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A Change of Troubles

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Feverish justifications don their masks, summon their marching band, and, to the anthems of Gold, parade smartly about as the Truth.

Francis Garrett McKenzie

(from the inside cover of one of his journals)

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## Chapter 1 Francis Garrett McKenzie, Gold Miner

**Journal. Birch Creek, near Circle City, Alaska.**

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Thursday, August 27, 1896

I thought Nevada Pete had gone on a spree to Circle City like he used to, for whiskey and poker at Ash's Saloon. Or women with their puffed sleeves, and corset covers, and petticoats. He did that every three weeks or so, to blow off steam, I guess. But, it seems, what he chose to blow off instead was the back of his head.

His last journal entry was badly scrawled. As far as I could decipher, it said:

"August 8, 1896. Can't work. The pain is fierce. My wife sent me here to win her a fortune. Lost one outfit coming down the Yukon River and arrived too late to get good ground. Lost three toes last winter. Lost all of last year's clean-up to Grizzly Mike and his cursed three Queens. Then I lost my wife to some dandy back in Carson City. Women are the death of me. Bury me here, as I am as god-forsaken as this country. Give my poke to McQueston. It's in the stove. And if you see my wife, tell her to go to hell!

God forgive me and rest my soul. May you have better luck.

Nevada"

The rest of it had but a few entries: recipes for flapjacks and sourdough, how to make hooch, and scribbles about mining methods and a tally of what he recovered from the claim he worked on a lay. Still owed McQueston for grubstaking him. No home address.

We could see his cabin up on the hillside, but we never knew. Kept to himself, pretty much. Found him only when a scraggly coyote started sniffing around. I've never seen coyotes in the

day. Had to leave his door open and cut the deerskin out of his window, and still couldn't clear the wretched air after half a day.

The poor bugger had buried his axe deep to the bone. He left drag marks in the dirt for 25 feet from the woodpile to his cabin door. I found him slumped in his rocking chair. Shotgun lying there. Bloody mess. Wrinkled, and crusted, and black as crow. All sprayed about.

I put his hat over what was left of his face, and stumbled like a drunk toward the door, bumping into his table on the way. Later, when the whole thing was running through my mind over and over, I remembered how tidy the table was – a clean plate and cup, cutlery ready for a meal that never came, another fresh notebook (which I pocketed) with a sharpened pencil aligned beside it. Made me glance up at the rest of the cabin, the way it was all arranged. Almost prissy. Ours has layers of muddle and mud on top of one another. I reckon in a strange way he was fighting against the way this country wants to make a mess of your affairs.

Some fellows just came by to look inside and left. I had to get my partner, Lefty, to help me bury him. But Lefty started gagging the second he went in. So he swore and left, too.

I dragged Nevada out in his rocking chair, pulling from behind, his head lolling about, and his hat falling off his face all the time. Couldn't keep it on him. Nothing but black for eyes and a black, toothless mouth gaping up at me. It haunts me.

Bloody hot day, too – vicious mosquitoes – clouds whining, attacking everything exposed. And me having no free hands. I shook to free myself and ran into a stump. We toppled, both of us, and Nevada flopped onto the ground. His bad leg folded under him with a gruesome crunch. By the time I got him back in the chair, I was gagging, again, what with the reek so close. And as I dragged him, his leg bounced along like a broken stick held on only by a bit of bark. It left a

sprinkling of maggots. Must have been the last of them as there were only a few. White as snow against the brown dirt and grey pebbles. Wriggling and twisting. Hated the sun, I guess.

I attacked the grave site with a pick, him in his chair fifty feet from me, facing away so I wouldn't have to look at him. When I stopped to wipe the sweat, a movement caught my eye – damned me if he hadn't started rocking. I circled him, holding the shovel, thinking: How can a dead man rock? It turns out it was the scraggly coyote. He'd come back for his meal, I guess. I swung the shovel in the air, and the little fellow backed off and watched me nervously, ready to bolt. But when it became clear to him I had little else to my threat, he inched back to the leg, eyes on me all the time. So I threw the shovel, which he easily dodged. I jumped up and down, shouting, but he just crept up to Nevada, paws and stomach to the ground like a sphinx, but with his head to the ground. He kept working at the leg to free it. I didn't want to get too close, so I went back to Nevada's cabin for the shotgun. It had an unused cartridge in it, and Nevada wasn't the kind of fellow who would leave it loaded. So he put two shells in it to do himself. What the hell was he doing loading two cartridges? Did he figure he'd get a second shot?

I looked for more shells but couldn't find any, and by the time I got back, the little bugger had just pried off Pete's lower leg and was standing there, his eyes focussed on me, the limb in his mouth, Pete's blood-stained boot sticking out one side, his chalky leg with a scattering of black hair sticking out the other, ending in a white bone cut almost through but for a few spikey bits. Hate the image. Hate the memory.

The moment I moved toward him, he spun around to run away, but Nevada's workings and cabin cut off one escape and I the other. The only way out was to scoot past me. I could see him calculating distances and speeds with some sort of instinctive reckoning machine. It was in his eyebrows. We moved at the same time, but he was faster so the little bugger made it. Damned

me if he wasn't then cheeky enough to stop and look back at me, like it was me who was the curiosity. So I shot above him, wanting him only to drop the leg. The blast sent me reeling backward, and he and Nevada's foot went toppling away and just lay there, a few feet apart. He must have caught the pellet spray.

It made me sick that I did that to him, but what could I do? So I went over and picked up the foot to finish Nevada's burying, figuring the poor little fellow was dead. But he started convulsing. His little mouth opened, his eyes were bugged and glassy, and he started retching as if he'd eaten too much death by mistake and he needed to vomit it. His whole body coiled and released like a heart. And he wouldn't stop – he just wouldn't die. Die! I kept saying to him. Just die, damn you! But he didn't. I checked the gun, but I knew it was spent. I went to crown him with its butt to finish him, but I couldn't. I might be a hero at 50 feet, but I was a coward at two. I turned to leave him, but I couldn't do that either. I owed him that, at least.

When he finally bought it, I carried him back – still warm – to bury the two of them together – one anxious to leave this world, the other fighting to stay in it. Maybe they'd balance out. He didn't mean any lack of respect – he was only trying to get along, like the rest of us.

I got back and hacked away at the permafrost again for a bit, the pick ringing and sparking against the quartzites, then I gave up on burying them. I laid the little coyote across Nevada's lap and dragged them both into the cabin in the rocking chair. While I had been gone, someone had taken Nevada's dishes and cutlery. His axe, too. His death was just an opportunity for others, I thought – your spot in life's long line of struggling souls closes up pretty fast when you are gone. Later, I saw that his things had turned up in our cabin, his dishes on the table, the rest in Lefty's corner.



I fixed the two of them up the best I could, gagging and retching all the time, Nevada's mouth gaping like he was screaming. A ghastly sound came out of his throat and that was it. I tried to aim my vomit away from him as well as I could and then I ran for air.

Outside I re-read his note. His last words. I ripped out his entries and quickly placed them on his chest and kept the blank journals.

I started the fire just inside the door. Coal oil sped it up, but it still took a half an hour to get the cabin going. I couldn't let him go without saying something, just in case he believed in God, though it would have had to been a God who seemed not to have cared much for him at the moment. I didn't know his full name, so I just called him Nevada. He was Russian, I think. Or maybe Norwegian. I was the only one there. Me, one near-stranger at his funeral pyre, standing looking at the pathetic pile of his things being consumed along with him, speaking to flames and black tree stumps, and a few shrubs on the hillside, bent and looking cynical. And a few pasty maggots.

I can't get the little beggars out of my mind, writhing and reaching like tiny cobras, searching for their home rot. A couple of brazen ravens flew in, hopped about, argued about which maggot was whose, and snapped them up. White as popcorn – into the black of their throats. Before they flew off, they chastised me for not having enough for them.

When he saw the fire Lefty came back, and some other fellows came over, too. They didn't know Nevada much either, it turns out. We all stood and watched the ashes lift and drift off, and we made small talk about mining. The smoke went straight up, bending south, drifting with a slow wind barely strong enough to chatter the yellowing birch leaves. It turned the sun black and orange as it crossed, and someone said, I reckon he's still trying to get home to Nevada, and

someone else said, But he won't get there, not even that way. And we looked about at one another, and I know for damned sure we were all thinking the same thing: I wonder who is next.

The inside of the cabin was burning up and flames spilled out the window and door, and Nevada was in the centre, ablaze in his little hell like a cloth torch soaked with paraffin. But I could see that the roof still wasn't burning well, what with all the dirt and moss on it, and in the end the middle gave way. His roof cave in on him and snuffed him out like a candle, only half-gone.

I'll go back after the fire is done to tidy up his grave the best I can and leave a marker – though this country will take that too, soon enough. The marker will say: Nevada Pete, Came North to Die on August 8, 1896, as God-forsaken as this Country.

His cremation was a botch up – like his life. If he could talk to me he'd say a woman had something to do with that, too. Poor Pete.

It's nothing to him now though. He has no troubles any more – he left them all here, with us.

---

Sunday, August 30

I've been feeling black since dealing with Pete. That side of life still takes its bite out of me. I turn to my memories of Vee to help, like the curl of hair on her forehead which she always tries to chase away as if it were a fly. Usually I get a string of memories, but lately they seem old, worn, and curled at the edges. And whenever I pick up one of her letters I get ahead of my own reading, I know them so well. The last one I got was dated last April though it only arrived this month.

Anything could have happened since then. It's not that I don't trust her... but still. It has been well over a year. What if she has found some dashing Captain? What if her excuses are inching toward me in the mail at this very moment? Thinking of Vee can be torture.

---

Monday, August 31

A while ago I threw my lot in with Leland "Lefty" Hillup to look for our Eldorado together. When our beards got big, people began to mistake Lefty for me. He can be morose at times – no help to me when his is, like now – but generally he seems to be an okay fellow. I've asked him how he got his name, but he just laughs and lies, one lie being more clever than the last. We all have secrets up here, so it's not surprising. And there isn't one among us who doesn't have his quirks. Most are decent fellows, though – it's the one scoundrel you have to guard against, and I figure Lefty has my back.

A few weeks ago, when Carver hit pay dirt, he got a bunch of us drunk on his hooch – Lefty, Nevada, me and some others, with poor Nevada the drunkest. Pete was too drunk to tell Lefty and me apart and kept spinning around, saying he was seeing double. We played it up, tricking him until the poor fellow wobbled past us out the door, saying all slurry, Lord, save us all! and fell a dozen times on his way down the hill to his cabin. We all laughed.

The past couple of days, though, I have been thinking about it, worrying that we helped drive him to end it. Lefty said he wouldn't have remembered. Anyway, he said, life had already put him six feet under – so at worst we threw a handful of dirt on his grave. But I felt badly anyway. We might have treated him poorly just when he needed a favour, I said, and Lefty said, Forget it, Mac. Life's a bully. And I thought, If that's so, we aren't much more than its gang.

---

Tuesday, September 1

I organized a miners' meeting at Ash's saloon. Thirty five miles to town over the some of the worst swamp I've ever seen. At least it was cooler and the bugs weren't so bad. Wanted to find out if anyone knew where Nevada hailed from so we could send his effects. I had only said a few words about Pete, telling them about the burial, when "Red" Savage got up and started telling everyone how Nevada tried to cheat him out of his share of butter at McQueston's last winter, but he got shouted down. One fellow stood up and said, "Ain't no need to shovel more dirt on a man's grave than what it takes to bury him," and walked out, and another fellow talked of a night last winter when he found Nevada in his cabin in the cold and dark, sitting in his big spruce-limb rocking chair, shotgun across his lap, staring at his door and rocking very slowly. We concluded he'd thought about it for some time. Cutting his leg near off was just the last straw. The fellows said we'd done everything a man could ask for in this country. No one knew his last name or home address.

After that some miner stood up and held up a vial of nuggets, saying there's been a big find up river on the Thron-diuck, somewhere over on the Canadian side, and that it was going to be the biggest thing ever. But every miner who looked at the vial was certain the nuggets came from Fortymile, Stewart River, or even Barkerville, having been carried around for years. No one has heard of this Thron-diuck place, and no one had heard of him, so we all got a big laugh.

I walked back to the creek with Carver and others, nobody saying much. The moon was closing down to half. The smell of winter was moving down from the hills like a heavy fog. I thought of Nevada going, and winter coming, and I couldn't help but think he's got to be better off even though half of him is ash dusted about the bush in a swath south of his cabin and the other half is charred and buried under his collapsed roof.

---

Tuesday, September 29

Cold spell. You can feel winter hovering about, with its long months of long nights. And us with no windows worth the name in our hovel. Even if there was any light about outside with designs on relieving us of the dark, it would never find us.

In winter we get trapped in here. To enter we have to bend over to clear the top of the cabin door. The only place to stand inside is in the center, where our faces, armpits, soiled long underwear meet, his and mine. Two narrow bunks huddle the sides where we barely have room to sit up. It's there where most of the things on the floor end up, after being kicked about for a while. We eat our beans and pancakes on a rough table by the stove, and play cribbage by the hour, bowed over, candlelight just on our faces and hands, flicking grimy cards – fifteen two, fifteen four – with so many folds in the cards and bits missing we can just about always tell what's about to happen. With the stove rattling beside us, the monster which demands feeding. It puffs and belches heat up the stack, sucking icy drafts through every hidden crack in the cabin walls. It burns one side of us and freezes the other. The air smells of wet socks getting singed where they hang, unwashed bodies, work boots infected with fungus, and the consequence of our daily beans. Sometimes twenty two or twenty three hours a day. Fifteen two, fifteen four.

Each of our snuffles becomes an irritant to the other. Coughs are thunder claps. Farts are insults. Lord, can I take another winter?

---

Friday, October 2

Thank heaven Mary came by today. Hadn't seen her for several weeks. Her fourth visit. She brings her own sun and lights up the cabin. And she brought some bloody good smoked salmon, too. We gave some to Lefty and asked him to go sleep somewhere else.

When he'd left, she held her nose to tell me I stink, and gave me a bath in our wash basin, doing one leg at a time. I couldn't keep my mast down.

She only knows about ten words of English, so we wave arms and draw pictures in the dirt of the floor to understand each other. And laugh. Easy laughter, never mixed with cruelty or ridicule. She drew herself and her mother on the floor so she could tell me her mother gives her grief about visiting me, a white man, but her mother married one, so Mary gives it back. Took her ages just to get me to understand she was referring to her mother. Laughing the whole time.

---

Saturday, October 3

I worry if I should tell Vee about Mary. But this is a lonely country, and Mary and I just seemed to fall into it, like sliding off a smooth, sun-hot rock into a summer lake. Or tumbling down a grassy knoll. You don't think about it as you check each other's arms or back for grass stains. It just happens. (Her arms and back are so smooth, and silky, and pure, a man would not be one if, he didn't linger.) It is not as if I went looking to be unfaithful.

Mary came to me as she did without a hint of sin or self-consciousness, being thankful for what I did about her brother, and being as beautiful and natural as an otter twisting in a stream.

I told Mary about Vee, using the two photographs I have of her, one of her looking radiant in their backyard, and one of us on Memphremagog. Mary laughed and asked in her way: Gerit happy now? (She says "Gerit" so it rhymes with merit, with the 'r' and the 'i' all squashed in, like her mouth when she talks.) I had to say yes. Then she looked at me and shrugged. She'll be fine whatever happens, bless her. She has that spirit about her. It's Vee I worry about.

---

Tuesday, October 6

Mary's voice when she coos and calls out my name.

We are spending so much time indoors we are going to run low on candles. Lefty complains that I'm not doing enough work.

---

Thursday, October 7

Lefty's still complaining. Mary kissed him on the cheek to shut him up. I told him I'd work extra hard in a bit and he went away grumbling.

---

Friday, October 8

Mary left today. Mucked out three feet and set the fire in the pit for the night. Fifteen feet more or so of waste before paydirt. It's a cold cabin tonight.

---

Wednesday, October 14

Hit bedrock but no paydirt. Starting another shaft. Boots wet. Cold feet. Empty cabin.

---

Saturday, October 17

Idea: How gold sits in rusting cans on a wobbly shelf in the midst filth and misery. The Squalor of Tom McGrim. McGrim dies. Lowly maggots appear. The Princes of Putrefaction. The poetry of squalor.

Squalor, armour, colour, demeanour, error, fervour, razor, rigour, rumour, stupor, terror, tremor, vapour, vigour. Candour, pallor.

The Crypt of Nevada Pete. I'll immortalize the poor bugger.

---

Tuesday, October 20

The Crypt of Nevada Pete (Part I; copied over from scribblings.)

There are some men who'll bend the truth, in poetry or prose,

Who'll tell tall tales and prevaricate, but I ain't one of those.

I speak the truth, I never lie, the facts I ne'er mistreat,

So listen now as I relate the tale of Nevada Pete.

Now good ol' Pete a miner was, who set himself a date

With Lady Luck Claudette Roulette who spins the Wheel of Fate.

Convinced he was his hold on luck was stable and secure,

He sold his house, he left his wife, transformed her rich to poor.

---

Wednesday, November 4

You'd think a man who'd choose to change his life so drastically,

Would study hard, prepare some maps, devise a strategy...

Or know a thing or two about the land he planned to cheat

Of all its gold by mining it and sidling out. But not our good ol' Pete.

He bought a passage cheap, aboard a ship that worked the coast,

He shovelled coal, he swabbed the deck, he starved himself almost.

A simple man, his scheme was, too – as simple as they come –

To snatch the gold and bring it south, and greatly rich become.



---

Thursday, November 19

Last month – three shafts and still no paydirt. Went to Circle City. We borrowed Carver's dogs to cut a third from the travelling time. It was daylight for only a few hours and it must have been 20 below both ways. A bitter wind. We are back in camp now, but forgot to get candles! How stupid we are! Using stubs and leftovers, and it's damned hard to write.

There was another miner's meeting in Ash's saloon last Tuesday with Ash voted chairman. It was all about a frilly young woman, Bonny Buxom, someone called her. She was there in the flesh and paraded her gifts for the fellows through a little hole in her dress just below her neck. You could only see when she bent over and if she had swung around in your direction, which she seemed to do as often as she could find reason. Ash's son, a gentle but drooling fellow stood up each time, pointed his crooked finger at her, and let out his idiot laugh.

She had a man with her, handlebar moustache waxed straight out, coloured vest. Obviously not a miner. He was going on about some worthless ground they staked high up on Birch Creek and how Bonny's employer, one of the trading company managers, went cold-hearted. He gave her the choice of selling him the rights for \$100 or losing her job.

Then Mr. Handlebar told us about her broken family in Mexico, and how she'd been taken advantage of by another man when she fled to California. My guess is that no one heard much because she was always bending over to fix something around her ankles.

Finally her employer stood up and said she was full of lies, but everyone started talking over him. He's not too popular around here. He doesn't grub stake miners freely, like McQueston.

Another fellow told us the same two showed up at a meeting in Forty-mile a year ago. Then she said her boss locked her out for staying out all night, and he told us how, after a rousing

speech from Mr. Handlebar moustache, the miners rewarded her a year's wages out of her old employer's pocket.

Someone else piped up to defend her: Does the young woman deserve justice only once in her life?

Then Mr. Handlebar said if the manager liked the young woman's ground so much, he should trade it straight up for his own claim down on Birch Creek. The manager objected strongly, saying his claim was proven and producing, while hers was just a prospect, and not a good one at that. But he didn't have a chance with that crowd, I figure.

Lefty, who was sitting next to me, was laughing hard into his hands, so I asked what, and all he said was, Can't you see what this is, Mac? They run cons. How would you know? I asked.

Harry Ash asked if anyone wanted a say before he called the vote, so another fellow stood up whom we'd all seen, but no one seemed to know. He looked about the room with steady eyes. Who would not rather dance with a pretty deception than a plain truth? he asked and walked out.

When the vote came, nearly everyone sided with Bonny, and the manager was forced to hand over his claim.

The next day I ran into a fellow who said that he had just bought the manager's old claim for \$4,000, and that the pair of them are now on the way to Thron-diuck along with some others. We were all fools, I guess. Except the mystery fellow who walked out. And Lefty, who voted against her. I asked Lefty again how he knew, and he said he has a nose for rats.

We got flour, lard, beans, molasses, bacon, tea, tobacco, coal-oil, and two dozen candles, which are up to 40¢. Someone's making money – just not us. And a can of butter! which we'll ration. New \$5.00 boots, too. I threw the old ones to Carver's dogs and they fought over them.

---

Friday, November 20

Mary's running dogs now, what with the snow, which means it's only a few days to Eagle, her village. She stayed a couple of nights. She pushes her back into me just before she goes to sleep. I crave the smell of smoke on her. Her hair's black and silky. Looks like raven's plumage; feels like argillite.

---

Monday, November 30

The Crypt of Nevada Pete (Part II)

On landing there in the Northern Terr. and looking all about,  
His mouth agape, his eyes abulge, their lids turned inside out,  
He stamped about all furious like, at arboured hills he yelled,  
Where is my horse? Where is my rig? Where is my fine hotel?

Though seldom will this land call out and ne'er to Sourdoughs,  
It yelled straight back, "Hello, hello, and welcome there, Cheechakoe!  
"Uphill beyond those rocks and trees is everything you seek –  
A little work and soon you'll have your mansion by the creek."

So Pete obediently did as he was told to do,  
He walked uphill and there he found a rock and tree or two.  
Surprised he looked about and saw not gold nor claims nor ore,  
But trees as far as he could see, in case he needed more.

A month and some it took to build his hovel smaller than

A hut precisely sized to fit the least reptilian.

His door was low, his ceiling, too, his pate was growing thin

And raw from rubbing logs that sealed him in his dungeon.

---

Sunday, December 6

Mary came by again and made Lefty go over to stay at Carver's. We saw the smoke rising, pole-straight. Up here skies are so damned blue. Ravens clunk a mile away, echoing along the bare slopes. It's the only sound beside the crunch and squeak on snow, or chatter of a squirrel.

---

Monday, December 14

We are still following the "streak" we hit at the end of November. The fires are tough to keep going when you're drifting. Panning about 80¢, and not much of it.

We spend so much time mucking and tending fires for so little return. The strain got to us today, to Lefty and me.

I started it, I admit, by saying openly that we should check out the Thron-diuck thing to see if it's true what they say, and Lefty got huffy and told me not to be a fool. He said we can't go running off every time we hear a rumour or we'd never strike anything. How long did it take Carver to hit his streak? he asked, sucking at his teeth. Four months of hard work, he said. And look at him now, rolling around fat and rich and whore-mongering in town whenever he wants. I don't want girls in town! I said, and he asked, Why should you when you can have your little minx? His laugh sounded like a dog I heard once, gagging and choking on a piece of bone.

The second he said it I was up and standing over him and ready to tear a strip off him. He knows I can whip him any time I choose, so he apologised. He didn't really mean it, but what could I do? Whip him for having that twitch of sarcasm at the corner of his mouth? So I sat down, and tried to calm myself, having seen many a partnership break up over just such a stupid thing. We went silent for a time. Then he found a spruce splinter and started working his teeth, slurping like he'd just finished a nice piece of roast. But I just waited him out. When he stopped – just so that he would know it hadn't got to me – I said, We've been working the same ground for over 5 months. But he just sloughed it off with some kind of sound like the French fellows around here make. He said, If Carver hadn't sunk that shaft where I told him to, would he be sittin' pretty right now? No siree!

I figure Lefty had just been shit-full of luck about Carver's shaft so I said, Tell us where to sink ours, then! But he didn't say anything and only made another Frenchy sound.

It wasn't getting anywhere. So, by way of explaining why it matters to me, I said, It's not just the winters and the hard work. It's Vivian I want, and I can't have her while I'm poor. She insists fortunes don't matter but the way I see it a dollar is a dollar until it's given or received, and then it becomes something else. To her that something is generosity or thoughtfulness, but to me it's charity. Or worse, it's pity.

He shook his head at me. Only fools give it away, he said. And I'll take from fools any day. You're a fool, Mac. You're too proud for your own good.

Maybe so, I said. And we went to bed, with me lying there staring into the black, listening to the snap of the fire, thinking for a long while.

---

Wednesday, December 16

## The Crypt of Nevada Pete (Part III)

But Claudette Roulette had spun her wheel. She dealt him quite a hand.  
She called his name, dispatched him to his longed-for Promised Land...  
For when out back he drove the spade to dig his little hole –  
Discreetly placed behind a bush – he hit a streak of gold.

A madman Pete became as deep he dug, and widely, too,  
All night, all day, for weeks on end, and then began anew.  
He packed his pants, his shirts, his socks, his pockets to the brim,  
Until he found he'd used them all, with no more room for him.

So naked there he stood and cast about for things to fill,  
Then suddenly, it came to him, he'd empty vessels still.  
Those cans of beans, those tins of oil, those gunny sacks of flour,  
He opened wide, and in let slide each ounce he could devour.

By taking on a hundred weight, he'd freed each tin and sack,  
Had filled and placed them on his shelf as close as he could pack.  
Above his bed they sat arrayed, a ton or more of gold,  
And there he lay, a man of dreams, of wealth – and girth – untold.

You'll quickly guess what hit him then, what crowned his cranium,  
What soundly crushed his skull, what ousted his delirium.  
A can it was, a full one too, the biggest of the lot,  
And when it hit, it drove his head quite halfway through his cot.

---

Thursday, December 17

Today Carver told us about some traders in Oscar Ashby's saloon. They had some gold and mail. One of the letters said fellows are getting \$150 to the pan on the Thron-diuck. We laughed. Ten ounces? Prevaricators! Lefty and I said, but Carver looked serious.

Mary came by. She took one look at the two of us and said, Pale face. Yep, Lefty said, That's me! But I know that's not what she meant. We've both been getting weak early in the day, and our skin's been getting pale. Lefty's eyes look different, like they were sunken, and my gums are getting raw. I told him I think it's scurvy, but he just laughs. She got some spruce needles and made some tea. Bitter as hell. Lefty swore and spit it out.

---

Sunday, December 20

Sixty below. Bitter wind. The cabin is covered in snow. Feet damned cold. Wolves howled last night. Carver's dogs joined in. Lefty, and I did, too.

The Crypt of Nevada Pete (Conclusion)

Though weeks and months they came and went, they left him unperturbed.

The bears and wolves, they found him not. He lay there undisturbed.

The only one who bothered by? A single bottle fly...

Who preened her feet, and laid her eggs, but did not stop to cry.  
Her hatchlings hatched, with great dispatch stripped flesh from every bone.  
As Pete had done, the maggots gorged 'till Pete the Feast was done.  
Now don't forget, our crazy Pete had stripped off all his clothes,  
So lay he there, all teeth and bones, and whiter than the snow.

When spring rolled round and water found its way in past the thatch,  
For added weight, a drip or two, the shelf would prove no match.  
It bent and splayed, it sagged and swayed, and slowly freed the gold –  
Which sprinkled down, as if a mist, to every bone enfold.

A pauper was ol' miner Pete, it's only fair to say;  
He wasn't mad, he wasn't sad, 'till Gold lead him astray.  
In Death, at least, he has it made; he dodged its final sting:  
Though prone his throne, has gilded bones, our rich Alaskan King.

---

Monday, December 21

I told Mary my gums feel better already. She gave me a bath. Pale face, she said pointing at my behind and laughing.

Mary and I hiked to the top of the hill – we both wanted to see the sun. It had sun dogs, but it was low and pale and weak.

Lefty says damned Carver packed up and headed up river, too, with his dogs.



---

Friday, December 25

Mary cooked six spruce grouse for Christmas dinner. We ate the breasts – juicy, but gamy, though we didn't complain. We boiled the potatoes we'd saved and later had cigars. Mary coughed something fierce. Funny to all of us, even her. She finished it though.

We lay about and Lefty went on about homesteading in Jackson Hole and how his dad and mom couldn't make a go of it, so they turned to poaching and horse thieving. He told us he rode with his dad, Uriah, and his gang from the age of 12. They'd catch the horses on the range, but sometimes it was Lefty's job to open a rancher's corral. He was small and fast, and Uriah figured nobody would shoot a kid when it came down to it. I piped up and asked how a dad could risk his son's life that way, especially as it would be dark and the rancher would never see he was just a kid and Lefty laughed in his bone-choking way.

One time, when Lefty was fifteen or so, his horse bucked him. Lefty was by the corral gate when the owner came out with his shotgun. Lefty says he dropped to his knees in the mud and started begging, telling the owner that he'd been held prisoner for twenty days and was forced to help steal horses and that all he wanted was a life in the path to God and would the owner please take him in and save him. The owner wasn't fooled, Lefty said, but his wife took pity, so she fed him and gave him a nice bath and bed. Then Lefty's eyes looked right through the cabin walls as he told how he heard his bedroom door open softly and the wife coming in and telling him to hush as she crawled in with him, and how he finally understood what the other fellows had been talking about ever since he could remember. He was too descriptive for my taste, but Mary had no idea what he was talking about, I reckon, though she seemed to enjoy the story as Lefty tells a good one full of gesticulation, and she giggled at the lewd gestures he used to describe his and the wife's copulation.

Lefty said he stayed for breakfast, exchanging looks with the wife, then stole the owner's best saddle and horse from the barn and lit out. He was the pride of the gang, especially when he told all about the wife. Then he laughed so hard I felt like choking him myself.

We couldn't kick him out on Christmas especially with him feeling weak, so we'll wait. Mary brewed some spruce tea and added a bit to our hooch. Lefty's drinking it right up, now.

Mary's curious about my writing. I pointed out her name. She smiled, like she does, as if everything in the world is magical. She sees things in the world that I don't, I reckon.

---

Friday, January 1, 1897

Too much hooch last night. We'd been cooking it since November off and on, with extra flour and molasses. I threw in our last can of peaches, hoping to give it some taste. If nothing else, I hope it will keep Lefty's teeth from falling out. He's been wiggling them at me.

LOTS of taste, it turns out – just not sure of what. Mary got drunker than us on just a few glasses. She sang in Siwash and danced. She was sick outside the door then curled up and went to sleep. I followed her about an hour later. Our breath was something fierce in the morning. The cigars didn't help. My mouth was like a dead bear's crotch. No more hooch for me.

Hoping for a good year. This is the one, I feel it.

---

Saturday, January 2

Two more cabins stand empty. Lefty wanted to go to town to ask about the Thron-diuck again. It was a slow trek with only Mary's small team. She went on home to Eagle from there. On the way in, she tried to explain to us what Thron-diuck meant. It has something to do with hammering and fish nets is all I could gather. Lefty and I are off tomorrow ourselves, finally.

## Chapter 2 Inspector Charles Constantine

From the letters of Inspector Charles Constantine, North-West Mounted Police, based in the Yukon, to Commissioner, Lawrence W. Herchmer in Ottawa:

September, 1896.

A new and rich discovery of placer gold fields has been made about 50 miles up the Yukon on the East and the stampede for it was wild. Over 200 claims have been staked. I cannot look after the mining business any longer. I don't care to be judge, jury, and executioner, which I am at present. There are not sufficient Police here. Should anything of a serious nature turn up in which there was strong public feeling and the law had to be carried out in the fact of it; I should be powerless. No Maxim gun was sent us. I asked for 4 trolley wheels. A large coffee mill and other items were asked for, but they did not turn up. In place of these articles I got about a ton of stationery.

Winter is not far away. The hills have snow on them very often now.

The gold excitement is at fever heat. It is pretty hard to hold the men.

There is one thing certain, unless the Government are prepared to put a strong force in here next year they had better take out what few are now here.

30<sup>th</sup> December, 1896.

Some Klondike prospects run up to \$150 to the pan. The usual thing to do is to take out a couple of pans of dirt when work is finished, wash them out and pay off the men for the day.

No caribou this winter. Pork and beans straight. Miners are flocking in, chiefly Americans who have not been used to control, nor do they wish to be. The winter up to the present has been mild, not lower than 40 below.

### Chapter 3    Dark Companion

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Tuesday, January 5, 1897

The new town is 220 miles upriver on the Yukon. We are now three days out. There were few dogs left in town and those were selling for \$500. We couldn't leave our gear and mining equipment behind, as we don't have the money to start over from scratch in the new camp, so we are hauling our sleds. I have seen drawings of slaves, bent over like draft animals. That is me as I stare down at the snow ahead of me, having to lift my head to see where I am going.

Feeling sad, and guilty about Mary. Wonder if I'll ever see her again.

---

Thursday, January 7

Bit of a warm spell since yesterday, so we have to watch the ice. We made about sixteen miles today, but we walk two miles to make one because the river twists like a snake. And on top of that, we have to weave back and forth avoiding the deep drifts on one hand and the rough ice on the other. At least Lefty's drinking the spruce tea now, and we are both better off for it. We sleep under caribou skins, as we are too tired to set up our tent. Dog tired. Two-legged dogs. Writing by fire light and a fat quarter of a moon floating lazily across the sky, too beautiful and aloof to pay us toilers any mind.

---

Saturday, January 9

Nineteen miles today. Stars as deep as the darkness on one side, curtains of northern lights on the other, moving as if in the breeze. The aurora crackles and hisses.

---

Monday, January 11

We passed a sled today. It ran too close to the cut bank where there's fast water and thin ice, even in this bitter cold. The leads from the fellow's sled went straight under the ice and back down-current. He's probably still under there, grimacing, teeth yellow from tobacco, his flesh blue as water. Someone took half his load, then dragged his own sled in a wide berth and carried on upriver. He couldn't have saved his partner even if he tried. He would have had to rig a safety rope somehow, and by then it would have been too late anyway. Two minutes in that water turns you to ice. He might well have died himself, and for nothing. Merciless country, this.

---

Wednesday, January 13

I thought of the frozen fellow for two days, imagining the agony of his lungs, his lips pulled back in a grimace. An iceman. He'll be frozen that way angled like a jack until well into spring when he'll bob and bump and tumble downstream, jostled by massive rafts of ice. Then he'll be pulled apart by wolves, and picked at by ravens, and carried off by cousins of Nevada's coyote. A bear will crack open his skull and leave it to bleach, and the bits will sink into a thousand shallow and mouldy graves in the undergrowth.

Death is our constant companion. Each has his own, like a patient cougar on the hunt, ready for the first opportunity. I have seen mine and his eyes are not empty, as they claim, but shaded, and unwavering, and cold.

Down south, with doctors and hospitals and such, it lags behind by hours, maybe even days. There people there come to believe theirs doesn't exist.

I keep my wits about me and stay well ahead of mine. But as the day wears on my thinking gets muddy and it catches up, especially when I get impatient or foolish or just plain stupid, like

poor Nevada. When he was chopping he became too hurried – or too preoccupied – to set himself before each swing. It's then when your death is ready to pounce that you must not panic. You have to take a breath, turn around, and stare the bugger down, make it slink back into the shadows. And even then, you cannot let yourself believe you've beaten it, because it is really just trying to appease you, to feed your bravado and set you up for the moment when your overconfidence betrays you, like it did to the man under the ice back there. Then it takes you, pitilessly. Snap. Like that. Without a thought, having only lent you to this world anyway.

At night, too, it catches up and curls up with me, even if I am not dog-tired. It steals heat through my caribou hide. An extra blanket or two stops it, and settles it down. It shrinks into a little black ball or something, which is strangely comforting. I would tuck it under my pillow if I could, just to keep track of it.

Soldiers understand this. Explorers and coppers, too. Not Cheechakoes though. That's why they die like flies.

---

Friday, January 15

Made twenty two miles or so twisting around islands and channels. We went past Eagle. No sign of Mary, so I left a note with one of the women who came down to fetch her children watching us pass. I feel empty because of it.

Who knows if she'll be able to get it translated. If she asks the missionary I know she won't get read to her everything I said.

Temperature plummeted last night. More than forty below, I bet, so we put up the tent. It took ten minutes to suck off the little ice balls hanging from my moustache. Cold feet all night. I pulled my sleeping bag over my head, and the moisture from my breath froze it to the inside of

the tent. I had to shake to get it loose in the morning before I could get out. Lefty thought we had a bear in the tent and leapt up with his rifle. Damned near shot me. Froze his arse. He didn't think it was as funny as I did.

---

Saturday, January 16

About midday we caught sight of the iceman's partner, a mile or so ahead, going around a bend in the river. We've been following his tracks for days, and slowly overtaking him. Early evening he had a fire up and waved us over for some hot soup. Rabbit – most delicious soup I'd ever tasted. Taste depends on context.

He turned out to be the same man who walked out of the miner's meeting in disgust. He introduced himself as Up-a-Creek Charlie. Curious fellow. He told us he usually goes it alone. The dead man was just a fellow who was heading out at the same time. Beyond that, he mostly just said Yep and Nope, so we stopped asking questions after a while.

Lefty took over for the rest of the evening, lying on his hide, laughing at his own stories and jokes. He went on about the South Sea Islands and European capitals he would visit when he struck it rich. He wants to go to Buddha's Pest, he says. It's in Hungry. I told him he had all the hungry he wanted here, sharing a smile with Charlie. He bragged about the size of the house he would build in San Francisco, the servants he would have, how beautiful his wife would be. He started telling us the things he'd get her to do for him in bed, we steered him in other directions.

Charlie waited for him to shut up – finally – and then quoted Epicurus, a Greek philosopher who said: The acquisition of riches has been for many men, not an end, but just a change of troubles. Lefty just shook his head and mumbled something foul, and Charlie didn't say a word after that.

---

Tuesday, January 19

Twenty five miles today. Best day yet. We must be getting close. A couple of days past a new moon and it's just a sliver now. Nothing so clean and magical.

Nothing magical about half-cooked beans, though. I went against advice because I couldn't wait to eat. Threw them up, so they did me no good at all. Cramps and cold feet now.

It took me an hour to fall asleep last night. I was thinking about Vermont and the house I would build, which will be a fine one. Back on Lake Memphremagog, maybe in Georgeville, where Mother is buried. With screens on the windows to ward off the damned mosquitoes, and a room for Father so he doesn't have to uproot too much, and so he can visit her grave whenever he wants. He's earned that, to be sure, what with all the trials his family put her through.

But sometime in the night Trouble came to haunt me – not big Trouble like a bear heaving around a corner of some creek, charging me to protect her cubs, not Trouble that I could shoot or stare down, but lots of little troubles, like swamps and dull axes, and sore teeth.

As we were strapping up this morning, I asked Charlie what sort of troubles we would have to face, and he said he had no idea; each man has his own. And they are mostly always unpredictable, he said, because they wouldn't be troubles for an attentive man, a man who saw them coming, now would they?

---

Wednesday, January 20

On our twentieth day from Circle we arrived, finally. They call it the Klondyke! – which I can see comes from Thron-diuck, since the way Mary speaks, it does sound like Klondyke.

Dawson's just a tent city. Three or four buildings, and a saw mill. Belongs to a fellow called Ladue. The saloon does, too. Lucky for us, the town site being surveyed by Mr. William Ogilvie!



And Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie were in on the big find, it turns out. They were packing for Mr. Ogilvie over the Chilcoot on my way in during the winter of 94/95, an eternity ago. I was surprised to see them all. And they were surprised I was still here, battling away.

Mr. Ogilvie says some of the claims have yielded thousands already in just a few month's work, and promise much more. With his own eyes, he's seen \$100 pans! Lefty prodded him about the richest, but Ogilvie wouldn't say, and was careful not to make predictions. But he did say he's writing the Canadian government to warn them that, with the fabulous strikes turning up daily, this will surely be one of the richest camps ever. No doubt there will be a stampede and they had better get organized. He laments that the government will likely not listen, however.

Mr. Ogilvie says it's already too late for anyone to stake good ground, but he'll hire us on as assistants. It seems they made a mess of staking up on the creeks, so he's been asked to survey them when he's finished doing the town. That way we would be the first to know when there are fractions, so Lefty and I should pretty much have our pick. Given what he's told us so far, some of the bits of open ground left over from sloppy staking could be a fair size. I'm excited as hell. Lefty is beside himself.

#### Later

Mr. Ogilvie is sending out mail by sled tomorrow. He promised me I could include something small. I got some things together to send to Vee. I hope he takes them.

Klondyke, Yukon Territories, Dominion of Canada

January 20th, 1897

## Chapter 4 Vivian Belcher

“Mail!” came the summons, some months later, in early April, 1897, in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Owen Belcher in Old Brookville on New York Island.

Abandoning Gulliver to the Houyhnhnms, Vivian Belcher vaulted off her four-poster, shot out her bedroom door and across the wooden floor to the curved staircase. Her hand complained on the railing, squeaking all the way. Her heels caught the edges of several stairs, chattering over them. She barely kept upright. What drove her was not the harshness of the cry, but its content.

“It’s from *him*,” her mother said, as Vivian braked. Mrs. Belcher held the box with her fingertips, well away from her full, white dress, striving to maintain as little contact with the offending parcel as possible. It was scarred and soiled. One corner was grated. Garrett’s scrawled name and address unmistakable nevertheless.

“Thank you, mother,” Vivian said, letting loose her sarcasm.

“His family is a disgrace!” followed her as she doubled the stairs, but the condemnation was lost as with determination she swung shut her bedroom door, thundering shudders throughout the expansive house.

Seconds later Vivian tumbled down the stairs again, made a whirlwind trip to the stables with the small box, and reappeared with the top cut open.

Back in her bedroom she gently spilled the contents onto her bedspread. She arranged about her: a pair of smoky, moose-hide gauntlets carpeted with colourful beads up the sleeve; a luxuriantly soft, deer-skin anorak, beaded, too, and liberally fringed; a small wooden bear which she knew, as it lay smiling at her from her palm, that her adored cousin had carved for her; and

finally Garrett's journal, with a letter folded inside. She removed the letter and set the journal down. The letter read:

*January 20th, 1897*

*Dearest Cous,*

*I miss you terribly. Though this is an exciting place to be right now, I never fail to think of my Vee. Do you like the bear I sent? Carved him myself.*

*I have time for only a few words. I just heard that a fellow is heading out from Dawson tomorrow – I am going to beg him to take this to you.*

*No need to say more as I have sent you my journal. You'll see that we have arrived in Dawson, full of expectation, but have no ground as yet.*

*It only occurred to me to send my journal to you as I was getting this parcel together. I have seen so many outfits lost to fire and river disasters that I thought it would be safest in your hands, away from the cruelty of nature. I debated whether I should ask you not to read it, and in the end I figured it should be like we used to say: no secrets.*

*So, forgive me my language, Vee, and forgive my indiscretions. You will laugh over them, I hope. (I miss your laugh. I miss your sparkle.) I pray you know that Mary was a friend to a lonely man. Don't get me wrong. I am not a callous man. She is a fine young woman and a friend, and I love her, in a way. But she could never mean to me what you do. No one could.*

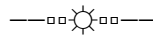
*I wish you were here. I truly do. I have to run.*

*I pray my journal doesn't throw you into the arms of my brother.*

*Your ever loving cousin,*

*Garrett*

Who was this Mary? Her stomach churned as she sat cross-legged, transfixed by the journal's black, injured cover, her hand frozen between craving and dread. How gaunt, how haunted it seemed, with its fearful secrets, cushioned in this alien luxury. All Garrett's letters, oblique within his careful composition, carried a starkness dangerously foreign to her. But now what lay before her were his unguarded thoughts. Steeling herself, she laid back the cover. As a badge of its wild origins, the first few pages were watermarked, making them barely legible, but soon enough his words became crisp, and gripping.



Garrett was only half-way to Dawson with his dark companion stalking him, when a persistent rap on her door wrenched her back from the Yukon. "Please leave me be!"

"Forgive me. May I come in?"

Vivian waited. She was loath to forgive her mother anytime, and now especially.

"I should be more understanding of him, I know. It wasn't Garrett's fault, sweetheart," her mother said through the door. "He was barely ten."

"You call me sweetheart only when you want something."

"Please. Talking through the door is distressing. It's demeaning."

"Be distressed. You do it well. And be demeaned. You need it."

Even after several minutes there was no mistaking that her mother remained there. Vivian could feel her, like cheek-prickling heat from a winter stove. She pictured her face, downcast, resolutely piteous, knowing that although her mother was alone in the hallway, she would still parade her feelings.

"Leave me be!" Vivian said, after a long silence.

“Let me apologise, please.”

“You have already.”

“Not to your face.”

Vivian walked to the door and opened it a crack, berating herself for giving in. She stood, defiant and angry.

“Well?”

“I’m sorry, Vivian, truly. But he is not suitable. In your heart you know that. It’s not our fault or your fault. It’s not even his fault. It’s just the way things are. Please understand.”

“The sins of the father. The Belcher’s black sheep.”

“To be fair, it was the sins of his mother.”

“Go away. You are missing the point. There were no sins. I’m tired of hearing about it.”

Vivian was about to close the door, when her mother countered by leaning her face into the gap.

“Captain Russell is coming this afternoon for tea,” she said. “His heart’s set on seeing you.”

Vivian leaned into the door, forcing her mother to retreat. The latch snapped into place.

“How could his heart be set? We’ve never met. Have I *ever* expressed a desire to see him?”

“Vivian, please open the door.”

Vivian stood guard.

“I know you are there. I can hear you breathing.”

Vivian crossed her arms.

“Garrett has done things. We’ve heard things. He’s not the gentleman you think him to be.”

“He hides nothing from me,” Vivian said, worrying that many other revelations still lay undiscovered. “He is the man I know,” she said, lying. “That’s all I care.”

“He’s your cousin. Does that not bother you? Don’t you think that is, well... *incestuous*?”

The word bore the same revulsion she had for Garrett’s box.

“Garrett’s my *third* cousin. And, bluntly, no. In any event, nothing has happened between us. It is only you who finds it incestuous. To us it is just natural and pleasurable.”

“What you find ‘natural’ the rest of the world reviles.”

“Just what ‘rest of the world’ might that be, mother? Let us face it. You never wanted to apologise. You never feel there’s a need. You believe it is the world which forces these trials upon you, which forces you to break down and blurt out words you pretend to regret. What I cannot understand is why I continually give you the benefit of the doubt. Getting me married to some prig is your project, not mine.”

“Better a prig than a blackguard.”

Vivian refused to respond. A minute of silence dragged by.

Finally, her mother said, “I’m sorry, sweetheart. He’s not a blackguard. I just get so frustrated at your refusal to entertain men of good breeding. My feelings overtake me. I’m sorry.”

“Vivian?”

“Vivian, what am I going to say to Captain Russell? He will be gravely disappointed. And he will likely talk among his friends about you. A snub may be very damaging.”

“Do you think he’ll talk, mother? Really?” asked Vivian, breaking her silence.

“I do. Though not in a slanderous way, of course. He’s too much of a gentleman. But a comment or two to the wrong people means young men’s families may no longer find you ... fitting. They may stop calling altogether.”

“Do you really think they’ll stop calling, mother?” Vivian sounded concerned.

“Yes, I do,” her mother said, her worry evident.

“That settles it, then!”

“Oh, good! I’m so pleased, Vivian! I am *so* pleased!”

“I’ll not be coming down until dinner! Say anything you want to Captain Russell, except that I am sick or that I regret not being able to visit with him.”

“Oh, Vivian!” Seconds passed.

“Vivian? Please.”

It was another minute before her mother retreated downstairs, to her recesses of despair.

Vivian looked about her bedroom, trying to collect herself. The dour, heavily-fringed and cheerless purple curtains hung weighed down by their existence, as if in collusion with her mother’s mood. Indeed, they had been her mother’s choice. Everything in the room had. “They will complement the curtains, and your bedspread and pillows,” her mother had said, holding up a corner of a curtain and nodding at the lavender, forget-me-not bedspread, the lilac pillow cases. “They are effective. They are perfect,” she said, enunciating the ‘t’ with precision as if words, too, ought to be carved with delicacy, with forethought and control. The curtains were undeniably effective, Vivian decided, but only in preventing light from relieving the oppression and gloom.

At twenty four, Vivian was tired. She was tired of private schools, tired of being called “the Belcher’s girl”, tired of the muted dance of the vogue puppets, always carefully measured, carefully watched, accompanied by appropriate laughter, vague remarks, decorum and caution. She was tired of having to hold her fork just so, of having her Negro maid lay out a dress for her every morning, of mutton sleeves, gloves, paletots, casaques and mantelets, and unnatural efforts to narrow her waist. She was tired of being redressed for swearing when she stubbed a toe, or of not pinching her cheeks even in the stables. She was tired of waiting for life to start.

Most of her social sisters chose to suffocate, to take the unconscious, easy plunge into a comforting world of sameness, to allow the whittling away of any disturbing uniqueness. Most took pride in performing the necessary amputations themselves, before others noticed. Those having minds or bodies beyond redesign or disguise, and those who could not learn the dance, sank into forms of escape – fiction, or gardening, or outright melancholy, breakdown, and ‘hysteria’. Such had been the fate of Garrett’s mother, hounded ever so persistently, not by Garrett’s father, but by Vivian’s mother and her corseted cronies until, after bouts of depression, Mrs. Willis Robert McKenzie, born Aimée Roselle Moreau from Magog, Quebec, a foreigner to the rigors of refinement, took the final wilting release into a pool of blood on her bathroom floor.

As is often the case, the rabbit was blamed for not being nimble enough. The hounds’ teeth and out-right viciousness escaped notice and blame. Mrs. Willis Robert McKenzie, having thus been crucified, became a cross for Vivian’s mother to bear.

Vivian was herself one of the very few, Vivian reckoned, who had a chance. Allies assured her. Her father, with his wry, knowing smile was one. George Willoughby, the McKenzie’s stable hand, the Civil War veteran, was a second. A third was the passionate, powerful, and rivetingly memorable suffragette whom she met in Manchester, England, some years before. And the fourth was her Garrett, whose journal she reached for again, having resolved to face whatever demons it might contain.

When she finished reading, with him now in Dawson, she looked over to his letter, which had ended, “I pray my journal doesn’t throw you into the arms of my brother.”

“It may just,” Vivian said, her voice as frosty as Yukon weather. “Ted seems true, at least!”

Five minutes passed before she moved. His silent voice, laconic and lilting, echoed throughout the room. His indiscretion gnawed at her; his images haunted her. Life and death, so



casually brutal, so matter of fact. So indifferent. Her calm exterior belied the insurgence within. Her mind was a riot, powerless to contain the feelings overwhelming her.

She ran from the house, to the stables, stumbling and cursing in her haste, saddled her Paint, Cordillera, and rode him out the doors like an apocalypse. Across the paddock and exercise track they raced toward her familiar woods. Skirting expansive lawns, weaving in and out of remnants of wild shrubbery, she sped him along the path worn from childhood, digging into his working flanks until his withers glistened and his bit dripped with foam and the sounds of the wind and his rasping breath enveloped her. Dogwoods and willows stung her face, caught and ripped her cape until, finally, with the sleeves of her white blouse streaked with slashes of pungent green, she slowed him to a trot, then to a walk. With powerful shakes of his head, he threw off sweat and foam, settling himself. They hugged a trickling creek – at which Cordillera slaked his thirst – and, to the occasional ring horse-shoe on cobble, meandered gently beside it toward Long Island Sound. There, on a narrow beach, she turned her friend loose. He ambled back, snouted her chest, then wandered off to tear off mouthfuls of greens. She hollowed out a spot to sit between waving tufts of beach grass. Digging her heels into the sand, she pushed her back into a cool bank, facing north-west, she noticed, toward the Klondyke.

Vivian sat for over an hour – absorbing, analyzing, struggling with feelings, with images which would not let her be: poor Nevada alone in flames, no one knowing his real name; Mary sliding in and out of Garrett's life, a seductive native spectre; Charlie's mate, the iceman, his face still frozen with terror, his fate waiting for him when the ice broke. Most powerful was the image of Garrett's dark companion trailing him, curling up with him at night.

Death, it had become suddenly and startlingly clear to her, had been ostracised from Long Island, particularly in her part of Nassau County. Most considered it to be an expression of bad

manners, except in the old, the terminally stupid, or the merely unlucky. When it did appear in any other form, it was fodder for speculation, being “as plain as the eye could see” a consequence of miscalculation or weakness. Not even the word was to be met directly. He did not die. He passed away. She went beyond the veil. They had all fallen into the Eternal Sleep. So said the impeccably dressed gathered about the impeccably presented remains in the impeccable parlour of the passed away. Every phrase suggested that passage was gentle, and was likely a peaceful transition between here and a state quite familiar to us in life. Quiet. Smooth. Not really an end at all. Which, after all, was the point for them, she decided.

By contrast, as Garrett described it, Nevada did not have a gentle passing. And Charlie’s mate was not eternally asleep, and certainly not peacefully. Rather, in the spring, he would be bumped and jarred by indifferent rafts of ice jostling along the Yukon River, cast onto the rocks as a piece of life’s pitiful wreckage, flipped and tossed like a jointed wooden doll, quartered and dispersed by bears, pecked at by ravens, then bleached to chalk in the midnight sun. Only his body’s ineluctable disintegration would give his soul its peace – a final dignity of dissolution, not into ashes, but into nothing.

At first it was horror which fuelled Vivian’s torment. But strangely she became accustomed to the indifference and inevitability of the violence, sensing that it was not violence at all. It had no intention. It was just the relentless turning of the wheel. Under it some are crushed for no reason other than they happened to be there. To view it as horror would be to see all of life that way.

But then it was supplanted by fear. Fear for her childhood companion. Fear for the man who had engaged her feelings slowly, over the many summers along the shores of Lake Memphre-

magog, first in a child's unconsidered attachment, then in an adolescent's heady and confusing infatuation, then finally in the love of a young woman.

In time, as she sat in the sand, her fear subsided as she reminded herself that her cousin was in good spirits and that he possessed the well-grounded, common-sense tools for survival.

She had seen his use of those tools and his poise during the five nights they spent alone on the side of Owl's Head, when she had broken her ankle and he had to figure out a way to get her down without further injury or disaster. The search parties had missed them; their signal fire went unnoticed. They sat on the side of the mountain, looking at Memphremagog laid out before them, and when the pain subsided as it occasionally would, they composed their song to the Spruce Grouse, a silly song of a silly bird which instinctively freezes on its roost when approached, dying with its illusions intact that its camouflage is perfect. Garrett could hit their heads with a well-thrown rock, he discovered, keeping the precious breast meat from being bruised. They had seven in those few days, all gamy from the grouse's diet of needles, so she knew just how Garrett's Christmas dinner tasted. The first few were dry and chewy until Vivian discovered that searing them quickly in the coals gave them a charred taste, but kept their precious juices. They accustomed themselves to the bitterness of the spruce.

Below, on the lake, Garrett's father, Willis, and Ted, his older brother by five years, were distraught with worry. They organised search parties, led by Ted, one coming within a mile of the lost couple's spot. Father and son had thought of nothing else for five nights, torturing themselves, never openly admitting to or expressing the unimaginable.

Alone in his room, Ted sat for hours, he later told Vivian, haunted by the thought he may have failed in a sacred duty conferred upon him when he was six, and his mother drew him aside on a walk in the woods following Garrett's first serious accident. She was gripping her rosary,

and at that moment thin shafts of light came through the trees and struck her in biblical fashion. Even the motes of dust about her were suspended and sparkling. An older brother must protect the younger, she said as she knelt in front of him, and he took it as his sworn duty, a dispensation from on high, accepting it with the gravity of a six-year-old, an edict from God Himself.

So charged, Ted had guided Garrett through the toddler's first trials: the savagely poisonous eleven-inch garter snake; the deadly encounter with the neighbour's dog which compulsively licked Garrett's screaming face; the monstrous sucking mud puddle that swallowed Garrett up to his ankles and would not release his captive feet; the ghoulish, wheezing oblates with flying cassocks who tumbled and rolled after the two no-longer-laughing, apple-thieving boys, down the hillside, over the ivied stone walls to final safety; the bitterness, but otherwise redeeming qualities and ultimate manly value, of chewing tobacco; and the terrifyingly confusing advances of the blossoming Alice Wickham who smiled at Garrett brazenly, placed his hand fully on her emerging mounds, and cast him into paroxysms of Desire and Moral Torment. Years later, even though by Ted had been long relieved of its religious import, the vow and his commitment to his mother's memory remained, plaguing him every one of those five nights the couple was missing, until finally he would succumb to a fitful sleep.

On the mountain, Garrett rigged a perch for Vivian's foot to keep it high and the pain to a minimum, when they slept – or tried to – their bodies together for warmth and comfort. It was then that Vivian first felt another kind of stirring for her cousin.

"My mother will kill me," Vivian said. "She barely agreed to my coming this summer."

"I know."

"She believes your mother's death was curse on the family."

"I know."

“She’s a fool, Garrett.”

“I know.”

“My father doesn’t believe that, you know. That thing about your mother.”

“Really? Why doesn’t he say anything then? To the rest of the family, I mean.”

“Peace. He has an instinct for peace. My mother would make his life unbearable.”

“I understand. They can think what they wish. My father, my brother, and I live comfortably enough. It’s only you I care about.”

Vivian moaned. She tried to shift her leg, but it did little to relieve the increasingly incessant pain. The swelling was becoming more prominent. It was clear she had broken something, and since the days were drifting by without any sign of rescuers, they had to act soon.

“Tomorrow I’ll make a travois. We can’t wait anymore.”

She nodded, gritting her teeth. Slowly the throbbing subsided and she began to relax again. Many minutes passed. The air was crisp, the stars brilliant, the silence was deep and soothing and broken only by an occasional hiss or snap from the fire or a night breeze darting through the shrubbery. Garrett nudged a remaining log into the fire. Sparks leapt up on sad, poignant journeys – it was as if they searched for reunion with their own distant cousins of the Milky Way, only to arc downward and die like little Icaruses on failing wings.

She tucked her face further into his chest, smelling the musk from their mountain, the smoke from their fire.

“How is it?” he asked.

“Better for the moment.”

She put her arm around his waist and drew him closer. He rolled onto his side, facing her, his body against hers.

“Can cousins marry?” she asked in an unguarded moment.

“I cannot see why not. Who are you thinking of, Vee? Not you and me!” And he laughed.

“Goodness, no. My mother would choke on it. Just an idle question.”

In the silence that followed, she felt a bump on her thigh. She shifted slightly and went to remove the wayward branch. As she swept her thigh with her hand she discovered it was covered with the fabric of Garrett’s pants.

“Oh!”

“Sorry.”

“Who are you thinking of, Garrett? Not you and me!” She laughed, and paid the price when the pain shot up her leg.

The next day, Garrett fashioned the travois using a young ash tree, bent saplings and strips of bark as twine. It took a long day of dragging her gently downhill, him strapped in at the apex like a draft animal, until they reached the first dairy farm on the lower slopes. From there, with a borrowed horse-drawn cart, they made it back.

When the pair showed up, winding their way through the west orchard toward safety and warmth, Willis’ and Ted’s immense relief threw them into fits of unrestrained joy. That evening the farmhouse filled with townsfolk and neighbours, laughter and music, disgorging its delight onto the dusty roads home well after the sunset had swept the trees with reds and the home-made, hearty fruit wines had released every song that lurked in memory’s corners.

Ted disappeared following dinner. Garrett sought him out, sensing the problem, and relieved him of his guilt.

Vivian’s ankle healed well enough, but she and Garrett concluded that her spirit needed ‘recuperation’, so they managed to convince the family doctor to recommend a longer stay. What

was to have been a trip of a few days turned into a month, with Vivian and Garrett being thereafter virtually inseparable. During that stay Ted, having finished his farm work, would lean casually against a doorway in the house, goading Garrett for being remiss in his farm work, watching Garrett's and Vivian's increasingly adult exchanges: a touch to a cheek, a knowing laugh, a half-second locking of the eyes. It was then that Ted fell hopelessly in love with her, too.

When Vivian returned to Long Island, she found her mother had fallen into her moods. She had once again taken to her room for days at a time. The irony of her mother's depression was that it resembled that of her victim, Garrett's mother. Mrs. Belcher seemed oblivious to this. Once, when she was being particularly condescending toward a servant, Vivian stung her with that observation, and Mrs. Belcher retreated for the longest stint yet.

Cordillera came over once again to check on her. She smiled and stroked the white patch on his brow. But just as she began to relax – her fear having eased – the blunt presence of Mary, the biggest threat to her relationship with Garrett, began troubling her.

Who was this woman? How could Garrett have been so cavalier about his relationship with her? Granted he was writing to himself – he never expected anyone to read about Mary – so he felt no need to explain himself or record his feelings, but even so. Would he treat her, Vivian, as he had Mary? Would she ever be able to forget that they had slept together? It was an experience Vivian imagined would be their shared first. And only after marriage. Now Mary would forever be there. Can it be that he no longer loved her? He said in his letter that he did – said it in his journal in so many words, being worried about what she would think about Mary. On went the trouble in Vivian's mind: confusion, denial, hurt, reproach.

Finally it turned to anger. First the anger of a cornered dog, sharp and intimidating, mixed with fear, and born of insecurity. Then the anger of a child robbed of her toy, a tantrum, with her

being ready to demolish the world. Then that of an immature lover at her admirer for having the bloody gall. Finally it became settled, controlled and purposeful, aimed not at Garrett for being lonely in a lonely country, or for being human enough to give in to his desires, and not even aimed obliquely at her mother, her jailer, her repressor – though she knew her mother deserved it – but inwardly, at herself, for not being there with Garrett, at herself for not having the courage to choose.

Anger then transformed into determination, and thence the choice, sharp and clear: either suffocate or escape; either cower or fight; either wilt here or go there and face it. Face him.

Her eyes widened. She scrambled to her feet, grabbed Cordillera's harness, mounted him, and raced back home. Her mother was unable to catch even her sleeve in the foyer where in Vivian's haste they almost collided. "Vivian!" was all her mother could muster, and "Mother!" was all she got in return as Vivian disappeared up the staircase toward her bedroom.

She assembled pen and paper, settled herself, breathing deeply for a minute, and wrote.

*April 3, 1897*

*My Dearest Garrett,*

*I have decided I will throw myself into this wonderful life, and not into Ted's arms, as you fear. I didn't know it until a few moments ago. Your journal and letter forced the matter. I was riveted by poor Nevada Pete's fate, by Charlie's mate stuck under the ice, and by that frightful, dark companion of yours. And even though parts of your descriptions were positively gruesome – I fear I, too, may not have been able to help in Pete's burial – I could not stop reading. My stomach was tight throughout. It was like watching a horrifically compelling accident.*

*I have been inching along this path of my own accord, but today, because of you, I have suddenly arrived at the full realization that for all these years, worse than living a lie, I have not*



*been living at all. I have been going through the motions only, and slow motions at that. I need only look around for proof. I am sitting here cross-legged on my bed, smothered under layers thick enough to muffle all laughter and every cry of anguish from the world outside. But for your words exploding from the pages, I may well have stayed forever, a prisoner of my mother's money, my friends' desire to be just so, and my own acquiescence. Your words have ruptured the barrier. You might say that life itself – cloaked as death – had invaded my sanctuary.*

*It will not do to carry on in this charade.*

*Even a day ago, on some pretext, I would have gone on a rant, fuming and thumping about. It is clear to me now I would have just been rattling the cage. In one day, one afternoon, in fact, I have grown immeasurably. Today I say, "Mother be damned! This will not do!"*

*I've been on the path, I now realize, since Willoughby became a person to me, and most particularly since '92. You remember the trip my parents took me on to Manchester? The trip so that my father could visit the mills and assess the effects of electricity on textiles and cotton futures? The trip my mother took solely, I am sure, to complain about the accommodations, the cold rooms in English Inns, their foreign food, and in desperation to find me a suitor I would not reject? I remind you only because I recall how your eyes would glaze over when I told you about Emmeline Pankhurst and her husband who were surprise guests at a dinner one evening. Surely you remember that! The founders of the Women's Franchise League? How she went on a tirade about women's right to vote and how embarrassed the hosts were to expose us to such "rubbish"? The businessmen's high collars were tight that night. Or were your eyes glazed for that part, too? They were, you Philistine, you cannot deny it! For my part, I have never forgotten how surprised I was that a woman would have so much courage and conviction in standing up to*

*men. And I'll never forget my mother's outrage, and my father's coy smile. Mrs. Pankhurst planted a seed which has only just now sprouted: I need do nothing I do not want!*

*So, my dear cousin, I am coming to join you. The lust for gold has not supplanted my reason. It is quite the opposite. Here I have all the gold I want, as you know. I have just to ask (in the proper manner, and having made the expected concessions) and I would receive. I'm coming to join you, ironically, to escape my mother's riches and her incessant sighing, to escape the heavy breath of suitors she arranges to visit. I'm going to throw myself into life in a place where it seems to be raw and unfettered, and where people may accept me for what I am, and not for what my parents own.*

*I have the kernel of a plan. Your journal has helped me there, too. Willoughby will assist, I know, as will Father. What a surprise he will get when he gets home tonight! Besides you, dear Garrett – and Ted, of course – I have no stronger allies.*

*Your loving cousin,*

*Vee*

Vivian tucked her letter into an envelope and determined to mail it before she lost heart, even before she changed her clothes, still ragged from her ride. On her way past the front sitting room, she stopped momentarily and, to help cement her course, said to her mother, who was sitting, straight-backed, in her favourite, tightly-upholstered cardinal-red Vicksburg, slowly leafing through some catalogue or other, and now wide-eyed at seeing her daughter in such disarray, "Mother, I have an announcement to make at dinner. I will see you then."

She escaped the house before her mother could intervene. She saddled her friend again, giving him a dry blanket, and trotted him gently two miles to the nearest post office. She held the letter in the slot for a second, then released it, letting her future fall into the unknown.

## Chapter 5    Fractions

Journal of Francis Garrett McKenzie, gold miner, Klondike Gold Fields, Dawson, North West Territory, Dominion of Canada.

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Friday, January 22, 1897

Sent the first part of this journal off yesterday – by dog team to Skagway; boat from there – but I don't know what I was thinking. After the fellow took off I stood there like a fool whacking my head with the palm of my hand. I was trying to be honest with her, but what's Vee going to think? Mr. Ogilvie was there to see him off, and asked what was wrong. Could hardly tell him.

I cut out the blank pages from the journal before I sent it. I've just spent three hours binding them for a new journal. My fingers are now so damned raw I can hardly write. It's worse than fixing boots. Lefty called me crazy, but he doesn't understand the joy and excitement of watching your own words unroll, line by line, image by image, onto the page. For me, at this moment of writing, and for every moment of writing, a sentence is a road at the very end of which each new word is the evolving tip. It is a road to an idea. It is an advance of certainty into the unknown. I do not know what I am looking for, but I am looking, and that is good.

Today a glorious sun shone on the tent door, and I opened it to let it fall on my face. Eight minutes at forty below, at least. Lefty yelled at me, shoved me out, and shut the flap. It's so damned humid in the tent that standing outside in my shirt, I started steaming. That and feeling sun on my face was worth it.

We start with Mr. Ogilvie on Monday. We are moving camp to the diggings, fourteen miles into the hills from Dawson. We'll tent it. Mr. Ogilvie supplies the crew with food. He laughs and says most everyone here has gold, but few have food. Gold is worth its weight in beans.

A few fellows made it over the Chilcoot Pass to Dawson, arriving yesterday, bringing some old newspapers along with them. William McKinley is the new U.S. president. Queen Victoria is sick, and so is the pope. Gentleman Jim Corbett is going to fight Fitzsimmons, The Fighting Blacksmith. The outside world is bizarre. And here it is irrelevant.

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Tuesday, February 2.

We've been surveying for over a week. Good campsite comprising a clutch of small sleeping tents around a mother grub tent. Bloody cold though. Must be minus 60. The airtight stove whistles and puffs and glows red around the pipe, then every once in a while, when it really gets rolling, the top claps up and down, blowing and sucking. Everyone hangs sweaty socks there. The smell of singed wool and burning fungus.

Mr. Ogilvie told us all how to stake a proper claim. Fewer than one in ten know how or bother, he says, even though it takes less time and it's cheaper to do it right in the first place than to argue about it in court later. Lefty yawned. He believes he knows everything he needs to know already. But when Ogilvie started talking about how to stake fractions, he came awake.

We are to spend the first few days surveying the creeks and laying out the baselines, starting with Bonanza and Eldorado. We are all, every last one of us on the crew is like a buzzard, watching for strays and accidents.

It gets dark by mid afternoon, which gives me time to read and write. Not much else to do.

Spruce trees are white sentinels guarding our world from incursions.

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Thursday, February 4

Our crewmates are mostly Americans and OK fellows. There's one barber from Seattle, Harvey Greenspoon, who cuts his own hair with a bowl. Funny little man with a savagely hooked nose. Some guys ride him, but he seems decent enough to me. Today several of the boys were on him, mostly because he has a badger's fierce temper but sometimes because he's a Jew. One guy was particularly nasty and called him a kyke, so Greenspoon called him a Limy-Frog-Kraut-Wop. I thought it was bloody funny the way he covered his bases! I was still laughing when the Limy-Frog-Kraut-Wop picked up an axe. I stepped in to stop a scrap, but he turned on me. He had the axe over his head, so I kicked him in the groin. Fair's fair, I figure. He doubled up and the axe sliced his ear and dug into his collar bone. Razor-sharp. Clean cut. Lefty and Mr. Ogilvie came in at the right moment, with me swearing like a miner at him, and him squealing like a piglet. Mr. Ogilvie asked a few questions, checked the witnesses, then sacked him on the spot. Up-a-Creek Charlie was watching it all. Smiled at me and walked away. Harvey came over to shake my hand and no one bothered him after that.

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Friday, February 5.

We got the first hint of a fraction today. Mr. Ogilvie marks the posts as soon as he has done his calculations. Welsh was the first to read Mr. Ogilvie's notes that #7 Above on Eldorado was staked twenty two feet longer than it should have been. Fortier asked if he could stake it and Mr. Ogilvie told him he was free to, but Welsh had already started. Welsh drove his posts, rented a team for \$200 a day, and mushed down the creek as fast as he could. Fortier was 100 yards behind. It's 70 miles to the Commissioner's office in Fortymile to record and it was 30 below.

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Wednesday, February 10.

It seems Welsh and Fortier ran neck and neck well past Dawson and then, about twenty miles out from Fortymile, Fortier passed and started pulling away. On rounding each bend, Fortier would look for Welsh, taking rough note of how much later Welsh hit the straightaway behind him. But one time Welsh was very late. When he didn't show, Fortier stopped about a mile up, only wanting to beat Welsh, not wanting him to die. Fortier said he heard nothing but a light breeze through the spruce and a raven. He went back and found Welsh lying by his spent dogs on the river, disconsolate, face down into the ice. Welsh only said, "They got nothin' left." Whoever rented him the team must not have fed them well. They say they were a sad lot. Fortier made one team out of the two and with Welsh bundled on his sled, he let the dogs push at their own pace to Fortymile. On the way, they decided to pool their efforts, to split ownership.

They called their fraction Fort Fortier/Welsh and have already made a sign. Underneath, in Latin, they wrote Anti Aurum Vita (Life before Gold, Charlie says it means). Money isn't worth shit up here without friendship, is what I'd say, in plain English.

The irony is that Mr. Ogilvie can register claims. Miners just make an affidavit of application before him. Ogilvie said that in the lecture, but apparently Welsh and Fortier didn't listen. And Ogilvie was too late to stop them.

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Thursday, February 11

A fellow walked up today and called me Lefty, like they used to at Circle. Yes, I said, as if I was, and the guy believed me and gave me the five bucks he owed Lefty. I had a laugh, and Lefty thought it was funny, too, until I wouldn't give him the money. He forgot he owed me.

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Monday, February 15

We reached Tom Lippy's claim today, Sixteen Above, on Eldorado. What a bloody lucky fellow. Lippy is. Four Canucks originally staked Fourteen to Seventeen, but dropped the last two so they could stake other claims in case better ground turned up elsewhere. A bird in the hand wasn't good enough. So Lippy re-staked Sixteen and it may be the richest ground ever.

Many fellows stand around looking at staked ground, judging whether it's rich or it's not depending on their inclination. Some say "It has too many trees," while others say "It's too high up on the creek." Smart fellows know that gold just is where you find it, and all the theory-making and divining amounts to a hill of beans if you are unlucky. These guys, these four Canucks, tried to play a smart hand, you'd have to say. They knew they only had four claims they could stake in the Klondike district, so they thought they'd play the odds: two on Eldorado, and two on some other creek, just in case. It's Ma Nature and lucky beggars like Lippy who get the last laugh.

While we worked at our surveying, a bunch of rich miners were gabbing on Lippy's claim. Ogilvie and Up-a-Creek, too. They all know Charlie, somehow. Suddenly, an amazing woman came out of nowhere. She wore a long, patterned dress under a heavy overcoat, Indian moosehide mitts, beaded up the forearms like those I sent Vee, and a hood trimmed with red fox. Pink, round cheeks and bright, smiling eyes. She had their attention – like a colourful bird flitting from man to man, charming each. Then she walked away and we all watched her go.

Lefty sidled over to me. Who was she? Where does she stay? Why... what... what if... and on and on. Told him to go ask Mr. Ogilvie. So he did, and I walked over to listen. Molly Larson. Swedish. Moved up from Circle City last fall. I never met her there though I saw her place. She has one in Dawson now, Mr. Ogilvie said, calling it Molly Larson's European Emporium, Spa,

and Bakery. He joked that her sign is bigger than her store. She sells anything expensive, he said. Even the bread is expensive, but worth it. She handed out her calling cards.

Up-a-Creek got a card and a very warm smile, I noticed. Lefty looked at his card, turning it over. When does it open? he called after her. After the first boat, she said, smiling. We'll see you then, said Lefty, all focussed and serious.

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Saturday, February 20

This morning Lefty said he was too sick to survey. When I got home late afternoon, I found a note saying that he'd gone to Dawson. Some sickness.

Boiled ham and pancakes for dinner. My gums are little sore these days. My small toe got frostbite yesterday, so I propped it up by the stove. Seems better, though the tip's still black.

A miner stuck his head into our tent looking for me. Said he was looking for that McKenzie, the guy what injured my brother defending that goddamned Kyke. I was tired and sore, and didn't feel like fighting – not that I ever do. Told him I was Lefty and had nothing to do with any goddamned Kyke, and he went away swearing he'd catch up with that damned McKenzie. I'll tell McKenzie to look for you, I yelled after him.

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Sunday, February 21

Lefty got back late evening – in a good mood, but looking pale – and collapsed on his bed. He didn't bother undressing. Had to help him get his boots off. What a stink in his boots!! He might have a bit of frostbite, too.



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Tuesday, February 23

We are measuring up the baselines, on our own, after dark, keeping ahead of Ogilvie, and watching for claims that run long. The sun sets at 4:20. Damned hard and cold work. Our own stakes are ready to go.

Missing Vee something awful these days. And Mary, too, though I know now that Mary was always only there because Vee wasn't. And because I was weak. This is the worst time of year – January and February. You can fool yourself into forgetting things around Christmas, and come March the sun has come back enough to make it seem that spring is around the corner. But January and February are filled with ice, and cold, and drifting snow, and a crippling boredom.

Light snow all day. I went out of cabin to do my business in the evening and tripped over a mound in the snow, tucked up against cabin – a Malamute, all curled up in its tail, under the snow. He yelped and jumped up. Poor thing looked ragged, with ribs showing. Who knows where he's been. He has one badly injured foot – a gash across the top of his paw. He limps and is skittish as all hell. I got dressed and went back out after him. It took me a while to gain his trust – an hour just to touch him, tempting him with bits of bacon, which was damned cold work under the circumstances. I wonder if he was beaten.

Lefty came out and told me to shoot the bugger. Nothing doing, I said. So he said, I'll do it then, and reached for his rifle. I grabbed the barrel and looked hard at him. He's staying with us, I said. Lefty backed down. Not one goddamned ounce of my food! he said and started sulking.

I finally got the poor fellow inside our cabin, but no more than a foot. Not surprising with Lefty yelling at me to shut the goddamned door! I gave him some warm gruel and that distracted him enough to get him in far enough to close the door. I'll make him a spot outside the door, I said. I'll move him out there soon as his foot's healed, and Lefty grunted.

He is showing signs of bouncing back, his eyes and ears are working away over in the corner there where he's lying, with his head on his good paw. I've started calling him Lazarus BadFoot.

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Sunday, February 28

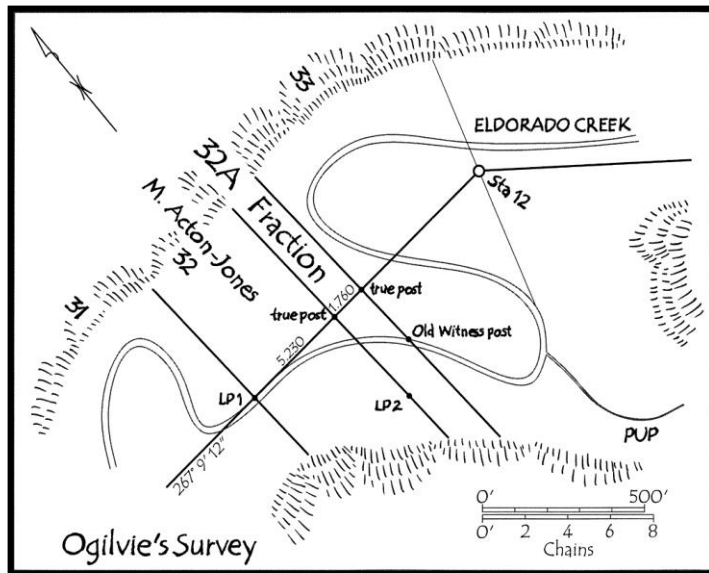
Bitter cold. We would be taking a break from surveying even if it weren't Sunday. The Sundogs were out again, I guess from all the tiny ice crystals in the air. Lefty was 'sick' again yesterday, and came back late today from Dawson. Is it Molly you're being 'sick' with? I asked him, but he only grunted.

BadFoot's paw's healing well. It took half a day until he let me look at it. It's cleaned and bandaged. Lazarus BadFoot Sundog is his full name. He is more relaxed now that he trusts me. The best sign: grunting and gnawing all the while, he shunted a bone about our dirt floor for an hour. He remains wary of Lefty, however, and carried his prize from Lefty's side to mine.

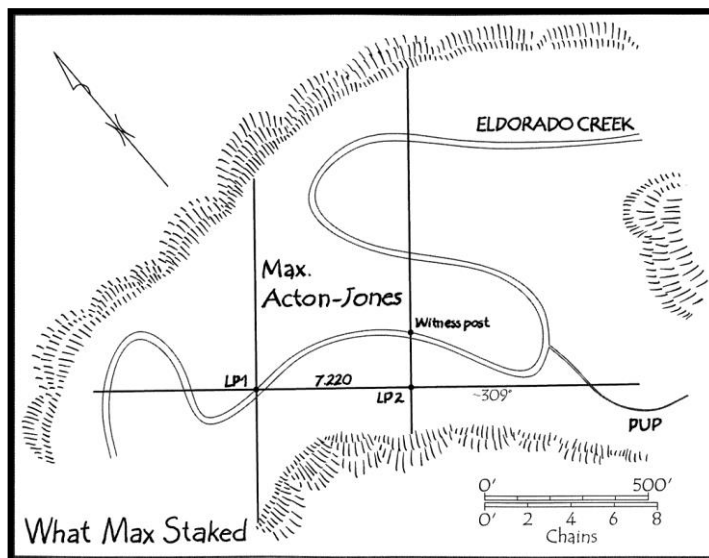
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Wednesday, March 3

WE GOT IT! Out of #32 Above which belongs to Max Acton-Jones, an Englishman. Nearby, Lucky Swede and Alex McDonald's pay streaks run 40' wide and pan \$5,000 in a single day! \$5,000/\$16 an oz. = 312 oz.! Damn! I pray our fraction that good! Too excited to write.



We knew Acton-Jones' was too long before anyone else did. Lefty had our stakes in the ground and marked before Mr. Ogilvie even finished writing up the new posts, and I took off at a run to our Post 2. Mr. Ogilvie took Lefty's affidavit on the spot.



We reckon Max used that LP1-LP2 line as his baseline because he felt it ran "in the general direction of the stream", like Regulations says, but he didn't look far enough up Eldorado Creek. So Ogilvie's baseline is quite different (running from LP1 toward Sta. 12), as the diagram shows. Max's Legal Post #2 limits his claim. Too bad for him! We own Fraction 32A.

Max's foreman, Anthony Giles Ainsworth, an Englishman like Acton-Jones, arrived minutes after we staked and was steaming mad, Lefty says. He had been in one of his pits. He then started calling Mr. Ogilvie a rotter and a crook, pointing to their diggings, where their pay streak is right next to our fraction. Mr. Ogilvie just said, sorry, but there was nothing he could do. The ground was open and those boys staked it legally. The foreman said he would see about that!

---

Thursday March 4

The sun is much warmer now. Lefty said I should quit surveying so we could work our fraction, 50 - 50. I thanked Mr. Ogilvie many times, embarrassing him a little I think, and apologised because we had to stop surveying. He said, never mind, boys, and good luck to you. We went off to Dawson this morning to get supplies, with BadFoot coming along as his foot is mostly better. He still wears a 'boot', though. We need to build a cabin, and buy mining equipment, but have no money beyond the little we earned surveying. It'll be a scrape.

---

Friday March 5

Lefty disappeared last night in Dawson and we stayed at Harry Ash's Northern Saloon – just a tent with floor boards. Hadn't seen Harry since Circle. He's going to replace the canvas as soon as Ladue gives him lumber. I had some whiskey, which was at the same time expensive and cheap (for being watery). Perfumed girls, with their sleeves puffed up like explosions, called me a Klondike King. Some king! I curled up on the floor at the back with BadFoot. I got a sore back and a hangover. Harry said they are included in the price. He thought that more funny than I.

Twenty sacks of mail came in. I stood waiting in line for three hours outside the P.O., killing time by talking with strangers. We have in common gold, homesickness (whether for parents or

sweethearts and kids), and some variation of rot, so that's what we talked about. In the end there was no mail for me. I caught up with Lefty, who is still tight-lipped about where he stays.

We went the rounds, looking for a grubstake, but everyone asked for half our gold when they saw the size of our fraction, even though Max's workings are just feet away. We had no luck and bought what we could afford. We'll try for another fraction and sell it to grub stake 32A.

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Saturday March 6

Heading to the creeks, we got one mile out of Dawson when Lefty turned back. See you tomorrow, is all he said. Getting annoyed at him. But then, I had Mary on Birch Creek.

I found a good spot for our cabin and started cutting. Up-a-Creek showed up in the afternoon, out of nowhere, and BadFoot liked him right away. I guess dogs sense when people take to one another. He didn't say where he's staying. He brought three spruce grouse and roasted the little devils on spits over an open fire. We threw wings and bits to BadFoot and they went down in a gulp, with his head thrown back. Made me think of Owl's Head, Vee, and I told Charlie the Memphremagog story.

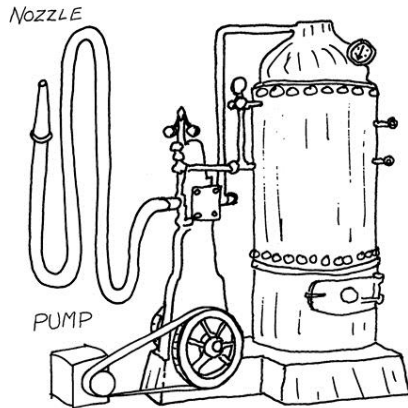
Got your fraction, I see, he said. Yours and Lefty's? Lefty's at the moment, I said. Careful you don't find yourself up a creek, is all he said. He's a hard fellow not to like.

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Sunday March 7

All day a blizzard piled snow up the front of the tent. The stove is puffing like hell, but the wind stops it getting warm in here. Lefty wouldn't have left Dawson in this. Lying around, but

don't feel like writing. I've taken four naps and am still in bed. I found some fine steam engines in catalogues. We could use one to melt the ground much faster than setting fires. Pricey, though.



BadFoot draped his chin on me; eyes and ears always moving. Tried to get him to bark, but he wouldn't. He makes funny 'woo' noises. Got him to howl, though, the two of us with our faces to the roof, and he's a champ at that! We even got a couple of other dogs to chime in.

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### Monday March 8

Still in bed, and the blizzard's still whistling. Bitter cold out there. Have to relieve myself, but not looking forward to dangling in the wind. I waited all day yesterday, and I'm backing up. Tore out the Drapes sections from Sears Fall and Winter Catalogue to be ready. Covered the boys with a sock, but just about froze them anyway. And lost the damned sock, to boot.

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### Wednesday March 10

The weather finally broke yesterday, so I found Mr. Ogilvie and he said sure thing. He's a fair man. Started on the crew again today.

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Sunday March 14

Is the country showing signs of the thaw, finally?

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Monday March 15

Staked our second fraction today. BadFoot hauled the stakes on his back. I had to tell Mr. Ogilvie sorry again. He understands. He knows we're all here for the gold. It's just above 46 Above Eldorado. Some say there's no gold up there, but I have to try. Registered it with Ogilvie, and he told me to register the contract with Lefty with him, too. Fifty-fifty, Lefty and me. Asked him about whether Lefty registered the contract for his fraction, but he couldn't remember.

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Tuesday March 16

Lefty's back. He brought a large steel rod with one pointed, fat end on it. Had fashioned in Dawson. It's an odd looking device. He said it's to heat the fat end so he can drive it into the frost to make post holes. He showed me by sticking the fat end in the fire until it was dull red, then rammed it into our dirt floor, where it steamed away and sent burnt earth smells swirling. In case we do more staking, he said. That's a clever idea, I said, but we won't need it now that we've done all the staking we are allowed. He just smiled and looked at me. Seems like a waste of money we could have used better, but he just tucked his chin in and looked at me. What? I asked him. Have it your way, I said when he didn't answer. I intend to, he said.

## Chapter 6 Mine the Miners

George Willoughby, a diminutive, grizzled '49er and Civil War veteran, looked after the Belcher stables with the care and attention of a grandfather. He never allowed the whitewash to yellow too deeply, or to get rubbed too thin by the horses, and never let bits and harnesses wander. The hay was always fresh, the straw was always clean, and the concrete floor, though cracked dendritically and stained in patches, was nearly always dry and free of droppings.

The Belcher house, huge by any standards, could easily have accommodated him in one of the many servants' bedrooms at the back, but he chose to live with his horses. His apartment, under his direction, had amalgamated two of the large front stalls. He joined the horses in the paddock for half of his bathroom functions, and the servants inside for the other half and an occasional bath. His remarkably full head of grey hair was a mane; it fell thick and straight and mostly to one side. If family or servants came upon him unexpectedly, they might catch him shaking his head as if to rid his nostrils of flies. He smelled of horses always. No one expected otherwise, or cared, as, despite having slaughtered his share of Yanks, he reckoned, he was the most gentle person anyone had ever known. Atrocities of war had made him that way.

At thirty six years old the wiry Willoughby had enlisted in Falkner's Rangers (7<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Mississippi Cavalry), and had been wounded in the chest at Selma, Alabama, under General Forrest. Scout saved him, having carried him, draped and unconscious, back to safety before the faithful animal succumbed to his own hideous intestinal wounds. From that day onward Willoughby wore the same ragged, scarlet handkerchief around his neck that flew into battle with him. He never started his day without thanking Scout and he never spent a day without feeding or petting or taking care of other horses. Vivian's own Cordillera, a black and white



Paint sired by a stallion Willoughby brought east with him, was one of the special beneficiaries. He treated the colt with the same devotion he would have Scout. Cordillera was second only in his heart to his owner.

As she grew up and as she followed him about, sometimes lending a hand with the chores, Willoughby recounted many stories of the Civil War for the wide-eyed Vivian, though he kept the most gruesome aspects from her. But of late and rather suddenly it had become the California Gold Rush which interested her. A fortune had come and slipped through his fingers in California, she knew, and she wanted from him whatever wisdom may have sprung from that experience. Closing his unpainted door behind her, she cornered him in his small stable-apartment, notebook and pen at the ready.

“Where again?” he asked.

“He called it the Klondyke. Northern Canada, just east of Alaska.”

“Makes sense,” he said. A soiled map hung on his wall, ragged with age. Brilliant yellow stars marked various locations up the mountainous western backbone of the continent where he had scratched notes at various angles, recording several generations of observations and dates. His finger, black under a ridged nail and warped as gently as his back, skipped north as he talked. “Sutter’s Mill.” He pointed to Northern California. “Fraser River. Barkerville in the Caribou. Atlin. Circle City. See?” His finger landed on an area east of Circle City. “Gold belt. Probably goes right to the coast.” He pointed at Nome.

“Pardon?”

“Gold belt. Up the mountains. All the way from South America to Alaska. It makes sense.”

“What would you do, if you were going, George?” She was not taken with his generalities.

“Going on the rush?” Willoughby’s demeanour softened as he looked up to his rough pine-planked ceiling where straw spiked through from the loft. He seemed to regret that this adventure was beyond him now. “Well, I’d be no fool, like the last time. Fellows go mad, scramble for ground, jumping one another’s claims, fighting. All sorts of shenanigans. All trying to get rich. I got caught up like the rest of them. But this time I’d mine the miners. In California it was mostly them who mined the miners who got rich, not them who mined the muck.”

“Mine the miners?” Vivian said as she scribbled.

“Yes. Only a few came out of the mountains with gold and many of them didn’t get past the saloons before they lost it all again. Most of the rest were just glad to get out alive. But they all needed food and kits. It was them what sold it to them who made the real money. Or them what bought claims from one miner and sold them to another. That’s mining the miners. But what you’re really doing is mining the fever. It’s the fever what weakens them.”

“And up there, in the... Klondyke? ...” – he paused for Vivian’s confirmation... – “Well... mining’ll be far tougher than California, what with the cold and isolation.”

“I’m not a miner,” said Vivian. “I have no interest in it.”

“Hold on, here, Miss Vivian. You are not thinking of going yourself, are you?”

“I want to get out of here and away from those who believe my place is in the parlour.”

“Your mother,” he said, pensively, mostly to himself. “I see.” Set in a landscape of dry skin weathered nearly to the bone, Willoughby’s eyes glistened with compassion for her. “It’s dangerous to worry about that, though. You are stepping off a cliff backward, thinking only about the bear lunging at you. You would be well advised to turn around. Face forward. It’s the rocks below that will kill you. It’s a hard trek anytime, going on a gold rush. Frontier... No amenities... But going north? That can kill you in a flash.”

Vivian searched his eyes as she thought. "I'll forget about my mother."

"That's good, of course. But I still can't say I'd agree."

"You don't think I'm fit? You think because I'm a woman I cannot take care of myself?"

Her irritation surfaced.

"The frontier, my young lady, especially a northern one, cares little for fitness, or whether you are a doe or a buck. The rock that kills you doesn't ask first whether your voice is high or low. And a woman's feet seem to freeze a good deal faster than a man's."

"You are just like all the rest." Vivian took a step back and turned toward the door as if to leave. Her voice was strained. She knew she was wrong, but it came out anyway.

"All the rest, as you call them, don't have your best interest at heart, young lady, and don't necessarily know what the blazes they are talking about." Willoughby looked at her, unflinchingly. "I know who you are, and what you are capable of. I've watched you grow up, for heaven's sake!" He spoke now, rapidly, as a father would, part scolding, part reminding – but mostly out of desperation. "I know you are better than most of the men I've met. But I also know you have no experience in the north or the wilds of any sort. Am I to stand here and agree with your foolhardiness just because you are bull-headed?"

Vivian paused. She looked into his eyes again, waiting for a sign that he would back down, but saw none. Finally, having taken a breath, she gave her response: "Yes!"

"I should have expected no different!" he said, choking on his laughter.

When Vivian was five, Willoughby first saw that spirit. Poor Albert Wheeler had tried to escape and return to his marble game. Though he was a year older, and bigger, she dragged him back to the village she was building out of scrap wood in the sand pile behind the house. She was not about to lose her scavenger to a nest of coloured glass spheres, particularly now that she had

already finished a block of “row houses”, a “grocery store”, a “blacksmith’s” complete with “stable”, and was half-way done her “inn”. Willoughby had seen it again the day, with a carefully selected forked stick and narrowed eyes, having elbowed the terrified servants aside, she cornered and captured the black rat snake in the Belcher’s first-floor library, where it had been drawn by open French-doors, the dark slate floor, and the cool relief of the shelter running the circumference of the room, under the walls of books. But he remembered it most proudly from the day when she was in her late teens. A local construction worker had made some racy comment as she and Willoughby passed on their horses. He never blamed the worker for taking note. She was, in short, a vision, with her black riding boots, her long hair pulled back, her breasts filled out, her head high. Calmly she reigned in Cordillera, slid expertly to the ground, walked up to within inches of the worker’s face, and dared him to say it again. It was the incongruity and the surprise that flustered the digger. Was she carrying a secret weapon on that five foot six body? Unsure, he checked with his mates who just smiled and dared him to say it again, too. In the end he said only, “Sorry, Ma’am,” quietly. She smiled, remounted, and – she admitted later – still shaking with excitement and fear, cantered away before her own surprise and a power which she sensed must be illusory wore off.

Now, her anger at Willoughby fell away with his laughter.

“But,” he continued, “you must be willing to take advice. Can you do that, at least?”

“Yes,” she repeated, this time softly, without hesitation.

“Good.” He smiled. “Will you agree to spend some time with me? We will call it tutorials.”

“Yes.”

“Good. My first question is, then, Miss Vivian, who is to travel with you?”

“Don’t worry about that. I’ll find someone. And Garrett will be there when I get there.”

“Garrett has his own worries, I’m sure.”

“Don’t worry, I tell you. I have a plan.”

“Alright, I’ll trust you on that. My second question is: what could you bring to sell that others would overlook?”

“I’ve thought about that, too. Garrett always complained about cold feet at night. So... sheepskin boots? Thick wool, rubber soles. What do you think?”

“Could work – if they are better than what a fellow would normally get. But, a little too obvious. Everyone’ll get boots for their kit, and they’ll be reluctant to buy a second pair even if they are better.”

“In his journal Garrett talked about the cost of candles. From what I could make out they need the candles not just for their cabins, but for their work in building shafts and tunnels. He said he had to pay close to 50¢ a candle when the supply fell short. I’ll bet I could find a source down here for less than a penny.”

“Just the thing. They’ll be thinking about their cabins, but they won’t know about the tunnelling until they get there. But when do they use them? When does the supply run short?”

“Mostly in the winter, it sounds like. That’s when they melt the permafrost and muck out their shafts and tunnels, Garrett says. And another thing. Mosquitoes. Something to do with mosquitoes. They drive everyone crazy. Where are your Sears catalogues, Willoughby?”

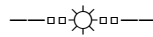
Willoughby reached up to a shelf where a stack lay. He handed her the most recent. “Are you thinking of nets?”

“Well, no. I was thinking of...,” her voice trailed off. “Summer... sewing machines... bedroom suites... screen doors and windows! Look here: Wire Screen Cloth, 24” wide: 3 ¾ ¢ lineal ft. \$2.00 per roll of 100 running feet. And that is retail.” She handed the catalogue back.

“Ah. Very good. Not something many would think about. And if it’s at all like California... lots of stampeders with carpentry skills, but no ground and no money and itching to work. And you said sewing machines. It made me think that everyone had socks to repair. Many brought needles and thread, but most of those what did, lost them.”

Vivian smiled. “Thank you, George!” She hugged the old man tightly on the way out. He loved those moments. “I’ll present my plan at dinner.”

“There’s a meal I’d like to attend,” Willoughby said under his breath, watching her disappear out the stable door. “Come back to us in one piece, Vivian!” he called out after her. “From the dinner, I mean.” He chuckled.



In the Belcher dining room, late spring pierced the stained glass windows. It sparkled pendants on the chandelier, swept in rainbow spectra across the meticulously placed settings, danced on polished silverware, settled on warm birch and cherry sideboards.

Adella Belcher sat across from Owen awaiting their daughter’s arrival, each at an end of their long, mahogany dining table. All about them, along the high shelf that ran the circumference of the room, a platoon of blue Delftware plates stood, shoulder to shoulder, as if on guard. Between husband and wife sat a rotund glass pitcher of water. In it images of sunlit portions of the room were captured and warped – and still – as if rendered by a Dutch master.

Vivian burst into the room. She wore a white blouse, puffed in style at the shoulders, trim riding pants and mirror-polished, high riding boots. She anticipated that her mother would explode the moment she saw her.

But Adella Belcher kept form. She waited for their errant and only child to take her seat, then she rang the small servant's bell, as she normally would, signalling the start of service. When the butler appeared to confirm her wishes, she advised him that dinner would be delayed until such time as Miss Vivian had taken the opportunity to dress for dinner. He retreated, stepping backwards, as if fearful of exposing his back, and closed the door, leaving the family in their respective postures.

Owen was the only member who showed signs of life. His eyes moved back and forth curiously from one woman to the other. His mouth fought to remain passive – he reprimanded himself for enjoying the moment, for betting with himself as to who would break first, and for breaking ranks in deciding it would not be Vivian. Long seconds dragged by. Finally, losing his sense of humour and responding to his grumbling stomach, he said, "Give us an explanation, or some reason, at least, why we should continue, Vivian."

"I have decided to change my life," she said, in a firm and abrupt voice, turning to look squarely at her mother.

"Very well," said her mother. "We shall just have to wait to start dinner until you change it back, then. Or at least until you withdraw to the stables and maintain your new life's course in a place more appropriate to your attire."

"I have no intention of doing either."

"My, we *are* feeling truculent tonight." Adella said, with unbridled condescension.

"Vivian," her father said softly, now hoping to resolve something for which he did not have any quick solution, "May we discuss this in the parlour following dinner?"

"I would be happy to," said Vivian.

"Excellent. I'm famished. Go change and we'll discuss it later."

“If you wish to discuss my clothes, I am happy to do so after dinner, in the parlour. However, I have no intention of changing now. Or later, for that matter. These clothes are modest, clean, and quite sufficient, thank you.”

“While they may be all those things,” her mother retorted, “they are not *proper*.”

“Propriety is a matter of custom, which itself is a matter of opinion.”

“Indeed, and it is the custom and the opinion of this room – in the majority, I might add – that stable clothes are proper to the stable – not to the dining room. That is self-evident, even to the mind of a stubborn twenty four year old.”

“Twenty six year old.”

“I should have thought much less. In the teens, perhaps.”

“I am immune to your insults, mother.”

“My, my. We *have* changed!”

“Ladies. This will get us nowhere. I’ve had a long day. It’s past eight o’clock. I believe I deserve a decent meal.” His hunger drove his frustration. He rose, making a motion to retrieve and use the service bell, but Adella calmly placed it in her lap. Owen sat, momentarily at a loss.

“You are owed not only a decent meal,” Adella said, “but also the respect due a hard-working husband and father. Our daughter is insulting us, and I have no intention of permitting it. And I do not understand how you can tolerate her behaviour.”

“Dear Adella,” he said, being as placating as he could, “I condone neither Vivian’s dress nor her attitude. I am merely hungry, and, on balance, I find my hunger outweighs my offended sense of decorum.”

“At least my father has reason and balance,” Vivian said, to the air, to the invisible jury at large.



“Hold on, Vivian. I have no desire to be drawn in as a counter for your mother. Your behaviour is quite infantile, I find. I merely don’t believe that it warrants much attention in and of itself, and I certainly have no desire to sacrifice my dinner to it.”

“Are you siding with her, then? Are a pair of riding pants worthy of so much attention?”

“I am siding with no one and nothing but my stomach and my strong sense of survival,” he said. “You are the one who has chosen your riding pants as some sort of vehicle for your statement, therefore it is you who have placed them as the focus of attention. Why don’t you just tell us what you really want to say? And then we can have dinner.”

“We will have no dinner until she changes,” said Adella. She sat, her hands anchored on either side of her place mat in the bedrock of the teak table, her arms spread and as rigid as flying buttresses on a Gothic cathedral.

“I’ve had enough,” said Owen, looking from the unmoving edifice to his smoldering daughter. He rose, went into the kitchen and instructed Oscar, the butler, to bring dinner for whomever chose to eat, and informed him that he, Owen, was one who had so chosen. Shortly, the butler glided into the dining room and, in his gentle serving voice, asked who else would like to eat, having assumed Adella had assented to this resolution.

“Oscar, if you bring food into the room before Vivian has changed and dressed properly for dinner, it will be your last paid act in this house.”

Broadsided, he turned to Mr. Belcher for assistance. Owen nodded and waved him gently back to the kitchen. “Would either of you care for dinner?” he asked, as he rose again. “No? Very well, then.”

When Owen returned from the kitchen, he brought his own soup and rolls, and without fanfare put them at his place, sat, and began to eat. When he felt Adella's stare bearing down on him, he asked, "Am I to be fired?"

Adella fumed.

Vivian then rose and in a moment returned with her own soup and rolls. Adella braced herself even more firmly against these sudden winds of insurrection.

Owen waited for several minutes, then asked, "So, Vivian, what in the world has brought us to this absurdity? What do you mean by saying 'I have decided to change my life'?"

"I am leaving home. I am going to the Yukon Territories, to the Klondyke."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Adella wheezed.

"Garrett sent me a letter and his journal. There is to be a gold rush to the Klondyke – though few know about it yet – and I am going to be there when it happens. To gain my independence."

"What foolishness!" her mother responded indignantly. "Your independence from what? From whom?"

"You, mother, and your money. And your frills and corsets and capes and dinner dresses and your endless attempts to have me married."

Her delivery was matter of fact, and hit Adella the harder for it. How could her care and her money be oppressive when it was a source of freedom? "Owen," she said eventually, her voice shaking. "Help me here."

Owen knew how such bluntness would injure her. "Adella, I will comfort you when I can and when you permit. But you must know that there is nothing I could do to stand in Vivian's way, even if I wanted to. She is a woman now. And if our daughter is to leave home for the

Klondyke, I will give her what advice and support I can. And I will do everything within my power to see that she is not harmed by her decision.”

The bedrock for Adella’s structure had shifted suddenly. Her buttresses fractured. Her head tilted forward, holding precariously one degree from toppling.

Owen, seeing the movement, discerning what it meant, quietly went again to the kitchen and brought his wife her soup. “Eat this, my dear,” he said, lightly stroking her shoulder. “It’s very good, and you’ll feel much better.” Slowly she began eating, in avian portions.

Vivian looked at her father, obviously grateful for his support and wanting to tell him of her plans. But, before she could say anything, he restrained her with his open palm. He gestured for her to pass him the service bell which Adella had by then placed on the table. He rang it and the dinner service carried on, stiffly, cautiously, but otherwise as normal.

The main course comprised grilled fresh salmon steaks, with coriander rice, minted peas and stalks of fresh asparagus, served with a fine Chablis. It seduced them all into a state of forgiveness, though the women less so with each other than with Owen. For his part, he was ready to forgive anyone now that his stomach was full and his wine glass twice emptied.

He smiled at Vivian, and nodded, sensing the time was right. “You must have a plan. You cannot go without one.”

“I do, father, and I believe it’s sound. And quite clever.”

“Go on.”

“I have talked to Willoughby. He understands mining. And he has kept up on the news from the gold camps. He even has a map showing their progress up the Cordillera.”

“I’ve seen it in his apartment,” said Owen. “He seems quite the amateur geologist.”

“He suggests I forget about trying to mine for myself.”

“Quite.”

“He suggests I mine the miners, as he calls it.”

“Curious.”

“Yes, but it makes sense. Apparently most of those who did well in California brought and sold things which all miners needed but most overlooked – or couldn’t bother bringing – or couldn’t spare the time to make.”

“Such as?”

“Well, I thought of sheepskin boots. Garrett complained incessantly about cold feet.”

“Their selling price?”

“I don’t know. Garrett only mentioned he bought new boots for five dollars.”

Owen, a man used to rapidly assessing business ventures, did some quick calculations. He was not impressed. “Any other ideas?”

“Yes. Two. Candles for the winter. Less than two cents here, at least fifty cents there.”

“How many? How often?”

“Willoughby guesses hundreds of miners, each with cabins, shafts and tunnels.”

He made more calculations. “Anything else?”

“Screens. For windows. To keep out mosquitoes.”

“Costs?”

They shared numbers. Adella’s attention sank inward.

“And Willoughby says that in mining camps there are always the late arrivals. Handy fellows with carpentry skills, many of them. I might set up a small factory to make screens. Custom screen windows. Very simple carpentry. There’s lots of wood onsite. That means low

material costs. And there are lots of miners with lots of money, lots of cabin windows and doors, and clouds of mosquitoes.”

“You may have something there,” he said brightly. “How many of these handy fellows?”

“Hordes, he says. Only the first arrivals get ground. The rest find themselves broke and looking for work.”

“Cheap labour. Indispensable product. How many windows?”

He listened to Vivian’s numbers and made more calculations. Then, turning to Adella, he said proudly, “Your daughter has a very good head for business.” Adella face was numb. He turned back to Vivian. “I wish to hear Willoughby’s assessment first hand, if you don’t mind.”

“Of course, father.”

Owen rang the service bell. When Oscar appeared, while keeping an eye on his wife, Owen whispered to him. A minute later Willoughby arrived, his horsy scent ballooning into the room ahead of him.

Adella rose quietly. “Excuse me, please. I feel rather faint.” She headed upstairs.

When Owen took Willoughby and Vivian to the sitting room, Vivian immediately felt taller.

“Oscar, we’ll have brandy, please. And pull out three of those thin Havanas, will you?”

Oscar disguised well his surprise at Willoughby’s and Vivian’s presence.

Vivian, aside from her repressed cough at her first tastes of Havana and Cognac, acquitted herself well. Their conversation was lively, filled with anecdotes, which Vivian repeated from Garrett’s journal, and Owen from ageing second and third hand sources. Willoughby’s came from his own experiences and were as raw as his language, for which he regularly apologised but had trouble avoiding. Together they relived a parlour version of the California gold rush, replete

with nuggets and dry dust, blood and bile, anger and stupidity. Infidelities and gambling surfaced regularly. Skullduggery and thievery often. Murder occasionally.

Then, as a team, they began to design the windows and doors, and to work out the fabrication line, a rough budget, and an estimate of costs and profits, looking at each other's sketches – keeping the design of the joints frontier-simple and their assumptions clear. Vivian collected the drawings and scribbled notes throughout, resolving to copy it over. Increasingly, she tasted the heady flavour of freedom. The door had been suddenly thrown open – rich possibilities lay before her. Her excitement was almost unbearable.

Then, surprisingly, her father said, “I will give you half the seed money and lend you the rest – interest free.”

Vivian leapt up and threw herself across the room at her father.

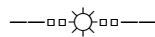
“On two conditions.”

She pulled back from her hug, looking into his eyes.

“You don't go alone, and... *and*... I approve of your companion.”

“Father! I would have thought you had more faith. I have a plan.”

“Ahh. I'm sorry, Viv, but I'm more than a businessman, I am your father. Willoughby understands, don't you Willoughby?”



### ***Companion Wanted for the KLONDYKE Goldfields***

*Must be friendly, mild-tempered, good-humored, strong, healthy, morally sound, honest, attentive, carefree, decisive, conscientious, inventive, adventuresome, level-headed, hard-working, and resolute. To leave immediately. \$100<sup>00</sup> Bond & Impeccable References required.*

Within fifteen days of her placing it, three women and one hundred thirty seven men had answered Vivian's advertisement in the New York Times. Owen rejected all the men on principle. Vivian rejected the first woman because she was so slight that Vivian feared the wind from a closing door might topple her. She rejected the second woman because she seemed to have only three teeth, and, given the cut of her dress, there was some question as to whether she could legally raise the bond. And she rejected the third woman because she arrived dressed like a floozy, smelled like brothel and left an excessively well-dressed, well-groomed man waiting in the carriage while she came in for the interview.

In desperation, seeing the list dwindle to nothing, Vivian proposed to her father that she ask Ted to accompany her.

"He manages the family farm, Vivian. You cannot put him in that position."

He was right. There was no one left. Except the one she had overlooked.

The idea struck her in the middle of the night. She slipped out to the stables to propose it. Willoughby was adamantly opposed, and mildly shocked that she would come out to him at such an hour, and he sent her back to the house scorching from a judiciously, though gently delivered reprimand which did nothing, in the end, but convince Vivian that he, Willoughby, was the right companion for her.

The next day she made the case to her father, who paid attention carefully, realising instinctively that there were many reasons why Willoughby would be the perfect choice. Despite his age. He had no one else in the world but the Belcher family. He had been with them for over twenty years. They all trusted him beyond question – even if Adella had trouble being in the same room with him. And he was beyond the age where Vivian's magnetic good looks could be the source of complications or seriously affect his judgement. Indeed, he was sixty two at the

time, was like a grandfather to her, and would risk his life to keep her from harm. However, his best qualification by far was that she listened with respect to everything he said, and what he said came from a deep well of reason, wisdom, and love for her.

Beyond his health, which suffered occasionally when his war wound acted up, the one serious impediment was his love for the horses. He was profoundly loath to leave them. Yet he longed for one last, great adventure. It was in his eyes. She had seen it, and she went for it like a wolf for soft tissue.

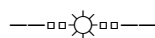
“Garrett says it’s likely to be the greatest of the rushes. Ever! Garrett says Ogilvie has admitted to seeing \$100 pans! And he knows Ogilvie has seen much higher! Garrett says the world doesn’t really know about it yet, but when the miners who have been working over the winter clean-up in the spring, and when they head out with their gold, it will be too late. The rush will be on! And it’s April. Spring is upon them in the Klondike. We have to leave now!”

“Garrett says! Garrett says! I’m tired of hearing what Garrett says.” Willoughby was, however, softening noticeably, and was listening carefully to everything Garrett was reported to have said. “Let me have his journal,” he said, in the end.

Finally, having read the journal, having realised the potential of the new gold camp, and having extracted assurances from Mr. Belcher that the horses would be well cared for in his absence, he gave in. He had only one other condition. That he would get an advance sufficient from the Belchers that he could buy a claim worth working for himself if the chance arose.

“But you’ve given up mining. Mine the miners, you say!”

“Just for the fun of it. The excitement. Who cares if I get rich? I don’t need to be rich. It’s a curse to be rich, anyway.”





The following Monday, Vivian Belcher rose and put on a laid-out dress for the last time and, with a well-scrubbed, properly-attired, newly-polished – and fine-smelling George Willoughby – went to meet her father at his offices on the corner of Wall and Front Streets. There, the three of them conducted their business, signing agreements – at Vivian's insistence. From her father's offices, they went straight to the front counter in their bank where she cashed her three thousand dollar cheque, and tucked the money away in her leather money belt.

Then, dragging Willoughby behind her, she went to Lord & Taylor's on 5th Avenue, straight to men's apparel. She bought trousers and a shirt, changed into them, gave her dress to the nearest store clerk – who happened to be a man, and a confused one at that – and declared herself a new woman.

## Chapter 7 The Bowels of Hell

Journal of Francis Garrett McKenzie

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Wednesday March 17, 1897

Cursed gold imprisons men who otherwise would listen

To reason and to common sense, avoiding greed and opulence.

– more seductive than alluring charms of women

– blackened soup of soot and rock    mock lock knock clock

– foetid smells. I muck this ditch    stitch switch rich which witch pitch twitch itch

– halls of Satan; rooms of hell.

Bah...

I've started work on our new, McKenzie Fraction. Slow going – I build the fire then wait, and write. There's more wood up here, though, as it hasn't been so heavily cut.

I can't help thinking about Vee. I wonder what she's up to and whether my package got through. I fear she may never speak to me again.

---

Saturday March 20

Hit bedrock today. Sixteen feet. I took a day to make a winch and frame, as it is too tough to haul the muck up the ladder. I harnessed BadFoot to the bucket. He hauls like a trouper! I mucked out the last and panned like hell. Damned disappointing. Two colours. Less than five cents a pan. This truly is the path of a madman.

---

Monday March 22

The snow's starting to melt making a few little pools, but it trickles into the shaft,  
and mucks up my mucking!

The Path of Madmen     by Francis Garrett McKenzie

Cursed gold imprisons men who otherwise would be content  
With reason and with common sense, avoiding greed and opulence,  
Those avenues of torment.

'Tis more seductive even than alluring charms of women  
Who, skilled in arts familiar to the Gods of pleasure, are  
Angelic more than human.

I know it is – for here I dwell, suff'ring filth, the foetid smells,  
In blackened soup of soot and rock, to which I'm chained in wedlock:  
Satan's entrails! Bowels of hell!

Thus obsessed I mucked this ditch, 'til Satan came and asked me, "Which?  
Mounds of gold or timely death?" Now true, I've had my final breath,  
But there's my gold – and *I was rich!*

---

Tuesday March 23

Second shaft. Winch working well. Bedrock at 22 feet. Colours same as before. Lefty's doing better on our other fraction: 25¢ a pan. Have to keep digging.

---

Wednesday March 24

Damned discouraged. Third shaft in McKenzie Fraction, right in centre of valley. I've reached bedrock and have only 6¢ a pan. Lefty says there's no gold up here and to come work with him on the Hillup Fraction. I will, starting tomorrow.

---

Thursday March 25

I'm back at Hillup. Had a good day, finally, pulling a \$1.20 a pan and not even down to bedrock yet. Up-a-Creek came around today with food. Venison steaks! He played with BadFoot while I cooked. We ate our steaks and tossed BadFoot some indescribable animal parts. For several hours he worked on a bone, rolling his eyes and turning his head sideways when he cramped down. Tail back and forth ceaselessly.

Lefty was sullen; something's on his mind. But of course he won't say.

---

Friday March 26

Hit bedrock late yesterday. We could see only a thin pay streak after all, which kept me sleepless and worrying most of last night. Today I showed Lefty my drawings of the steam engine and suggested we drift along the bedrock, but as the engine costs between \$135 to \$235, plus the cost of shipping, it would take every dollar we have. Lefty said he's been figuring for some time we should sell the McKenzie fraction. But we won't get

anything for it, I said. Just wait, he said. He took our can of gold, and left this morning for Dawson, saying he was going to scare up some buyers. Once again he promised, at my insistence, to transfer half the ownership of the Hillup fraction to me.

---

Saturday March 27

Lefty came back last night. He took his strange, fat-ended rod up to our other fraction today, and got back late. Staking up there, Lefty? I asked, but he ignored that by saying that some interested buyers are coming tomorrow from Dawson and going to bed.

---

Sunday March 28

Three fellows showed up at our cabin first thing, one from California, one from Sweden, and one from Italy. Anthony Ainsworth, Max's foreman came with them. He's a Welshman, it turns out, and their "advisor." International event, this stampede. They called themselves The Syndicate. My, my. They looked back and forth at the two of us, our similar looks confusing them. The Californian introduced himself as Collis Schiller, Publisher of The Klondike Crier. Never heard of it, Lefty said. You will, he said. The others introduced themselves, too, but one name at a time is all I can handle.

Lefty told them where the ground was and Schiller said that it's too high up the creek, but went anyway. Lefty told me to work here. They all came back after supper, and the fellows seemed encouraged.

---

Monday March 29

They went up again today and came back late. They were very excited. They camped out on our floor. Whiskey and gold kept them talking loudly about women, big houses,

and fast horses until midnight, startling BadFoot a couple of times. The Italian called me Lefty, told me I was a fine fellow, then threw up his dinner outside. Bad luck for him. Good luck for BadFoot. He lapped it up. An Italian is an Italian, I figure, and a dog's a dog. You have to forgive each them their weaknesses.

---

Tuesday March 30

Lefty returned late with \$4,000 in US currency. I didn't figure it was worth anywhere near \$4,000, I said, but he said they pulled a few \$25 pans. So I told Lefty we should keep the ground, maybe, but Lefty said it was already sold, and that we shouldn't be greedy. Spread the wealth, he said. Anyway, he said, the little pay streak they hit won't pan out, and he smiled. All of which I thought strange.

I'm going out to Vancouver or Seattle to buy an eight horse power boiler and steam engine, for \$200. I'll take the first boat in after the Yukon breaks.

---

Wednesday May 5

The pay streak comes high and close to the surface at east end. A fine looking dump we've stacked up, waiting for clean-up.

---

Monday May 17

The word from Dawson is that ice on the Yukon broke Friday. Cracked and heaved. Blocks half as big as a house. By yesterday there were small boats on the river. Working bloody late these days. Too tired to write much; I will on Sunday.

---

Sunday May 23

Last couple of weeks we've been drifting hard, heading down toward the west end. Fifteen hour days, I figure. We ran into a nice streak, panning anywhere from \$3 to \$300, most \$40 to \$60. Followed it toward the creek, about 25 feet underground, along the boundary with Acton-Jones. I sank a shaft right on our side to make sure we didn't stray, and moved our hoist over. Lefty didn't think it necessary, but I said it would save us trouble if we knew it was our gold. Mucking out and hoisting is bloody hard work, mostly by hand with BadFoot in his harness doing the hoisting. We also have to cut and haul firewood down to melt the head. I plan to hire a couple of miners next time in town.

Our dump 20' long, 8' wide and 3' at the peak. That's about 500 cubic feet of muck, or something like 2,000 pans. If the pans average \$25, then we have \$50,000! Neither of us can wait for clean-up! The melt is running now, but not hard enough yet. We pan just before bed for an hour or so, and we have rows of cans and bottles on every ledge, filled with gold. We are getting good at getting out most of the black sand, generally because much of the gold is coarse enough the black sand isn't much of a problem anyway. With these returns, it looks like we didn't need to sell my fraction after all.

Max's foreman came over to look at the new shaft. Bloody close to my ground! he said. I should make certain you don't wander, if I were you, and went away grumbling.

---

Monday May 24

Lefty is back from his Sunday trip to Dawson. Molly? I asked him, but he just smiled, and grunted, as usual. He says it won't be long before the first steamers arrive, so

I'm going down tomorrow. I'll bring \$1500 in pokes, or just about 100 oz. I love the colour, like butter, but richer. Who doesn't like something like butter, but richer?

I was working away in the drift this afternoon when a fellow showed up in a vest and a tie looking for Leland Hillup. I pointed up toward the cabin where Lefty had gone, then caught sight of the two standing by our cabin door, Lefty reading a bunch of papers. Lefty looked at the fellow and threw the papers on the ground. The fellow shrugged and walked away, and I heard him say to Lefty, You've been served, Mr. Hillup, and Lefty said something nasty which I needn't record. I asked Lefty later about it, but he replied, It ain't none of your affair. And I said, No, I figure not. After a few minutes, having thought about it, he said, I'm sorry Mac, it was from my Mrs., if you must know. She's a pain in the arse.

---

Wednesday May 26

BadFoot's with Up-A-Creek, and I'm in Dawson, staying in a tent hotel with no sign on it. There was a fellow on the street selling spots on a wooden bench. Dawson Ritz, he called it, so I bought one, and he laughed. Now I know why.

I had an argument with Lefty again yesterday because he keeps wearing my buckskin into the workings! It's cold down there, Mac. Not my bloody fault, Lefty. Get a decent coat! This coat's decent. And so on. In the end, I told him to go to hell.

Wandered about Dawson with little to do but wait. It's bustling. Ladue's saw mill running around the clock. It puffs, and blows its whistle at noon and midnight. There must be over a thousand folks, now, with buildings going up everywhere. It's muddy, though, and the air smells vile as the town has no proper drainage.



Molly Larson's European Emporium, Spa, and Bakery is one of the few buildings finished. It's long and narrow with a big sign and a big empty front room filled with fresh bakery smells. Molly came up and handed me coffee and a muffin. Molly Larson, she said, and put out her hand. Where did you get the foodstuffs? I asked and she just smiled.

So you're Lefty's partner, she said. It's remarkable how much like Lefty you look, except for this, and she pointed to the little mole I have on my cheek just about covered by my beard. Even your hair, and your eyes. Hard to believe.

Through the door at the very back marked "SPA", a fellow appeared with red cheeks, a Christmas smile, and a shining of sweat on his forehead. He had the smell and press of laundry. His old clothes, which he left on the counter, had the stench of the wild. He floated in a dream toward the front door, as if he were balancing something precious. I'll be back tomorrow, he called to Molly. You'll melt away, Gregory, she called back.

What's a 'SPA', I had to ask. It's a couple of hours that makes you feel like that, she said, pointing at Gregory and smiling. I want some, I said, laughing. And she said, Yours, for \$30. That's a lot, I said. Not to the men who come in here, she said. It's a sixth the cost of a good steam engine. Now what would you want with a steam engine? she asked. To mine my gold faster, so I can go back there, I said, pointing toward the SPA. She gave me a free steam cleaning, and now I feel like Gregory.

It turns out she's going down river, too, to Circle City. There she can pack up her things and bring them up. What things? I asked. She waved her arm about the empty room. The things everyone wants when they become rich, she said. But there'll be no room onboard the sternwheelers, I said. Don't need to get them on, she said. I'll build a barge and get the sternwheeler to tow it. I'd love to see that, I said, what with the current.

You will, she said, and laughed. Hearty laugh. Full of life. No wonder Lefty follows her and Gregory's coming back tomorrow.

---

Tuesday June 8

The Alice was the first boat in, and the Portus B. Weare was two days behind her. The Alice's cargo was mostly food and whiskey, which sent the officials into a fury and the rest of the town – including me – on a two-day binge. My head feels like a soccer ball at the end of a tough game. I pulled myself onboard the Weare this morning, but I might as well have booked a “railing-ticket” for the amount of time I spent looking down into the swirling, muddy Yukon, waiting for the next heave.

I had stood in line for hours at the Mining Recorder's a couple of days ago as I wanted to see the record of the Hillup fraction. I grabbed a clerk coming out a side door and asked what a fellow had to do to see the records. I wish I could help you, sir, he said. Then he bloody well just stood there. It took me a couple of seconds to catch on. I dropped a few dollars into his pocket. Newton Morris is the name, he said. Come this way, in through the side door.

Lefty has not changed the record of ownership. Presently I have nothing in my name. No mounds of gold for me in return for suffering the filth and foetid smells in blackened soup of soot and rock.

## Chapter 8 Viola Baker

Over the month of April and well into May, Vivian bought for Willoughby and herself, at Lord & Taylor's and elsewhere, checking them assiduously off on her list, one pair of knee-high boots, three suits of heavy woollen underwear, two pairs of trousers (one close-woven for winter wear), three heavy woollen overshirts, one heavy woollen sweater, a long overcoat, and a wide brim hat. Elsewhere she bought, for each of them, among other things, one pair of gum boots, leather soled and nailed, two pairs of overalls (one felt lined), a woollen neck scarf, and twenty yards of mosquito netting.

She also collected 60 100' rolls of 24" screen cloth from the Atlas Screen Co. in New Haven, for which she paid a total of \$72.00, bought enough boxes of finishing nails to kick-start the screen works, packed fifteen hundred pounds of white utility candle wax in cartons, inspected their assortment of candle wicks and moulds and the carton full of needles and thread, and reserved two train tickets to Seattle.

"George Willoughby," she said to her companion, standing at their pile of supplies in a storeroom next to the stables, "I would like you to meet Viola Baker."

Moments slid by as George looked about for this mysterious Miss Baker, who, he surmised, must be a soft walker to be approaching so quietly on the wide planks of pine.

"I am Viola Baker, George," she said, seeking to relieve his mystification. It did not seem to help. "If I am to be free of my mother's money, I should also be prepared to be free of her name."

Willoughby tilted his head, pursed his lips in a moment of doubt, then smiled.

"You may simply call me 'Vee', if you wish, to avoid confusion."

When, finally, they finished stuffing everything in newly-bought trunks and wooden boxes, Vivian startled her father by saying in two days they would be on the train to Seattle, a deadline which brought home to Owen the reality of his daughter's departure.

Then, choosing their time for when Adella Belcher was napping, the newly minted Viola Baker and the man now calling himself Scout Willoughby (thus maintaining the integrity of his homage to his heroic horse) – both feeling taller and lighter than either remembered – received hugs and handshakes from the staff, and left a note for Adella. Viola planned to send a letter from the train which she hoped would help heal whatever rift might have opened by their disappearance.

Owen Belcher came to Grand Central Station to see them off. George Willoughby had combed locks and a smile that stretched from West Virginia to Alabama. For the first time in twenty two years, he wore his Confederate Cavalry officer's grey uniform, the hat with one brim pinned up, the frock coat with its high collar and dazzling twin rows of brass buttons down his proud chest and over the modest paunch he had been tolerating of late. The one blemish in his coat was there by choice – a hole on his chest from a damned Yankee's bullet. At Selma, in a fierce and desperate attempt to hold the city, seven days before Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, the tumbling bullet pierced his left lung below his heart, splintered two ribs in passing and making a shambles of the back of both his coat and body. Though long since he had the ragged back of his coat mended, he never did the same for the entry hole at front. He preferred instead to have it buttonholed to stop fraying, and to let all takers test it with their finger-tips, and find, to their surprise, the matching pit in his chest. This was how, in fact, he met his beautiful Celia, at a ball with waving fields of gold braid and flush with the sound of fiddles and

crinoline, where she was the only young woman of her four friends who was bold enough to probe the entry. Within two years of their prompt and splendid marriage, she had died in childbirth along with their infant son. This was the other wound which had long ago given the appearance of healing, yet which never did and whose scar was hidden behind his gentle smile.

For Owen's comfort, just before he boarded, Willoughby flipped open a holster to reveal one of his twin revolvers: a sparkling .36 caliber Griswold and Gunnisons with a black cylinder and barrel, brass frame, and custom-carved, ivory-inlaid, black-walnut handle. He winked at Owen, snapped the holster shut like the crack of a heel, buttoned his coat, and followed Viola on board. Owen, having been just old enough to feel and remember the crippling devastation of the Civil War, found himself distinctly ambivalent about the pistols.

Owen watched the train roll out, heading west, its smoke butting against the high ceiling of the station, feeling as any father would when his only daughter plants her foot and launches herself into the highest dive she has ever attempted: excited, tight, immensely proud, and, above all, terrified. He worked hard to keep his smile.

On board, Willoughby, after having inspected their connecting cabins, settled in, anticipating his first-ever experience of first class – courtesy of Owen – while Vee held her head and shoulders out the window. The power of the engine throbbed in her chest, as her father's form slowly shrank to a dot.

Once the engine had worked the train up to speed, the steady music of the tracks took over, and Vee, now wedged against the window, looked up to a sky strikingly blue and suddenly astonishingly wide.



*Mrs. Adella Belcher,  
Mill House, Hoaglands Lane,  
Old Brookville,  
Nassau County, New York, USA.  
May 19, 1897.*

*My Dearest Mother,*

*We are on the New York Central en route to Cleveland.*

*I had no desire to hurt you or leave you and Father in a manner which might make you to think I was ungrateful for all you have done for me. I cannot count the number of times you have come to my aid. You have always been a sweet mother.*

*It is true that I left only a note behind where I should have given you a proper goodbye. I have no excuse but cowardice. I admit that I could not risk changing my mind had I seen your face. I am racked with guilt thinking of how you must have felt. Please, please, forgive me.*

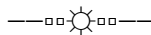
*Trust us – Willoughby and me – to keep each other safe. He would give his life to prevent any harm to me. You must know that as well as I do.*

*Until we see each other, I remain*

*Your ever loving and grateful daughter,*

*Vivian*

This letter was never sent. It remained among Vivian's personal writings.



*Mrs. Adella Belcher,  
Mill House, Hoaglands Lane,  
Old Brookville,  
Nassau County, New York, USA.  
May 21, 1897*

*Mother,*

*We are now somewhere west of Chicago, on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy.*

*It was unfortunate we did not see each other before we left. I was anxious to avoid your cajoling and appeals for pity.*

*I watch the countryside slip by and say to myself, I am free. I am free to enjoy the ragged children standing at the railway crossing without having to endure your commentary: how filthy they are, how poorly loved they must be, how brutish it is to let them wander about so poorly clothed! I'm free to watch the receding sky-line of Chicago without having to listen, once more, to the story of how the Governor of Illinois stayed at our house for two days that summer with his nephew whom you thought so handsome and such a prize (but who was nevertheless – privately – an insufferable bigot), and how you endured the Governor's endless and unbearable coughing and snuffling, all on my account. I'm free to pick at that little gap between my front teeth without a lecture. I'm free of you, dear Mother, and never has the countryside looked so damned green!*

*Your emancipated, erstwhile daughter,*

*Viola Baker*

The preceding letter also was never sent.



The following letter, however, was mailed from Seattle on May 27, 1897:

*Mr. and Mrs. Owen Belcher,  
Mill House, Hoaglands Lane,  
Old Brookville,  
Nassau County, New York, USA.  
May 23, 1897*

*Dear Mother and Father,*

*Mother, I apologise for not seeing you before we left. My only excuse is that I was fearful I might have hurt you further had we had the inevitable confrontation. In the note I left you, I tried to express my gratitude for all you and Father have done for me over the years. Let me say thank you again. Please don't blame yourself. You have only done what you felt best for me. We simply disagree about what is best. I have chosen to risk my future – I will not regret my choice whatever ensues.*

*May 24, 1897*

*Willoughby and I are both well and in high spirits. We boarded the Great Northern Flyer at Minneapolis yesterday evening and are now sitting in Devils Lake, North Dakota, while they change engines (which the brochure says they have to do fourteen times between St. Paul and Seattle). You'll be relieved to know, Mother, the next stop after Devils Lake is Church, North Dakota, where I plan to exorcise myself of any foul influence the Devil may have had while at his lake. (Laugh. That was a joke.)*

*The journey has been eventful but mostly trouble-free. I had no idea that we lived in such a big country! Few but those with the courage to travel West get a sense of that, I am sure. The Northern Plains are so flat, so expansive. And there are so few trees! While the engines were switched I stepped off for a minute to drink in the view. I swear I have*



*never seen a sky so big! Our next adventure is the Yellowstone River and then on to the mountains. I ache with excitement.*

*While I was standing there, a family disembarked from one of the Immigrant Cars. They looked distinctly Eastern European, dressed in heavy, drab clothing and dusty, life-worn boots. The woman wore a bright kerchief – the only sign of color among them – tied tightly around her head, from which one thick braid hung. You might think they would be in high spirits, like us, heading off for a new adventure, but they were all, even the four young children, sullen, and wary. As I walked toward them they all turned away, busying themselves with their make-shift baggage held together by ropes. The father gave throaty, firm commands in a language I did not recognise. As I got close, he turned toward me, and I saw his profound anxiety – they were, after all, stepping off into the unknown, and unlike us, there could be no going back. I called out, “Good luck!”, and they all turned toward me, for a moment, not understanding. The youngest did return my smile and wave. He must have been all of four years old. When the train pulled away I caught my last sight of them, a dun clump getting smaller and appearing more and more lost in the landscape, like Father when we pulled away from Grand Central. In the end, they disappeared into the horizon, that line between pure, clear blue and the endless plain.*

*We have our own First Class berths next to one another, each with his own lavatory, in one of the Palace Sleepers. It is lush with brass and wood to the point I feel we have made the wrong choice. Willoughby is quite inured against the trials of rugged living, of course, and needs no introduction to it. I think, perhaps, that is just why he chose to book First Class tickets, knowing it would be a long time before we could smother ourselves in comfort again. But I feel I need some hardening to prepare me for*

*the life Garrett describes. So, after we arrive in Seattle, I will insist that we book passage among the rugged, rather than the rich and tender – it will be steerage for us.*

*We take our meals in the Dining Car surrounded by mahogany, linen, and soft oil lamps. In the evening they fire up the stove in the corner. We are fed by a staff of nine for every twenty four of us, and on fine gold-trimmed china, with elegant silverware on which is engraved an ornate NPR. I slipped one of their beautiful silver spoons into my bag as a souvenir.*

*And the food! My goodness, how can food taste so delicious? I cannot determine whether it is just that they keep their fish fresh on ice, that they serve meals fit only for royalty, or that their meals taste ever so much better for being savoured by a free palate. I have concluded the latter. Freedom and excitement are elixirs.*

*It was perhaps just that excitement which led to my first “incident”. Last evening, after dinner, I decided I wanted to go to the Buffet Smoker Car to toast our trip and have my life’s second cigar. Willoughby warned me of something I had not noticed: that the Smoker Cars are reserved for men – though for the life of me I don’t know why I was surprised. He tried to reason with me, but under the circumstances I felt that the Railroad was unlikely to have posted guards in the car to enforce the rule, and that the men there would surely have the courage to over-ride it.*

*Well, I was wrong. The men, dressed elegantly in their vests and smoking jackets, to the very last one, stopped their conversations and turned on me when we walked in. “We are sorry, miss.” “Would set a bad precedent.” “Just not done!”*

*After listening to many such excuses, and when it became clear they were not willing to bend, I lost my temper. “I am a well-mannered, well-educated woman who is*

*going to the Klondike to make her fortune. As insulated as you are in your own lives, you will likely have never heard of the Klondike, and will be totally unaware that within a few months the world will be rushing for its gold. You, I predict, will sit and stalwartly guard your little worlds as they are, with their ridiculous rules and prejudices, all the while pronouncing the gold rush as madness, a figment of the press's overactive zeal, and an exercise in futility in which only fools would participate. While you are so preoccupied, I will be getting rich. Very rich, I expect. So rich in fact that I will return to this very car one day, buy it, the railroad on which it runs, and all of you in the process. I will then kick you all out on your ar\_es! Whereupon, no doubt, you will skulk off to form a little boys' club somewhere else – with a hidden entrance this time, and a secret handshake – and hire several burley thugs to guard against invasions of undesirable and unruly creatures such as me!”*

*As I turned and walked out, I heard a voice with a distinct English accent call out, “Bravo, young lady! Well done!” which he supported by clapping. Then I heard Willoughby say, though he was coughing hard from laughter and nearly doubled over, “Just so you know, gentlemen, that was Miss Viola Baker, and I would secure your defences as she will very likely do exactly as she has promised!” And he followed me out.*

*Now, it's true, dear Parents, I did not deliver an oration quite so fluid, colorful, or organised – I am not accustomed to such acts as you know – but as Willoughby will swear it was nearly that good. It included only a few missteps and a few silences while I scrambled for direction. And, Mother, you will be relieved to know I said ‘bottoms’ rather than ‘ar\_es’, though it felt like the latter when it came out.*

*May 25, 1897*

*It is mid-morning. Earlier we left Havre, Montana, heading for Blackfeet Indians' territory and Glacier National Park. Rumor is that we need 'helpers', second, more powerful engines, to get over the upcoming mountain passes. Just the idea is exciting.*

*Last night at dinner we were joined by the gentleman with the one dissenting voice from the Buffet Smoker Car. He approached our table, smiling, holding out one of his calling cards. I was immediately suspicious of him as there have been prominently posted warnings throughout the train alerting us to the presence of "Card Sharks" and "Con Men". (One wonders why they have been accorded the respect of capitalized, proper nouns, but such is the case – I suppose even "Murderers" and "Thieves" have attained that status.) Given that the stranger was also very well groomed and dressed, I leapt to conclusions and did not even let him open his mouth, poor fellow, before I rebuked him for thinking we would ever entertain the thought of risking our savings gambling with a rogue like him. Rather than taking offence, he just laughed. He commented on my strength of spirit, and said that he had come merely to ask if he might offer his congratulations to the infamous Miss Viola Baker for "stuffing the stuffy" of the Buffet Smoker Car. As soon as he spoke, I recognised him as the man who had applauded my dressing down of the dressed-up in the Smoker. I was embarrassed to the point of mortification. Willoughby, in his style, doubled over with laughter. I begged the gentleman to allow me to make it up to him and asked him to join us for dinner.*

*He is Maximilian Acton-Jones, formerly of Great Britain, but now living in Dawson, Yukon Territory. The luck of it! He is a graduate of London University and has worked for many years as a geologist and miner in Barkerville, Fortymile, and the*

*Klondyke. Beside being well turned out, he is well spoken, and well mannered. And, I must add, quite handsome, tall, slender, with a small moustache and dancing brown eyes. Early forties, I would guess, and still in fine shape, I couldn't help but notice by the cut of his dinner jacket and white vest. He insists on being called Max.*

*It seems he has a lucrative claim on Eldorado Creek, one of the richest creeks in the Klondike. As you can imagine, with experience like that sitting across the table, the conversation seldom veered from gold and the mining of it. I took copious notes, while he and Willoughby talked about the special aspects about mining in the Far North, dealing with the permafrost, the long winter months, the mining laws in effect, the inevitable looming of the Canadian authorities, and so forth.*

*He explained that there are "mining seasons" in the Klondike, and that you are required to work your claim more or less continuously during the summer season. During the "close season" the miners are free to leave without risking the right to their claims. Many work throughout the winter, as Garrett seems to be doing, but Max – I guess because he is assured of a sizeable return on his claim – chose to escape the tough winter months, leaving his manager to sink shafts and drift. He plans to do his "clean-up" once the waters start running again. ("Clean-up" is where one sluices the gold-bearing dirt in order to separate the gold itself.) I'll stop describing mining affairs now as I suspect for you it is both mysterious and boring.*

*I was quite amused to watch the match between Max and Willoughby, as their goals seemed quite divergent. Willoughby, of course, would not stop asking questions of a technical nature and always about gold. As you know, his eye is on acquiring ground. Max, on the other hand, having had his curiosity peaked by my use of Willoughby's*

*expression “mine the miners”, tirelessly tried to steer the conversation back to my plans. For every question Max had for me, my rapacious Willoughby would suffer no longer than a thirty second response before he leapt at Max with three rapid, gold-related questions of his own. I enjoyed every minute of it. Watching Willoughby’s impatience alone kept me amused for the better part of the two-hour exchange.*

*I’ve just taken a moment to look out the window. The magic of this place! If I were wise, I would do nothing but look out. We are passing through Chester, Montana. Flat and featureless as the ocean and dusty. You would think there would be nothing to see but the hovering layer of dust and, of course, the sky. Yet there I sat, in the Day Coach, the Rosewood writing box perched on my knees for a desk (not the one with ornate brass inlay – sorry Mother – but the simpler one – thank you again, Father), staring out to the North, wondering how Garrett is faring, when Max slipped into the seat beside me. He drew my attention to a set of hills, far in the distance, barely visible, seemingly floating above the horizon and looking like an ancient, faded mountainous world, lost to all but the Blackfoot Indians since the dawn of time. Well, there I exaggerate since the Blackfoot Indians, so Max tells me, are thought to have moved west just ahead of the white man, using the newly acquired horses the whites brought with them to conquer the plains. But “the dawn of time” is so much more appealing a phrase than “just ahead of the white man,” do you not think? They are the Sweet Grass Hills, he said, and they are fifty miles away! The center one is Gold Butte. Gold follows us everywhere, he said, and laughed.*

*After a few minutes of chit-chat, he turned slowly thoughtful and steered the subject to my plans for the factory. He said he was quite impressed with my foresight and degree of preparation and agreed that custom screens for the many dark, dank cabins would be*

*very popular. And he said, once I assembled a skilled team of wood-workers, I could easily branch out into other amenities which the miners crave – well-made tables and chairs, for example, especially rockers, given the hours they spend waiting for the weather, or recovering from back-breaking mucking out of waste and paydirt. Then he said that he wished me to forgive him for being so forward, but he wondered how well I was doing for capital and whether I wished to have an additional, silent investor. I told him that I was quite secure in that department and thanked him, but he persisted for some time, albeit gently and with a charming sense of humor, before finally giving up.*

*I will pick this up later as I hear we are approaching Blackfoot where, I understand, we will change engines again and take on one of the massive 12 wheelers to help us over the Marias Pass. I am anxious to see one of these big fellows and am also anxious about the Blackfoot territory. We are in the middle of their Reservation. I am secretly hoping – and privately terrified – that we might see some of these wonderful, wild creatures close up. When I mentioned this concern in passing, Max chortled, saying that I had little to worry about given that the United States army tamed “the louts” years ago. Despite his assurances, just the thought of an encounter is enticing. I fully expect to see a party of proud warriors on horseback, replete in skins and feathers and war paint, trotting toward the sunset and a certain violent melee with an enemy tribe. Or perhaps we will wind our way along a hilltop somewhere so that we can look down into a river valley where a scattering of tepees marks the summer camp, where the women spread buffalo skins and the children hoot and holler and play war in the creek and among the rocks.*

*It is now late evening. We have just completed the most spectacular traverse of the Rocky Mountains and are approaching Kalispell, Montana. I swear I barely breathed all*

*throughout dinner as one massive rock face, one towering peak after another slid by. Easterners are not used to such magnitude; we should be issued special medical kits to cope. At the very least, we should be given advice as to how to deal with necks wrenched and sore from looking up. Each time we stopped to take on water – and it was many, those locomotives being thirsty beasts! – I could not resist stepping off for a minute or two so that I could expose myself to the mountains and their overwhelming presence.*

*They rise, these rocky beasts, above ragged carpets of evergreens still dusted with overnight snows, through the thickly bedded beiges and greys of finely carved and gnarly cliffs, to aspiring, triangular peaks aproned in white. From their very tops insubstantial clouds blow like riotous hair raked to the side by thin winds of altitude. Below other clouds, their warmer cousins, drift by, lazily mottling the slopes, stroking them as your hand might a mink, savoring them gently and tenderly. And, every mile or so, thin ribbons of ice water slip and spray in curved, swirling veils and tumble dizzily from the heights, arguing with huge slabs of rock on their way, spitting and flying off into the air in fits and rages before gathering again in filaments, and finally into streams, grumbling and gulping over valley boulders, inviting you, even daring you to drink – and punishing you with their cold when you do.*

*And above all this, immune to the fuss of cloud and crag, sits a languid sky of an impossibly jewelled blue, being so rich and deep and endless.*

*I have never been so belittled in my life. I think once in his life at least each must subject himself to this just to know what humility is. Perhaps then we might get along, knowing how little we matter up against these grand, ancient, and eternal guardians.*



*Every time we stopped, Willoughby had to come out and drag me back onto the train. Bless him. I could not have chosen a better companion. He is so patient with my excesses. Indeed, he almost seems to be amused by them to the point of pride.*

*By contrast, heartbreaking was the passage through Blackfoot territory. Max stayed with us throughout, explaining what he knew of their history. (He has crossed the continent several times.) He told us of the wave after wave of diseases – small pox and measles – that swept through the territory as recently as thirty years ago, decimating the tribes, and of how their staple buffalo have been hunted by us whites to the point of disappearance, throwing the Blackfoot into the chaos of sudden change and forcing them, under the government's guidance, to try to become farmers – a livelihood totally foreign to them. He said that when their small herds and crops failed they were reduced to begging for food from government agencies. For my part, as we passed through Browning, all I saw were Indians dressed in white man's clothes. One wore a battered and dusty bowler hat so anomalous as to render him almost comic – I found it painful and tragic.*

*Two were fighting in the dust of the street, apparently over just such a hat. Max said they were drunk on our whiskey and that their weakness for it may forever prevent them from becoming civilized. I admit to having become testy and saying that the white man's weakness for profits might provide the white man with an equally formidable barrier. "Profits such as those you seek in your venture up north, Miss Baker?" I sat silent after that for a bit. He apologised for upsetting me and let us be.*

*As we pulled out of the settlement, I saw another, older Indian bent over in a small field, hoeing, his feet covered in dust from the barren ground he was trying to work, near*

*a ramshackle hut that had no doubt replaced his ancestral tepee. My romanticism choked and died in under an hour. Nature may be brutal, but we humans ought to know better.*

*May 26, 1897*

*Today I awoke in better spirits. I realize I can change only that which I touch. I will keep my romanticism, but anchor it in truth when I can. As I went to sleep I thought about Max's comment and decided that it's not profit itself which is the curse. As always it is the hand – and the intention – of the agent which governs the character of the act.*

*All day we have been immersed in contrasts: mountains and plateaux, sharp and round, dry and wet, tumbleweed and redwood; such a variety as to put to shame my simple imagination. It is evening now and we are fast approaching Seattle. Mt. Baker, my mountain, rises to the north.*

*Max has given us advice regarding shipping north to St. Michael, at the mouth of the Yukon River. We will take him up on it and seek to book onto the same ship as he.*

*I will send this from Seattle, as next mail drop following that will be weeks away. Wish us luck.*

*Until we see each other, I remain*

*Your ever loving and grateful daughter,*

*Vivian*

*P.S. I now call myself Viola Baker. This way whatever mistakes I make will not reflect badly on you, and whatever advantages I earn will be my own. Willoughby has started calling me Badger Baker. I do hope it doesn't stick.*

## Chapter 9 Recruits

The following letter, from Vivian Belcher to her parents, was mailed on July 17, 1897 by the Captain of the S. S. Portland on his return to Seattle, Washington:

*Mr. and Mrs. Owen Belcher,  
Mill House, Hoaglands Lane,  
Old Brookville,  
Nassau County, New York, USA.  
June 7, 1897*

*Dear Mother and Father,*

*I am awash with salt. I taste it whenever I lick my lips – indeed I have to stop myself from repeatedly doing so.*

*We are aboard the S. S. Portland as it chops its way to St Michael, a small outpost in Alaska near the mouth of the Yukon River. We left Seattle at dawn this morning to clear before nightfall the Strait of Juan de Fuca which runs between the Olympic Mountains of the new Washington State and southern Vancouver Islands. It is now evening, we are abreast Cape Flattery, and heading out to the open ocean.*

*Once again I am spellbound by the landscape. Every day I have been overwhelmed by sheer magnificence. One day, it is the immensity of the sky, another the massiveness of the Rockies, another the bone-dryness and cactus and black volcanic rocks of the plateau. Now it is the dripping mist and enchantment of the inlets of Puget Sound with its Killer Whales – especially the Killer Whales – as they arc and spray. Along the shore, strangely twisted, dusty rose trunks of the Arbutus trees, their parchment-like bark peeling back, clutch resolutely to the shoreline rocks. Time and again I return to the bow*

*and, looking through the string of droplets on my hair, wonder if the distant Olympic Mountains reach heaven when they plunge into the clouds.*

*This morning, as we approached what will be Fort Flagler – a post under construction near Port Townsend on Puget Sound – I spotted a Bald Eagle. She was watching us from her perch on the forked branch of a dead cedar. Max tells me the females are larger than the males and this one was very large. I got the feeling from her unblinking eye I did not matter to her as much as she to me. A minute later I heard her high-pitched cry as if calling “good luck” though it soon got lost in the heart-thump of the steam engine and the raucous calls of the ever circling flock of gulls. What a riot among them when the cook’s helper threw over the breakfast scraps!*

*Out of my port hole I can see the edges of the western sky turning pink. I’m going on deck to witness my first ocean sunset from beginning to end.*

#### *Later*

*The sunset was as orange as the fruit, red as blood, purple as a ripe plum, and filled with both softness and surprise as it drifted from one to the other. I lingered on deck, rocking gently under the stars, yelping over falling stars streaking across the sky.*

#### *Midnight*

*I could not resist waiting for the moon. Last quarter. It rose at midnight over the backbone of Vancouver Island. My experiences are far beyond my ability to capture them. As I looked toward the Northwest I dreaded the mass of black ocean that seemed to blot out the stars. We puff blithely toward it. Eleven days to St. Michael.*

*Day Five (June 12)*

*My body has rebelled. Once we left the Juan de Fuca, the swells increased to the point where everyone in our party but Max was sick as a dog. (Do dogs get seasick?)*

*By day three, the storm subsided, and we started to get our “sea legs”. I no longer felt like food was a curse. I have recovered strength and the world looks bright again.*

*Our time in Seattle was fruitful. Max was a god-send. He recommended that we make ourselves self-sufficient over the winter as, once the news of the strike hits, thousands will flock to north unprepared. He expects that food and supplies will become short and quickly. His patient advice has been indispensable. We did very good business at Cooper & Levy Outfitters, and at Filson’s, and Max made sure we got decent prices. Willoughby spent under \$500.00 for the two of us – mostly on dried goods and tools as we had already equipped ourselves well with clothing – and similar amounts for our new employees. (Employees? you ask. Be patient. I will explain.) I looked at the boxes of canned fruit (prunes, peaches, pears), canned vegetables (corn, peas, parsnips, beans), bags of flour and rice and sides of smoked bacon and wondered how long it would take to tire of such a diet.*

*Day Six (June 13)*

*While in Seattle the course of our conversations led to the question of what those who headed North in the rush would do for accommodation and support while they got themselves settled, and how they would entertain themselves during the long winter. Max said that from his experience and study, each gold rush follows the same course. The miners on or near the strike at the time end up with the best ground. The fast-movers who*

*hear of the strike before the world at large often get decent ground or establish themselves in business supplying the miners (with whiskey and food, for example) at a time when land prices and space are not at a premium. These ones end up doing quite well (and, as Willoughby had explained, often better than the miners themselves, being more level-headed and less infected with Gold Fever). And then there are the hordes of ill-equipped and desperate dreamers whose rather sad role is to deposit their life-time savings into the pockets of Outfitters on the route or purveyors of comfort at the site.*

*At this point I asked Max who builds hotels and restaurants and bars in places like Dawson, and he said, people like you, people with foresight and cash to invest. He pointed out that one could charge over \$5.00 or \$6.00 a night for a single room in Dawson when the crowds arrive, while, as we all know, one can one pay \$1.00 or less down south. Meals are similarly five times or more as expensive. And the margins of profit through the sale of whiskey are higher still.*

*Willoughby and I put our heads together and laid out a plan. We calculated rough costs of building materials – keeping in mind that we would have our own milling equipment for the windows and doors – as well as of labor and such. With a few purchases of more dried goods and alcohol (I am sorry, Mother, you will just have to swallow that one, so to speak), that we could make a tidy profit from that business, too. With Max's help, over the next several days our plans solidified quickly.*

*Max made three recommendations which we believe will benefit us greatly.*

*The first was to hire both a manager and chef before we left, solid people with experience but young enough to take the hardship, and adventurous enough to take the gamble. We did this by approaching the manager of the New England Hotel where we*

*are staying, a fellow in his thirties called Roderick Palagio. He has a face just like his name: first you see the square jaw and outline of an Englishman, and then you are somewhat overcome by the dark swirls of Italian hair. It did not take much to convince him to drop everything and come with us. He does not have a family to be concerned about, and that might not have impeded him anyway, the way his eyes widened as he listened to Max's stories about \$1,000 pans. Roderick went immediately to the hotel chef, a Byron Inger, and got him "on board." Needless to say we will not be popular with the owners of the New England Hotel, but such is life. We'll stay at the State Hotel when we come back through.*

*Roderick and Byron spent all their time going over their plans, hounding poor Max in the process, so he told me. What is the temperature like in the dead of winter? Brutal. What kind of sanitation facilities will the town site have? None. Plumbing? None. The water supply? The river. The river?! Yes, the river. In winter? A walk onto the ice. Good Lord! The Good Lord only supplied the river, and the town has not yet got to it. Then what about sanitation? Another walk. Is it that primitive? More so. The coal, who delivers the coal? The Good Lord never got around to that either. There's no coal? Plenty of wood, however. Who delivers the wood? You do. My heaven! Heaven does not come to mind when I think of Dawson, Max said.*

*Before we set sail, Willoughby and I took them aside and said, outright, "If you want to change your minds, now is the time." Neither did. They signed contracts.*

*Then Willoughby took them on his kind of shopping spree. Nails, hinges, brackets, plumbing fixtures (they are going to set up some sort of water tower), stoves, kitchen equipment, and the like. He also bought two steam engines for the mill, and an extra*

*barrel of nails. He says, "Wait to see how fast they run out of nails up there. Worth their weight in gold, they will be."*

*I went for bedspreads, blankets, sheets, chairs, place settings (rugged but attractive), wall lamps, furniture for a small common seating area in front of a huge fireplace (I hope), and one beautiful candle and kerosene chandelier for the foyer. I love the plans, but Max says we are giving up too much space for the foyer and seating area.*

*"You want a stand-up bar down the sides of a big room, with a few chairs and tables. Bring them in, top them up, turn them out. Call it The Water Tower Bar. In no time they'll be calling it the Watered-down, and loving it."*

*We'll have the long bar – the profit is in the whiskey, after all – but we can fit in a little civilization, too. Something has to remind them of home. It'll be just two stories to start. Or maybe three. We'll see how it goes.*

*I'll get to the second and third of Max's recommendations tomorrow. Right now I'm going to stretch my legs. Willoughby talked me out of going steerage, and I'm glad of it. Even so, these cabins are so cramped I try to spend as much time on deck as I can. It's rather tedious to walk, with the cargo tied down everywhere, but it's better than nothing.*

#### *Day Seven (June 14)*

*Max's second recommendation was to use the bar to our advantage in a way which we may never have thought of. He says it does well to invest broadly, taking shares in many different claims, often in exchange for necessary supplies. But, he warned, it is easy to be "taken" in the process. The best way to make investments is to have reliable and fresh information about what's happening on the creeks, so he suggested we have some-*



*one whose only job it is to know the creeks and its people, and to “work the bar”, using a little free whiskey now and then to grease the wagging tongues.*

*So we found, through Roderick, a young, pleasant-looking, out-of-work school teacher who has a good head, a natural ease with people. Luckily she has shape and charms to spare. Norma Jean McCormick. At first she was cautious, suspicious that we were asking her to trade favors. We quickly assured her this was the farthest thing from our minds. In fact, we said, we wanted her to remain aloof from all serious love relationships while in our employ. All the better to keep miners interested. We added that she would be protected – a man would be charged with keeping an eye out for her. Who is her protector, she wanted to know. She smiled when I turned to Roderick.*

*Our offer suited her perfectly. She needed only to make a casual allusion for me to understand that she recently had her heart broken. She wants a change of setting and of company. He must have been a scoundrel and a fool, I thought, as she is such a delightful creature.*

*Norma Jean is particularly taken with the idea that I will award her five percent of everything I earn from deals she recommends. She has already cornered Max several times and had him draw rough maps of the creeks, complete with every bit of relevant geography. She also likes that she gets a new wardrobe – “working clothes” you might say. The words that make me shudder – mutton sleeves, corsets – seem the very ones which excite her. She swore that along First and Second Avenue in Seattle she would find all that she needed “As good as Sears.” She signed her contract, swept our cash from the table with a smile, and headed for the shops.*

*Max made overtures about wanting to invest in our hotel, but I turned him down again. I said my decision was solely a matter of my being able to set my own course, given that I had never before had such an opportunity. He seemed to understand.*

*His third recommendation was that we approach the manager of the North American Trade and Transportation Company in Seattle, as he had a letter of introduction given to him by his friend, the unruly and unpredictable John J. Healy himself – as Max described him – co-founder of the N.A.T.T. Company. Max believed that the manager would be well aware of the impending rush. Max thought that, for a modest deposit covering minor labor costs, and given Max's connection to Healy, the manager could be easily convinced to take a list of supplies that he was planning to send to Dawson anyway, and secure them under my name, with payment in full to be exacted on arrival. As the supplies so bundled and palletted would be several weeks to a month behind us in reaching Dawson, I would be able to find funds to make payment at that time. And should I fail to do so, the Company would be out nothing as it could sell the supplies through normal channels. It worked like a charm. The manager saw that he was taking no risk, and was establishing connection with a potential hotel owner and valuable customer. As a result, he even waived the minor labor costs I offered.*

*So on a sullen morning, our little band, Willoughby, Roderick, Byron, Norma Jean, and I, attended by our ever-helpful Max, watched our crates and boxes swing in nets, sometimes drunkenly, from dock to down into the hold of the S. S. Portland.*

*She's a fine looking, wooden hulled, 191-foot, screw-propelled twin-masted steamer with a two cylinder engine, launched in Bath, Maine, in 1885. (That was for your sake, Father, thinking you might just have seen her off Cape Cod on one of your junkets.)*

*Then Max made yet another suggestion which we all bit into right away. (I am beginning to like him very much.) Everyone up there is called Slow City Sam, Nevada Pete, or Bones Riley. If our Norma Jean was going to have credibility, she is going to have to have a moniker of her own. Something sassy and suggestive. I suggested Sonoma Norma, but they said that any miner saying it might sound drunker than he was and shut up. Gentle Jeanie. Too soft. Klondike Norma. No ring to it. "Midnight" Fanny McCormick. Now there's a ring for you!*

*Hold on, Willoughby said. Turn around and let's see. Willoughby, stop being coarse! But, look, it suits her. I have to admit, it does. And it draws attention away from her intelligence, which is what we want, isn't it? Yes, we do. Disarm the poor sods. What do you think, Norma?*

*She got me to hold up a tin of biscuits and looked at herself in the shiny underside. She couldn't suppress her giggle. So, "Midnight" Fanny it is.*

*My hand is sore from writing. I have an appointment with Max on deck. We are on target to reach the Aleutian Island chain tomorrow. I've heard others call out that they see them. I'm going to see for myself.*

#### *Day Ten (June 17)*

*We are nearing the Alaskan Coast. The air has become decidedly colder. The winds are brisk, but we are making good headway. (I am becoming quite the 'salt'.)*

*Max is a charming fellow. His experience in the world is broad compared to most, and certainly compared to mine, but in contrast to what I've heard of Englishmen, he*

*doesn't look down his nose at me because of it. I can tell because, when I occasionally ask a silly question, he takes a gentle and humorous jab at it.*

*"It is true, Miss Baker," he recently said, responding to my question about the Klondike creeks, looking up from the map between us and over his spectacles, "that many are navigable in small craft, but I'm afraid, as you can see from the scale, right there, the creeks are generally narrow, rocky, shallow, and fast flowing. The only small craft navigating them would be of the size you would see children floating into The Round Pond in Hyde Park. However, such a craft might carry a nugget or two, if you lashed them tightly to their decks." We spent a delightful few minutes on that premise – I quizzed him as to the details of just how I might get the nuggets into the hold without damaging the craft, while he designed a small set of ramps to accommodate a proportionately-sized wheelbarrow, each of us laughing at the absurdity.*

*He seems to know I am not too proud to ask questions which might appear foolish. It only matters for me to be right in the end, and to know, given a few tries, I will get there. And he does not take himself so seriously he cannot suffer a dint or two. For all his worldliness he was not aware that a paletot is a variety of coat, while a mantelet is like a short shawl. "You would think I would know," he said, smiling, "as I have brushed shoulders with those who wear both. Once I was even engaged to a woman who seemed to think of little else. She was very active in trying to introduce me to the world of fashion and manners, and became very frustrated with me when I showed no interest." He sparkled as he said it. He is the definition of a gentleman.*

*I can see a great deal will be happening over the next few days, so I think I will just say goodbye for now and prepare this tome for mailing from St. Michael. As I stop to*

*think I realize mailing anything in St. Michael makes no sense. I'll ask the captain to mail it from Seattle on his return.*

*Until we see each other, I remain*

*Your ever loving,*

*Vee*

## Chapter 10 St. Michael

Journal of Francis Garrett McKenzie

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Wednesday, June 9

When I boarded the Portus B. Weare yesterday, headed for St. Michael, there was gold everywhere, in suitcases, boxes, packing cases, piled in every corner fellows could find. I saw a couple hauling a grimy old blanket on board, all roped up – any fool could see it was gold. It's so damned heavy no one could steal it, but he set up his kit on deck right next to it, just in case. Alaska Commercial's Alice is two days ahead of us, and miners are crowded on board her, too. The Weare took some extra time to shore up her decks. At first I thought it was a silly precaution until I saw what they dragged up the gang planks.

Joe Ladue's on board, along with Tom Lippy and Clarence Berry, and dozens more. Stinking rich, every one of them. If I passed them on the street today, dressed as they were, I'd throw them a nickel and a wish for good luck. Patched pants and elbows and sweaty hat stains, all of them. Even Mrs. Berry. Yet each could walk in a bank and buy it if he wanted, if he weren't thrown out first for being a vagrant. Clothes belie the man.

I caught a glimpse of Handlebar and Bonny Buxom, the ones from Circle with the tall story and the ampleness. They were working the crowd. This will be interesting.

Tried to read my book, Cervantes' Don Quixote. Couldn't even finish "the conclusion of the stupendous Battle between the gallant Basque and the valiant Manchegan." First few chapters are well fingered, but the rest of my copy is as untouched

as a nun. I fell asleep in the sun with it on my chest, thankful for the relief the river gives us from insect hordes.

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Thursday, June 10

We are at Fort Yukon and only half way through the ‘flats’. I thought the channel was tangled going South from Circle to Dawson, but it’s far worse here. Islands and bars shift in the river’s slow dance from season to season. So the boats hire on Native pilots to get them through without running aground.

We stopped in the middle of the night last night at Circle. Two AM, but nearly as bright as morning. A ghost town now, except for a couple of die-hards. Molly Larson got off like she said and called out for me to come to her Emporium when I return.

I slept until noon curled up by the bow, underneath the stairs up to the wheelhouse. Few have a berth, it’s so crowded. I crawled up to the bow when I awoke and watched the spring go by: blue spikes of Lupines, dusting of yellow and white Daisies, young, purple Fireweed hiding the charcoal stumps and deadfall among the pickets of dead Black Spruce, skeletons of White Birch, black at the trunk, snowy at the tips. Saw a huge bull moose up to his stomach in a back water, watching us go by, antlers draped with dripping weeds, beard dripping, too. He couldn’t have cared less about us. He shook his head to rid his nose of deer flies and horse flies, throwing water drops in spiral fans, and dove his head under again. All under a slow sky with a pair of Red Tail hawks cruising and carving the air, and clouds making faces at me, turning to dragons, and goats. Someone said magenta about the Fireweed. Someone else said, no, crimson. Another, purple.

Its colour resisted description. I tried to hold on to everything, the images, the feelings, but it all slipped by, swirling, like the river.

Bonny Buxom's sweet-talking one old Canadian fella, Quarter-Lame Sorenson, we call him, because he walks with a cane but only sometimes, we guess because of his mood, or maybe the weather. She took him by the arm into the saloon deck. Like many of us, he's been hammering away at this country forever, first in the Caribou, then Cassiar, then Forty Mile and Circle. He's going out now and will never have to work again.

There was a big card game in the corner and Bonny got Sorenson to sit in with Handlebar, who's a smooth fellow. He slowly pulled the table's chips over to his pile, but not so fast that anyone worried. I swear he was cheating. After a while, I left them to their fate. When I passed by later, the game was still going on with no sign of Sorenson.

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Wednesday, June 16

We are at Pilot Station, nearing the ocean. We got through the flats by 7 AM on the 12<sup>th</sup> (last Saturday), and the boat has been going smoothly since then. It has been a bizarre few days. And sad, too.

By Saturday night Sorenson had re-joined the game and they had been going pretty steadily. Sorenson had a lead in chips, with Handlebar not far behind. Five card stud, with Handlebar dealing when I arrived.

Sorenson took one card, Handlebar three, and everyone else dropped. It was hard to keep my place for the press of folk coming to watch. Sorenson was angry about something and kept staring at Handlebar. The pot was up to \$12,000. At Handlebar's last bet



of \$3,000, Sorenson challenged him to prove he was good for it. So the girl brought the ship's Purser to vouch for him.

I'll be damned if Sorenson hadn't been drawing to an inside straight – and missed. Handlebar's pair of sixes saw him through. It went all silent for a full minute. You'd never catch most of us making bets like that. Crazy. Except I'll wager Handlebar somehow knew he would take Sorenson in the end.

Sorenson stayed away from the game for a couple of days, but was back at it by Tuesday. Eight hours straight again. I was there at the end. Sorenson cursed at Handlebar and said "Everything I got," and he hauled over his last suitcase full of nuggets and dust. I helped because I wanted to tell him to stop, but he shut me up. It was too damned heavy to lift onto the table. Handlebar threw down his full house, Jacks over fives, and Sorenson just stared. Then, with his hands on the edge of the table, he pushed his chair back, and dropped his head between his knees. Then he made a frightful sound. Someone turned over his cards. Full house, too, but only tens over Aces.

Handlebar quickly cashed in his chips and disappeared with the suitcase.

At around midnight someone noticed Sorenson's threadbare waistcoat rolling round and round on the axis of the stern wheel. The Captain pulled up at nearby Pilot Station to take on wood and clean the boilers. We launched a punt to look around the river for him. We could see the Captain in the wheelhouse, dressing down the Purser. The Purser, Handlebar, and Bonny got put off right there. No one could show that Handlebar had cheated, so his winnings went with them, in poor Sorenson's beaten-up suitcase.

Sorenson's death hit me harder than Nevada's. He was like me, but older, and a miner all his life. He knew how to keep his bearings, even in the midnight sun, knew how

to stake and pan, what angle to put on his sluice, and when to change his riffles to rid himself of as much black sand as he could without losing his flour gold. He knew how to shoot and trap, and save his meat from the bears, and how to build a cabin and chink the walls, and keep a fire all night, in the stove, and in the pit, if need be. He knew not to work up a sweat outside, in winter, and what to do if he did. He knew how to keep on working though his back and his spirit might be broken. He knew how to be poor, and fly-bitten, and half-frozen, and damned well alone. Just about the only thing he didn't know was how to be rich.

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Friday, June 18

We reached St. Michael this morning. Already much of Alice's cargo is aboard the Excelsior, out of San Francisco. The Portland is expected two days behind the Alice and I got a ticket for her.

My first look at St Michael. The buildings are all lined up along the water, lonely outposts each, facing the sea, crouching, I expect, in anticipation of the next gale. It's grey, and flat, and windswept, dismal when the fog rolls in, like this morning, and heavy with the stink of rotten fish. Dawson is Paris by comparison, and Dawson ain't no Paris.

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Sunday, June 20

The Portland steamed in at noon yesterday, amid blasts of whistles all round. The unloading went quickly. There's no lolling when gold is about. The captain was barking from the bridge, anxious to get back to Seattle. He took one look at the crowd, and asked his mate to see if the cargo is mostly gold, like on the Excelsior. There's over a ton

waiting for us, Captain, the mate reported, and over sixty miners carrying it, most yet without passage, so the captain more than doubled his prices for the latecomers.

A man bent over a pile of supplies caught my eye. He had long, thick silvery hair, and wore a Rebel hat just like Willoughby's. And then he straightened up. Lord Jesus, it was Willoughby! I yelled at him, and he yelled back. Cracker! he said. No one else calls me that. What the hell are you doing here! I asked. Comin' to see you, you little varmint! But what about the Belchers? Oh, they'll be alright, he said, chuckling. They're big folks now. How could you leave Scout? I asked. I was sure as hell glad I did, he said, when I saw what they do to the poor wretches on the boat. Tied them up, sides touching, right next to the engines. Some bucked and panicked 'till they died on their feet. I would have shot the captain if Viola hadn't talked me out of it. Viola who? I asked.

A vision, I swear, when I saw my Vee. She walked out from behind a stack of crates and stood there, smiling like a miner at clean-up, sending a warm wave tingling down my body. When it reached my toes, it bounced back, making me so damned happy I couldn't contain myself. I started hooting and flapping my arms and stamping the dock like a crazy man, happiness and laughter spilling out from me. Willoughby was bent over, slapping his thigh. When we were done hugging, and I recovered somewhat, I asked, what's this then? What is Willoughby going on about? Vivian Belcher could never make it up here, she said. Viola Baker can. And will.

Then a fellow walked up to Vee. He was rugged, but with new work clothes, all polished and shiny and clean, like his mother sent him. Roderick Palagio, she said, my hotel manager. Hotel? I had to ask. And she told me all about their plans, pointing out

their staff, including Byron Inger, their chef, with his new work clothes, too. Won't take long for this country to scruff you fellows up, I said. I could do with some, Byron said.

And that's Midnight Fanny McCormick, Vee said, referring to a lass, bending over, moving some of their bags. She's going to get miners to tell us about who's recovering what. Midnight Fanny straightened and turned around. Oh, I said, that'll be easy.

That's Max, Vee said. All trim and tweedy. English, no doubt. Maximilian Acton-Jones, miner in Dawson, he said, so I said to myself, Holy shit! I asked him out of politeness if had good ground. A nice piece on Eldorado, he said, then asked if I was alright. I didn't feel like explaining that our fraction is carved from his claim. Haven't seen you on Eldorado, I managed to say. I went out during the off-season, he said, and left my foreman to look after my affairs. "Ahh" I said and turned back to Vee.

Why are you going out? Vee asked, so I explained about the steam engine. Take our smaller engine, she said. Our big one's enough to get us started. We'll order another.

Look at her! I thought. A businesswoman already. But as impressed as I was at that, I could not stop looking at that sweet, sweet mouth, the wildness of her hair, the curve of her back. Feelings and ideas welled up which were never there before Mary, and moved through me, in my blood, an awakening, a kind of hope and expectation that knows now what the secret is. She read something in my look, and a curtain dropped somewhere, and she went to one of her bags, took out my journal, and handed it to me firmly, looking at me in the eye. I kept looking at her but she just skipped right over that, and said, pointing to a steam engine, Alright, take this one, the two-horse power, and we'll use the ten.

There sat the finest looking piece of machinery I'd ever seen, but still I couldn't pay much attention. I looked back at her, and said, give us another hug. But she skipped right

over that, too. When I took a step forward, she put a hand to my chest, and let me come in only for a peck on the cheek. Do you want the two-horse, Garrett? Yea or nay?

I went to the captain to tell him I didn't need my passage to Seattle. Sorry, he said, No refunds. Told him to bugger himself, and I sold my ticket to some fellow waving from the back of the line, who paid me three times the price.

What with hordes from the boats all looking for the same, I barely managed to find a room for us. It's in a shed on stilts, with a wooden cot for Willoughby and enough space on the floor for Roderick, Byron, and me. We didn't get undressed, even to our union suits.

They fed us some fish none of us could identify, beans, and decent bread off the Portus B. Weare. And the strongest whiskey I've had for ages – not cut with as much water as in Dawson. We paid the price for drinking it.

When Vee was not overseeing the loading, she was planning something with Willoughby or she drawing up menus with Byron or floor plans with Roderick, or talking to Max and Fanny about the creeks. And if not that, then damned Max got in the way with his hoity-toity, English charm, with her being all flouncey and sweet toward him.

I fear I've been banished. She doesn't understand that this country rules us, not the other way around. What we are gets dug out of us faster than we can dig for gold.

Mary didn't ask for anything. Nor did I. I found her last August by the dock in Circle, near midnight, crying over the body of her twelve-year-old brother who had just died of smallpox. McQueston said the Han elders send their sick to Circle because we don't get smallpox. They think we have medicine.

The men unloading the steamer, with nothing in mind but their profit and wages, yelled at her to get her “thieving, stinking body” out of the way. She was so grief-stricken she could only look up and stare at them, with the corners of her mouth filling up with tears. One of them kicked her brother’s leg to get it off the path. I couldn’t take watching that. I went over and helped her to a fallen birch by the river. I brought her brother’s little body over and placed it down beside her. When I gave her a drink, she took the water. But when I went to get my cup from her, she wouldn’t let go of my hand. So I sat with her, for nearly half an hour. She finally loosened her grip and looked at my face, and said something in Athabaskan. I could only guess that she was thanking me. I helped her put her brother in their canoe and shoved her off.

At first she drifted down-river with the current, away from her village, north-west, toward the low sun, a silhouette, her back bent forward, her head hanging limp. Then she turned about and paddled upstream, slowly, until she disappeared around a corner. If you feel too much in this country, that in itself will kill you. I try not to feel too much, but had trouble with that. She was so blameless, so young and small in the face of it.

How she found me working our claim three weeks later I do not know. She brought berries and two rabbits, and slid in like we were long lost friends, and looking like a dream. She cooked the rabbits on a spit. It was damned good. She looked at me again and smiled and said “Good man, you” like she had been practising her English, and left.

There was still a shadow about her, in those moments when her mind fell quiet, and her eyes drifted toward the ground under the weight of her brother. Grief is like crossing a cobbled creek. You’re fine and dry as long as you skip along quickly and land on each

cobble just so. But with one slip, your boot gets wet and sole slippery and soon you are stumbling about in the water.

She came again. And once more. Each time with fresh game in hand and looking more and more lovely, each time lighter and lighter on her feet. She was probably 19 or 20 years old, with skin like an angel's and a smile to send weakness to my knees. Ravishing. And hair. Black and lustrous, moving in waves as it drapes her shoulders. Enough to drive a simple man crazy. I tried to tell her not to come because I could see what was looming, but I couldn't bring myself to say it. When she came the fourth time, when Lefty had gone to town for supplies, after we ate, she bent over to fix something by the stove, her deer skin hugging her. She spotted me under her arm, looking at her. She just stood up and turned, having decided what she wanted, I figure. We ended up, as natural and irresistible as could be, with her standing beside my bunk undoing herself and me sitting, looking on shamelessly, watching soft leather drop away. Only heaven could fashion something so beautiful, I was convinced. She pushed me back gently, and started on my shirt. There was no feigned shyness or bravado, no censure or evil or wickedness or sin or any of those things they preach at us. It was simple, and beautiful, and a moment to surpass all moments, surprising beyond my imagination.

But just before it, with her sitting naked on the edge of my bed and me lying back, eyes drawn to lightness of her tiny frame, the upward curve of her breasts, the perk of her nipples, the wonder of how the north wind had not lifted her and blown her away by now, she opened her hand, hot, placing it hot on my chest, like a child pressing into a wad of clay, fingers spread. This is me, she seemed to say. I make my mark on you. My handprint makes this moment eternal.

I pulled her by the shoulders, but she held me off. So I let my arms drop and relax. In no damned rush, though throbbing by then, with her smiling her pixie smile at it. No marry, she said, cocking her head at it, as if it were a child after sweets, all eager and heedless, needing to be taught its manners. As you wish, I said. No marry.

Pleasure unblemished. Pure, and simple. Tight at first, then heaven, suddenly. Before that, not fifty words had passed between us.

My only regret is that Vee found out the way she did. I am convinced Vee's hurt and jealous, but that means she still loves me.

We have two more nights sleeping in this shed, snorting and snoring, with the wind whistling up through the floorboards, bringing the stink of fish with it.

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Tuesday, June 22, 1897

*I've decided to keep a diary<sup>1</sup>. While writing to my parents, my concerns for their feelings and my mother's delicate proprieties censored me. I begin with the day we left St. Michael for the Promised Land.*

*On June 19, while we were unloading our cargo from the Portland, out of nowhere it seemed, appeared my rugged Garrett, his smile raining happiness on all.*

*Back in his beloved Memphremagog county, his wild, tawny mop of hair would get sun-bleached tips, and after months of haying and fence-mending on his father's dairy farm, his smooth back became bronzed. He was rugged then, but never so manly as now.*

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<sup>1</sup> Viola Baker's diary, unlike Garrett's journals or Viola's letters, has been edited to eliminate purposeless repetition with regard to Garrett's journals, while the latter have undergone minor editing to render his style less cryptic and more readable. Where repetition has meaning, it is retained. T. C. Haas.



*My beautiful hazel-eyed predator in his deer-skin coat, with his open vest, cross-thonged over his chest, with his broad brimmed hat curling up and reaching out half the width of his magnificent shoulders. He is, without doubt, the handsomest man on this earth. And although I've seen his face hundreds of times, it is so extraordinary that, like a gem, it draws you to itself in disbelief, convinced nothing could be so perfect. But the real amazement lies in that such a form can host so kind, brave, and sensitive a soul, that this magnificent vessel contains such a radiant spirit. And thankfully so, or I'd worry that my love would be for his shape and surface, and not his substance.*

*One thing I have never seen before, however, is Garrett fully-bearded. It is wild and untamed, and covers much of his splendor. But I've seen his brilliance, so I looked past the beard to the man, concentrating my focus on the seat of his eyes.*

*He caught me at it, too, the wily creature. I could see by the twinkle in his smile that he knew of his power over me, damn him! – that he sent passion suddenly winging through my veins to blushing places.*

*But then I thought of Mary, and the world righted itself. I decided at that moment it would be best to keep my distance until I figured out how she fits into things.*

*Following our landing at St. Michael we spent a furious three days shifting cargo over to the N.A.T.&T. Company's Portus B. Weare, a 175 foot sternwheeler.*

*We left early this morning. Fanny and I are bunking together in confined but reasonable comfort, and the men are sharing a large, spare storeroom off the kitchen. It was the best they could get, but seems to be enough.*

*Max must have connections with N.A.T.&T. because he has the largest of the staterooms all to himself, larger even than the Captain's. It's not actually large – nothing*

*on this ship is – merely the largest. He invited us to join him there after dinner, though Garrett declined. Perhaps he wasn't feeling well. We sat on trunks, the bunk, and the floor. After priming us with a sip of his special Cognac, he passed around another after-dinner treat. Even Fanny lit up. But the room is so small, and his porthole so inadequate, that although he opened the door we couldn't clear the smoke from seven eager sets of lips pulling on Havanas, more or less expertly.*

*We are all chomping at the bit, as Willoughby would say, and he no less than any.*

---

Wednesday, June 23, 1897

*It all came tumbling down today. Garrett caught me at the bow by myself. A worried look came over his face and he started to talk about Max, as if he knew the first thing about him. It struck me as very presumptuous and churlish. So, in a very calm and reasonable way, I informed him that it was none of his business whom I befriended. And then I alluded to Mary. I suggested there could not be two principal women in his life and, if he felt drawn someone else, he should return to her and forget the hints we always made at marriage. Perhaps I went overboard. I had not realized I felt it so deeply.*

*Garrett is now avoiding me. He seems to be sulking.*

*I have known men to sulk. They are masters at it. I am not sure why. Perhaps they have not learned to deal with disappointment quite so well as we have. Or perhaps men are allowed from birth to have expectations far higher than life has equipped them to meet. Or maybe it is simply that sulking was so effective when they were young. Among us women, there is much depression, astonishment, and disbelief, but not much sulking.*

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Thursday, June 24

Left St Michael a couple of days ago. Finally.

Been thinking a lot. Can set the thing with Vee right, in time, as long as that damned Max gets out of the way. Something about him rubs me the wrong way. It's the very thing Vee seems to find attractive about him. He's smooth and polished, like Handlebar, but with class. I look right at his eyes when he talks and I see him thinking. Cogitating. Advantage here, or there? Quick like a squirrel. A little flicker. I can't trust a fellow who has to think about everything. He never seems to stumble. Never makes a wrong move.

Yesterday, I managed to get Vee to myself for a few minutes. Foolishly, I tried to undermine Max. What a stupid idea! She blew her stack worse than a steamer. Are you my guardian now? Now that you are a *worldly* fellow, have you suddenly become an advisor in the affairs of men? How she said 'worldly' shut me right up.

What's wrong, Garrett? Cat got your tongue? I couldn't manage a word. Not a cat; a lioness. I didn't expect Mary to come up. Mary's not... was all I could get out.

Mary's not what you think she is, she barked. Shhhh, Mr. McKenzie! I'll do this myself. Mary is either wanton or your wife. If the former, then the man I hoped to marry one day is himself wanton. If the latter – perhaps a result of some secret, strange, barbaric ritual – you are no longer free to marry. Either way, you are second-hand man.

I said, It's not like... but again I couldn't finish. Leave me alone, Mr. Francis Garrett McKenzie. Go back to your little Indian wife.

It took an hour for my stomach to loosen up. I realised that I just have to be patient and not bring Max up again and not do something foolish in the mean time, like killing him. Maybe this country will do it for me. If I'm lucky.

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Thursday, June 24, 1897

*Garrett continues to avoid me. I read and chatted with Fanny. We are kindred spirits. Having each found ourselves suffocated, we have taken steps to break out.*

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Friday, June 25, 1897

*I saw Garrett briefly about noon, skulking about. Couldn't get a look at his face, so the report must remain inconclusive. Skulking certainly; sulking maybe.*

*Max arranged for just the two of us to be served in the Captain's quarters. It was a pleasant relief from the constant jostling on the boat and the complete lack of privacy. I am not used to spending day and night in the presence of others. The perennial coughing, sneezing, scratching, wheezing, and honking into handkerchiefs are impossible to ignore and difficult to tolerate. Not to mention the expectorations over the side by crew and less cultured passengers. Nor does it take into account the rather shameless re-alignment of baggy pants and undergarments. They catch one by surprise very often, in mid-correction, as one's gaze moves about its natural course. And their foul language! If I am to live in a mining camp I had better get used to it all. But a challenge it will be.*

*With Max, of course, all such behaviors are absent. The perfect gentleman, with the most engaging accent and wit, he has spent many mining seasons in the Cordillera, and as many winters travelling Europe, putting his gold to good use. He has invested in several properties and businesses over there, everything from small hotels on the French Riviera, to a wool mill in northern England.*

*I sat enthralled as he took me on excursions to London, Paris, Vienna, Rome, Venice, and Seville (which he called Sevee-ya, in the most enchanting way). I drank in the*

*romance of these places as readily as the wine Max served – a Montrachet '94, which he described as an off-year and a modest French Burgundy. Every few minutes he would stop for fear of dominating the discussion but I wouldn't let him. I said I wanted to be on a row boat drifting under a lazy sky on the Seine past the ancient Notre Dame Cathedral toward the fabulous, new Eiffel Tower (that bane, so I understand, of many commentators). I wanted to listen to the calls to prayer arching out from the minarets of Istanbul; or watch the proud curve of the Flamenco dancer's back sweeping so close to his partner's long ebony hair as to trouble it in passing; or fall into white, pillowed sleep in the cedared hills of Tuscany, by open shutters and under the spell of a Nightingale, catching whiffs of Jasmine, or Cypress wood smoke from an oven, drifting on the wind.*

*It was, all in all, a heavenly evening. The skittering conversation returned to the Klondike, where I actually did not want to be, given the dreamy alternatives. Max talked about life here. He told me how hard it was to be away from family and loved ones, and to have friends who so often you've only just met, in whose hands you nevertheless find yourself placing your life. He talked of the many who give up in the face of it, either killing themselves or escaping to the outside world whenever they can. He talked about the devastating loneliness, especially during the winter months, when one is imprisoned in one's cabin with the howling jailer of a northern winter breathing ice through every open crevasse, and being deprived of all pleasures that sustain civilized souls.*

*I mustered the courage to ask about Indian women, having Mary in mind, of course. Rather bluntly, he described what exposure to the elements does to their faces with age, how life up here is cruel to beauty, how it bends and bulges their bodies.*

*“But,” he said, “no healthy man can withstand the allure of a young Indian woman blessed with the elements of beauty: symmetry, good skin, good health, poise and proportion. And, furthermore, they generally have an honesty and naturalness about them that beguiles those who find the enforced duplicities of the ‘white man’ hard to bare. They are temptation itself, the Biblical kind. They are what priests fear most.”*

*“A young Indian woman robs a man of resistance, for even if she is not classically beautiful, a miner will soon see her as such. And if she is genuinely beautiful, no divine intervention can save him.”*

*“What if he has a loving woman in the south?” I asked, trying to maintain a ruse.*

*“A few marriages,” he said, “survive by the man hanging photographs of his loved one and doggedly keeping the thought of her in mind. But by doing so, he raises the loved one to such heights that, when they re-unite, it takes a rare woman to match such an ideal.”*

*“And do not forget that this country is cut off from the world. There is no telegraph, even. No matter how many letters she may write, no matter how she sends her reassurances to him, willing him to be true and strong, her love cannot reach into the dimness of his cold, cramped cabin. He knows that she, too, has needs and wants, and that she is surrounded by temptation. It’s the devil’s garden, and he spares no effort in nourishing and protecting its sprouts until they grow and flower, sending their noxious perfumes to weaken and distort the most secure of memories and confidences.”*

*“Now, if you dare, introduce the presence of a young Indian maid. The poor man would have to be inhuman, I say. Many marriages have only survived that trial by maintaining secrecy, by carrying the inevitable transgressions to the grave.”*

*"Each member of the partnership is equally deprived," I protested.*

*He laughed. Then he said, apologetically, "Forgive me. I don't mean to be rude, but I have been asking you to imagine something which is beyond your experience. So let me try another way. I want you to imagine the worst pain you have ever felt."*

*"I have no trouble imagining that," I said, thinking of Owl's Head and the throbbing hell through which my ankle put me.*

*"Good," he said, "Now extend that pain so it is with you day after day for months on end." I must have furrowed my brow at the thought. "Now I want you to introduce to your imagination a young, strong medicine man, one so good-looking as to make you swoon, one whose honeyed voice is even more seductive because every unintelligible word he utters sounds to you like praise of your charms, or promises of undying love." I must have smiled because he said, "Good."*

*"Now look in his hand. Do you see that small leaf he bears? It contains a drug which will not only annihilate your pain, it will transform it to pleasure. The degree to which the pain was excruciating will be the very height to which the pleasure lifts you. And the conditions are few. You must abandon your pretense that thinking of your absent loved one will save you. You must recognize that very delusion as being the chief cause of your pain. You must convince yourself the love for your absent one can be harmlessly replaced, if only temporarily, with the love of the present one – namely, the handsome medicine man. And you must say to yourself that neither you nor the medicine man has any intention of it being other than a passing state, and a necessary one at that."*

*Then he stopped and looked me in the eye. "Now, I am only going to ask you if, under the unbearable pain of his absence, you could convince yourself that the pain's*

*replacement with the immediate pleasure of the warmth of a fine person and a fine body – temporary pleasure only, mind you – would be a harmless thing.”*

*“Never,” I was about to say, but he stopped me. “Consider it overnight before you judge.”*

*I promised him I would, even though I was convinced my answer would remain the same, and said goodnight, but as I walked away, he called after me. “This country weathers the soul like water tortures bedrock.” I slowed to hear the rest. “It seeks out the weakest streaks in a man and erodes them. Up here, men’s strengths and weakness become sharp and visible. And undeniable.”*

*Then after a pause, he said, “Although, as it happens, it is just there, hidden in these worn-away troughs in bedrock, that you find gold.”*

*“In man’s weakness you find his value? What kind of metaphor is that?”*

*“I haven’t the slightest notion,” he said, laughing. “But it sounds so good, I’ll endeavor to find a meaning.”*

---

*Saturday, June 26, 1897*

*I thought of it most of the night. He had some good points. We in the South judge Northerners, but the conditions there are so foreign to our experience. It is easy to say that gambling is an abomination, for example, if you live in a world where there is none. So, I concluded, I will not judge him harshly, but, for me, my answer is still: Never!*

*I ran into Garrett on deck early evening. We almost collided, in fact. I tried to greet him but he mumbled something and passed by. My report remains inconclusive, therefore. He may still be sulking, but I cannot tell.*



---

Sunday, June 27

Despite the heat, there's frost on Vee's door – and no sign of a thaw. I have to resist temptation to sit and lean against it. If I can take the longest of winters, I can take this.

I'm staying out of everyone's way. Willoughby wondered why. Women, I said. Oh, he said, and walked away shaking his head. Give me a wild horse any day, he said, over his shoulder, chuckling... twenty of them!

---

*Sunday, June 27, 1897*

*Didn't see Garrett at all. I have up to now been feeling rather guilty about it and sad for him, but today I stopped. I will say something to him whenever I can, but if he refuses to talk to me, I cannot help it. He has made his bed, as they say, and I, mine.*

---

Monday, June 28

Keep seeing Vee, but she doesn't look about as if she were looking for me. I can wait. Like wintering over – have to work at it, day by day.

---

*Monday, June 28, 1897*

*Dinner with Max and Willoughby. Now that was a treat. It was once again in the Captain's quarters. I think Max must be quite rich, and the Captain desperate.*

*Much of the conversation was about 'the old days', as one would expect. I was fascinated to hear about the other mining camps, and I was quite interested in all the technical mining topics – hydraulic mining, the use of conjoined sluices, the vagaries of nature and the inadequacy of prediction.*

*But it was the tales of folly that gripped me most, tales of suicide, of miners gambling away their fortunes, and at least three losing all to women of loose character. Up here, there are so many tales of failure that losing it all is not enough. Only magnificent failures make it to the Pantheon of the Extraordinarily Pathetic. If I told them about Nevada – whose death affected me deeply – they would have leaned forward to hear my next sentence, expecting the story to rise above the merely tragic, and they would have been disappointed. One must fail in a grand manner. The competition is brutal.*

---

Tuesday, June 29

No sign of a thaw. Maybe she's like the frozen Yukon River: a few rumbles and cracks one day, free running the next. Will keep to myself 'till I hear the rumbles.

---

Tuesday, June 29, 1897

*They tell me we are half-way there. The River valley is flat and featureless to the south, but to the north is arrayed a range of mountains abruptly cut by the river. Max says a huge earth fault must run along here as that alone explains how the mountains seem to stop right along its line.*

---

Wednesday, June 30, 1897

*Sigh... What else can I say?*

*Fanny is working on her grasp of Klondike geography and continues to improve.*

*Max took me off to Europe, Africa, and Asia today, from Portugal, around the Cape of Good Hope on a schooner, through the Seychelles to India, and back to Lisbon*

*through the Suez Cannel. I could listen to him for hours, and I did, in fact. He said his throat was sore by the end.*

---

Thursday, July 1

We Canadians had National celebration today. Three from Nova Scotia, two from Victoria, one from Megantic, and me. Sang God Save the Queen. A curiosity for the American boys. They outnumber us 10 to 1, at least. They looked on, politely, and clapped a bit. I sat with the Megantic fellow after, and talked about Memphremagog, and such. Most beautiful spot in the world, we both think. We got ourselves thinking too much of home. Longing is a strange emotion. Deep in the body. I want my Vee back.

---

Thursday, July 1, 1897

*The Canadians had their National Day celebrations today. I saw Garrett. How can we both be on the same small boat, and not run into one another?*

---

Friday, July 2, 1897

*Ten days out. I was quite excited by the prospect of the voyage when we began, but now it seems to be just an endless thumping, puffing and churning between our daily long stops to load on firewood cut and delivered by frightful looking 'forest-men' who materialize out of the bush to greet us. It is all beginning to be boring. I want to get on with it. Even this magnificent scenery and good company fail to fulfill me.*

---

Saturday, July 3, 1897

*Had a enjoyable exchange with Fanny and Max today. He suggested we test Fanny on her familiarity with the creeks, as she has been studying hard under Max's tutelage, but has yet to face a real situation. I thought it would be a good opportunity for me to absorb something more about the geography of the country, and she agreed enthusiastically. She is irrepressible. We set up a map with only the Yukon, Klondike, and Indian Rivers and asked her to draw, without reference to notes, all the creeks including every important bend and curve, and all the best claims and producers labeled as to ownership. She passed magnificently.*

*Then came the second part. Max sent her out onboard with only a rough description of her target. She was to locate him among the crowd and extract from him, as gently and completely as possible, locations and production numbers from last year's work sufficient to define the value of the miner's property. She then had to bring those numbers back in her head to match them against Max's recollection.*

*She is natural to this. She has airs of being the most approachable, convivial, and harmless of creatures, but she has a mind which does not fall to distractions. Max says she reminds him of an experienced lioness faced with a panicking herd of Zebra, the way she is able to hold her focus on her target. (I had no idea he had been into the heart of Africa, too!) Clearly, from the information Fanny brought back, these miners are all too willing to give her what she wants in the vain hope she would reciprocate.*

*We all learned much, especially me. And she got the gold star.*

*While she was out on task, Max disregarded my diversions – which were entreaties to tell me about Africa – and focused on his target. That was the idea that he*

*might invest in my hotel and our intended screen mill, but I turned him down politely. Once again, the zebra escaped.*

*The report regarding that other male remains the same, the mood unchanged. I bow to the amount of energy he has to muster to sustain it. You would think he would tire. I would have found myself childish ages ago, but what do I know? I am “just a woman”.*

---

Sunday, July 4

The American Independence Day celebrations took my mind off Vee for a while. They sang “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee.” In the middle, Max said, loudly, that they couldn’t even compose a melody of their own, but had to steal one from the British, and started singing “God Save the Queen” over top of them, with a booming voice. One of the American boys – rugged fellow, two teeth missing – started for Max – Max with his tweed and his pipe looks as if he’d back down from a fly. But he tripped the American boy up and sent him flying overboard. I hate the man, but was impressed nevertheless. The captain wasn’t, however, as he had to stop and turn around. He put the stern wheel into reverse, sending shudders through the ship, foaming and kicking water up everywhere, swung the bow around on a dime, with nine cents left over. Vee steered Max into a safe corner of the ship, before anyone else went at him.

Throw him over, I wanted to yell! Right into the buckets, like Sorenson, and let the wheel chew him up. I didn’t though.

The Purser wisely stepped in and got everyone singing “Stars and Stripes Forever”, feeding them the lyrics as they went – only a few knew them off by heart. Then he led them on a march around the saloon deck, with everyone stamping. The captain looked on

nervously, fearing the deck's collapse, no doubt. One fellow had a fire cracker, and blew it up. One loud crack, then just silence for a few seconds while everyone waited for more. The one gun salute! someone called out, and laughter spread from one end of the boat to the other. Then another fellow started up with "Yankee Doodle" and got much of the crowd going. But Willoughby broke out "Dixie" and gathered a competing group around him, singing at the same time. Soon tunes turned to shouting. With too many in each group to stop them, the captain mustered his crew – leaving only the stokers below – and formed them in a line between the two. But when the songs were done, Willoughby yelled, Buy the Yanks a whiskey! So everyone cheered. And then Willoughby added, But make it the cheapest! and everyone laughed, again. Then some Yank yelled, Cheers for the Rebs! And the cheapest it is as they can afford no more! and all broke, laughing, for the bar, such as it is.

---

Sunday, July 4, 1897

*Today is Independence Day. I could not resist reminding Max who won that contest and he took it with grace. "Sometimes," he said, "in running a rambunctious family the father overlooks the actions of the youngest child, as burley as he may be." He had such a self-effacing smile, the arrogance of it was thrown on its head, and I had to laugh.*

*When Willoughby broke into singing Dixie, I was drawn to join him and his fellow Rebels, locked arm around waist and belting it out as loudly as we could. We leapt into the air on "Hurrah, hurrah!" and on each "Look away, look away, look away," we mocked a ship's lookout, bent over, hands shading our eyes.*

*I saw Garrett watching us with the faintest hint of a smile.*

---

Monday, July 5

Should I lament what heaven sent

A face so pure    assure cure impure inure lure cure procure secure

If I was wrong    strong long throng song

Let me admit    emit fit omit permit split submit whit

admit! admit! submit! submit! To hell with it!

I did what I did. I am what I am.

Relax, Garrett! She still loves you.

---

Monday, July 5, 1897

*We are tied up at Fort Yukon, taking on wood. The Captain says we are running slow and apologizes profusely. They are taking an extra few hours to shut the boilers down (it takes them forever to cool!) and to flush them out. He says that may help.*

*Fort Yukon is in the Yukon Flats, and a well-deserved name. We can see mountains only at the greatest distance. Between us and them there is nothing – it seems – but an endless carpet of trees, mostly very spiky and very close together. And the Yukon River. It's worse than some of my feeble-minded classmates of old – it just doesn't know which way to drift. First it goes one way, then another, then a third, and then back again. A thousand little islands at every turn; a thousand bars to navigate; a thousand choices. You should never give a feeble mind an alternative.*

*Speaking of feeble minds... no... that was not generous.*

Later:

*Today was the day! hallelujah! Praise be... etc. etc. A reckoning has happened over the last day, a sorting out of facts and feelings – who knows? He looked at me across the dining room on the Saloon Deck. He did not smile outright, but his gaze was steady and his eyes were clear. I could see a kind of longing in the length of the moment. In the end he just turned his head and walked out. He must be too proud to apologize or too ashamed. “Help me overcome my shame,” I imagine him saying.*

*I will. I now understand that his transgression was not as blameworthy as I originally felt. Max helped me there. I still have some way to go in forgiving him entirely, but at least I think now that it was not for lack of love for me.*

*Are women always slated to be the only adults?*

---

Tuesday, July 6

Sitting behind the wheelhouse, trying to figure the world out, when who should come up but my Vee. Can’t take anymore – was my first thought. Wanted to die on the spot.

Garrett, I’ve been a fool, she said, which melted me away, I swear. I know you hate Max, but this may change your mind. He is the one who convinced me I’ve been wrong about you. He asked me if I would want a man who hides indiscretions from me, or a man who is free of connivance and capable of love.

Then she asked me what I figured no woman would. She asked me to tell her about Mary, so I did. How I found her with her brother. How we seemed to fall together so naturally, without promises or expectations. How couldn’t help but think of Vee some of the time I was with Mary and all of the time I wasn’t. And how badly I felt about leaving



Mary the way I did, with just a letter that she would have to ask someone else to read to her. How badly I still feel about that, how she did not deserve that kind of desertion.

Her eyes watered. You are indeed a good man. Do you love me, Garrett McKenzie? More than life, I said, though meaning even more than that. And she leaned her shoulder into mine. If happiness is anything, it is after misery a touch like that.

Not going to thank Max, though. I haven't spent three minutes with him, but already know his game. No generosity there. All self interest.

---

Tuesday, July 6, 1897

*Saw Garrett this afternoon, sitting with his back against the wheelhouse, his face buried between his knees. He looked up when I approached him, with dread on his face as I've never seen it. It took me by surprise. Who knows what I looked like to him?*

*I told him I was convinced we were both being somewhat foolish, that I only wanted him to give me an opportunity to think things through, and that I had been looking for him so we could talk. I asked him if he wanted to talk. He may have wanted to, but at that moment he seemed not to be able to get a word out. It is clear that our difficulty had taken a toll on him. His eyes were watery and he had trouble talking. I thought it best to leave him and went to get up, but at that moment the boat must have grazed a shallow bar and I lost my balance, rocking into him and nudging my shoulder against his. I went to apologize, but that touch, for whatever reason, seemed to dispense all the tension between us, and he started talking as if a flood gate had burst.*

*"I know you hate Mary," he said, "but she is innocent in all of this. If anything it is my weakness which is to blame." And then he told me all about her and her brother. Men – all people, in fact – have a frightening amount of cruelty in them, and poor Mary*

*was the unwarranted victim. The thought of her on the path weeping over her dead brother brought me to tears.*

*I told him how Max had expanded my understanding of life up here.*

*“Max!” he said. “He’s only trying to steal you for himself!”*

*That was enough to make me see that Garrett was not ready to face our troubles and I went to rise again. But he said immediately, “That was foolish of me!” He begged me to sit down. As he took my sleeve, it pulled me again into his shoulder. Such a touch is a powerful signal whose meaning can be wildly disparate to each party, it seems, for it irritated me but seemed to immediately relax him again. “No harm done,” I thought.*

*But it also made me determined to establish a condition of my continued involvement. “There must be no secrets between us,” I said, although my strongest desire was to ask him, outright, if he had intended to tell me about Mary, face to face. I knew it was an unfair question. “You must promise to face me,” I said, instead, and we went on to talk of other things, in a manner which I have greatly missed.*

---

Wednesday, July 7

Vee came looking again today and found me by the buckets. When I turned, she just looked and looked into my eyes until I was about as pink as the finest piece of moose, all tender and ready. Then she took me by the hand, and I couldn’t help asking myself, Good Lord! Is this what I think it is?!

She walked me like a puppy over to their cabin, where Fanny, Max and Willoughby were talking. Fanny just got up and left. Max gave me a look and left. But Willoughby

stood by the door. I could see he was torn, and I guessed by what. Vee just said to him, you are not my keeper, Willoughby.

Willoughby looked at me as if to say, if you were a gentleman you would leave with us. I took one step toward the door, feeling deflated and guilty, but Vee held me by the arm and said to Willoughby, Leave him out of this. If what concerns you is that we are out-of-wedlock, I must tell you I place little stock in marriage as an institution. We all know women and men, many of whom are of 'good breeding' (a word which she ladled with sarcasm), who use marriage to hide their hopping from one bed to another. We also know of women who marry men they barely tolerate and even abhor, solely for position and money. I'm afraid I don't see much honour and high moral purpose there. I am not about to let hypocrites rule my life. I will be true and honourable and faithful to the man of my choosing, at the time of my choosing. Now please leave.

Willoughby and I both knew neither of us was in charge at that moment. So he left.

She unpinned her hair and started on her blouse, not four feet from me, and kept looking at me all the time. In the eyes. This is a new world, Garrett, she said. I'm making the best of it. You don't have to follow, if you don't want to. Good Lord! I was thinking. Soft in the head, hard in the pants. Up to me? What kind of man does she think I am?

Then she stopped, suddenly, and froze, as if she only then realised what she was up to. The young woman had boldly stepped to the end of the diving board, but the young girl had suddenly looked down. I expected her to say, I had no idea the water was so far below, or so deep.

My territory, this. Been dreaming of it since I was twelve, lying on the rocks with her by Memphremagog, wondering how old cousins had to be to marry. And now with the comfort Mary had given me, I was relaxed.

Leave this to me, I whispered, helping her undo the rest of her blouse, bit by bit. Should I be writing this? Damn it to hell. My memory. My journal.

I worked my way so slowly I can remember each button slipping from its hold, each flick of my fingers skittering down the flesh of her bare arm, like a little wave. I remember how her blouse came free, how I undid the laces on her boots, and how I suddenly realised I didn't know my way through those under things, and how she dropped the rest and stood there, not a piece of clothing. My pants slipped to the floor leaving my hardness bulging my underwear. She placed my arms around her and melted into my body, letting out a little "Ohhh" when she felt me lie against her.

She turned face down, and the evening sun spilled through the porthole, washing over her back. The light caught the dew of the finest tiny hairs down her backbone, in that triangle above her backside. Her breasts pushed out the sides, and caught the light, too. I ran my finger the full length of her back, and she twitched gently with its touch. It made a little trough in her skin that would vanish as I went. Especially over her buttocks. Lord what buttocks! They would bring religion out in me, if I were so inclined, just to thank Him for making them so perfect, so round. She began making little noises as my finger ran past her secret, and down to the back of her knees, and I could see her legs relax, and move apart ever so slightly, inviting a fall. Must have swept down her back a dozen times, when, finally, having found the courage, I let my finger slip, and climb back out to her thigh. A little cry escaped. A mock scolding like: Oh, you wicked man! with

both of us smiling. Relaxed she was now, standing fearlessly at the end of the diving board. So I did it again. A second's hesitation to touch the warmth and flowery softness. I lingered longer at each passing, allowing my finger to catch her perfume, her musky honey, the promise of heaven. But neither of us could take such teasing, so I rolled her over, gently.

In the end, she squeezed me and made little cries. Heaven's song.

Then neither of us could stop smiling, and I heard her giggling against my chest. What is it? Just remembering, she said. Remembering what? Just this.

---

Wednesday, July 7, 1897

*I found Garrett by the stern this afternoon, transfixed by the buckets, as they call the large paddles. He didn't hear me coming, they churn over so loudly, turned by the long arms called pitmans and powered by the engines puffing away in the bowels of the boat. It's easy to become transfixed by them, like one can with a fire. He spun with surprise when I lightly touched his arm, his face betraying his thought that he had to defend himself from something. Poor fellow has been on edge. When he melted in front of me, when I saw the effect I had on him, that is when I decided to displace Mary for good.*

*Fanny was with Max and Willoughby in our room when we arrived. Max packed up his drawings, and moved with Fanny outside. But Willoughby did not. I am certain, dear man, he felt I was sending myself to ruin. After a few words – I had to lay down the law – he left... upset and angry.*

*How what transpired in that little cabin can be put into words I do not know. I was all nerves and excitement, eagerness and trepidation. Thank God Garrett had his own experience to guide me. My New York friends had no experience at all, though they*

*were only full of conjectures and giggles and imaginings whenever the subject came up. And how profoundly wrong they were. And Mother? What can I say but poor father.*

*But Garrett, bless him, was gentle. He knew at some level I would be terrified and awkward and took to guiding me through.*

*I am a happy woman, though a little sore, as I sit here in bed at midnight with the low sun still pushing through the curtain, with the buckets still churning and Fanny breathing softly next to me. I am a full and happy woman. Life courses through me.*

---

Thursday, July 8

Pulled into Circle late evening. As promised, Molly was waiting with her new barge all loaded, tied down, covered in canvas. We went ashore and I introduced her all around. Vee and Molly seemed to take to one another right away. Same independent spirit, I reckon. Max came up and greeted Molly. Three of them chatted, throwing in Latin quips about Emporium and decorum and decimus or something. Like the Canadian government, said Max, with its royalty, which was funny, apparently. Vee with her schooling, Max with his snobbish upbringing, and Molly with her surprising agility in Latin.

I walked off and helped tie up Molly's barge to the Portus B. The barge has no way to steer or slow down, so the captain secured it to the side to keep control. Didn't want it ramming the buckets and crippling us. We loaded wood and got underway.

The three of them were still laughing and quipping by the railing, so I sidled up to Vee and touched her hand. The two of us just broke out smiling. There you go, Max!

---

Thursday, July 8, 1897

*We landed today at Circle City very early this morning to take on wood and drop off a few supplies. Waiting there for us was the most extraordinary woman – Molly Larson – with a barge-load of saleables for her Emporium in Dawson. She helped tie the barge to the side of the Weare and we pushed back out into the current. As we muscle up stream, the barge is driving the poor engines even harder. Luckily, Dawson is not far.*

*Garrett touched my hand while I was at the railing. A little spark passed between us, and we both smiled like candied-up children. Now we have lovers' memories.*

*Molly and I spent a delightful hour talking about everything and sundry, including the crazy people that drift north. We are slated to be best friends, I can see.*

*She explained her Emporium to me, how she sells items and buys them back later and makes her profit that way. When I didn't understand, she told me this:*

*"The Emporium is a pawn shop, but on its head. In a pawn shop a fellow comes in and sells Mother's ring, say, for a price far below what his father first paid. He just want the money. If he want to get it back later, he has to pay a price for it is much greater than what he received. At the Emporium I deal only with the suddenly, fantastically rich. When they come in they throw their gold around as if it is almost worthless. It's the prestige of owning the object that they want. So I charge them a healthy premium. Later, when they are desperate, or tired of the object, or just moving on, I buy it back at a price which they would normally have paid in Seattle, say, if they had been in possession of their senses, namely market value plus transportation, overhead, damages, et cetera.*

*"At the pawn shop, the seller resents having to buy his prized possession back at a higher price, so only the broker is happy. At the Emporium most everyone is happy. The*

*buyer doesn't care how much gold he forks over in the first place – he has too much of the stuff anyway. When he brings the object back, he knows how foolish was, and although he is taxed for his folly, and he is relieved to get fair market value for it. They realize they only been charged a tax for stupidity.*

*“I have a telescope which has been to Forty Mile and Circle City, and come back to me each time. The result is that I'm barely 36 and I've already netted a comfortable retirement.”*

*I asked her why, then, is she still here? She laughed heartily. “My dear,” she said. “Life is just too much fun!”*

---

Friday, July 9

I love standing by the buckets, watching them churn. The power of steam thumps through your soles, into your stomach. Vee found me, with something behind her back: a pair of scissors in one hand, a mirror in the other. It's too long for me, she said. Wasn't going to question that. I got myself set up on a chair, in the sun, and began cutting the beard – she did the hair. Started off looking like a mountain man, ended up looking like Ulysses S. Grant, I am told. Trim and presidential. Not bad, F. G. McK. A ladies' man.

Vee wanted me to have dinner with them in the Captain's quarters, but Max will be there and I'd just get riled, so I thanked her and gave her some silly excuse. Max will be off to his claim soon enough.

We passed Eagle, Mary's village. Sternwheelers are a novelty only to the children these days, though some adults came down to the shore, too. I longed to see Mary, and I



noticed that Vee saw me looking for someone. It would have been just awkward and sad, so it probably just as well that there was no sign of her.

---

Friday, July 9, 1897

*What enjoyment to spend time with Max, Molly, Willoughby and our crew now that things have settled. Willoughby came around, as I knew he would. But every time Max appears, Garrett leaves. Oh, well. We had dinner in Captain's quarters last evening with the conversation ranging from General Robert E. Lee's position on slavery, to the design of the Taj Mahal. Max said, cheekily, he plans to build one and has a woman in mind.*

*Garrett and Max are so enticing both of them, each in his own way, and each struts when he's around me. It's rather funny, really, and thrilling, but I realize I must not take advantage no matter how strangely powerful it makes me feel.*

*And now, after I insisted Garrett get shorn – I found his mane too ticklish – he is, once again, as handsome as a buck. And as virile!*

*Earlier today we passed an Indian village. Garrett was standing at the railing, looking hard. It's clear whose village it was, or who he thought might be there, at least. I'm just as happy not to have seen her – I fear she might be too much of an enchantress.*

*I have just been told we are about to land in Dawson. Such excitement!*

## Chapter 11 Dawson

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Friday, July 9, 1897 Midnight or Later

*I am wrapped in a blanket and Fanny is bundled up next to me. We share a tiny bunk behind a sheet hung for 'privacy' at the back of the only room in the Klondike 'Hotel', the best Garrett could find on short notice. Max went right out to his claim.*

*As I write by candlelight each movement of my elbow rubs her. She emits little noises either from pleasure or annoyance. It is still light out, but not a ray gets to me through the tiny window at the far end of the room, on the other side of the sheet. The room has a wood-plank floor, is about 20' by 30', and is packed with grunting and snoring and odorous men. To be sure they are all fine men, more or less. I would just rather not sleep among them.*

*None removed his clothes for fear of those tiny white pariahs which nest among us but no one names. They are lice, of course, and there is a whole town – Lousetown – of forty cabins and tents across the river named after them.*

*I just pray I don't have to pass water in the night. They gave us a small bedpan in their efforts to accommodate us, but I would die of embarrassment using it where all could hear. And I have no desire to work my way past the sea of crowded cots on the other side of this sheet, perhaps stumbling over bodies and packs. Even if I made it safely, I would have to brave the flying hordes outside, all anxious to bite me in most tender parts. The Almighty forgot women at the time of His grand design.*

*Mother would last but a few minutes in this place. The first would be spent in calling in vain for the servants, the last in bewilderment when they did not show up.*

*Earlier we toured Dawson with a mind to a good location for the hotel. It took in less than an hour as it has only 3500 souls at the moment. Garrett was our guide, as he is acquainted with both Arthur Harper and Joe Ladue, the two fellows who had the foresight to stake nearly all the habitable area. We will have to lease or buy our land, and get our start-up lumber from one of them.*

*Everything in town is orientated with the river in mind. The town-site runs parallel to it for one and a half miles up to the base of Moosehide Mountain (where there is huge scar left from an old rock slide), and is about a mile wide. On the corner of the site sits the Federal Reserve where the Klondike River meets the Yukon River. It contains everything from stables, to North West Mounted Police offices and barracks, to Post Office, Mining Recorder's Office and jail. Should anyone doubt under whose jurisdiction the town lies, the bold, bright red, white, and blue Union Jack waves above the compound to dispel it. Of the thirty or so Constables of the North West Mounted Police, several strutted about in their handsome scarlet jackets, dark blue trousers and blue pill boxes.*

*Garrett said, "Now here's a piece of luck," and took us over toward Alfred Lannark, a fellow who helped run Joe Ladue's affairs, who was chatting with a Mountie. Mr. Ladue, who has been a trader in this country for years and one of its stalwart promoters, had himself gone out with the huge shipments of gold that Garrett accompanied to St. Michael. The Mountie was Staff Sergeant Mallard, a veteran of several northern winters and a rugged looking man. Garrett explained our intentions, and Mr. Lannark and I quickly arranged to meet the next day. (Good Lord! That's today. I'd better wrap this up, although it probably won't matter, as I'll hardly sleep anyway for excitement.)*

*I noted the Staff Sergeant was writing something in his notebook. Roderick was in a position to read at least some of it, but said nothing. I chose to be direct.*

*“Here I’ve been in Dawson less than a day, and already I’ve run afoul of the law.”*

*“Oh, no, Miss Baker,” he said, “it’s part of our job to try to keep track of new arrivals. This town is growing in leaps and bounds. I try to keep abreast.”*

*“You cannot fool us, Staff Sergeant Mallard,” I joked with him. “It was clear you were writing something more than just names.”*

*“You have him now, Vee,” Garrett said. “He’s as red as his serge. Tell us! It’s our right to know what crime we’ve committed.”*

*“Yes, it is,” Mallard said, laughing. “I use little tricks to help me keep sorted the people I meet, otherwise I’d be overwhelmed. Mr. Palagio I’ll remember first by his striking head of hair – it is like that of a bust of Julius Caesar I once saw in Ottawa and his name does sound Italian.” Roderick struck an emperor’s pose. Turning to Garrett he smiled mischievously and said, “You, sir, are guilty only, so far as I know yet, of having one of the finest buckskin jackets I’ve ever seen, and a trim, full beard reminiscent of our recent, ill-fated Prime Minister, Sir Mackenzie Bowell. Your Scottish names complete the device.” Garrett moved in beside Roderick and struck his own pose, the two of them hilariously statuesque. “And what can I say of Mr. Willoughby here other than to remind him that the Civil War is over, and that those magnificent Colts he wears are not a welcome sight in Dawson?” Willoughby smiled, nodded and promised to put them away. “However,” Mallard continued, pointing to his chest entry wound, “we will keep an eye out for the Yankee who shot you, as there may be some apologies owed.”*

*“No fear there,” Willoughby said, proudly muscling his way in front of the other two statues. “I sent him to hell where he belongs!” And with such a hearty laugh, too! I love the man dearly.*

*“Miss Fanny, you have eyelashes enough to conquer any man whether at midnight or midday, and, you, Miss Baker, have eyes a color of blue-grey that puts this country’s skies to shame.” While Fanny was basking, I was blushing terribly, and thinking, well, I deserved that! Byron, I could see, was straining to see what his entry was, but Mallard closed the book on him.*

*“I can match that,” I said, jokingly. “I’ll remember you for the unique color of your serge, and that fetching pill-box you wear.”*

*Mallard saw the joke, looking about at the other similarly dressed constables. “We are featureless upholders of the law, Miss Baker.” He pointed to the gold braiding on his collar. “But you may remember me by this as only Inspector Constantine has more.*

*It is his rugged face I won’t forget, I thought. That rake of a moustache. That easy, genuine smile.*

*We were about to break up when Garrett asked, “And what of Byron, Staff Sergeant?” But Mallard just smiled, told us to look for him should we need anything, apologized for his need to carry on other business, and wished us goodnight.*

*Byron cornered Roderick, who had read the entries. “My face is not ‘delicately-featured’! Is it?” he whispered. Then he fondled his lips. “Are they really that full?”*

*Along Front Street to the north of the Reserve lie the log ‘hotels’ and saloons and even an ‘Opera House’ – something like ten of them, following the river’s edge. The*

*motley panoply of tents and shacks housing all sorts of business, from laundries to barbers, come next. They include many tiny “bakeries” with a woman hovering at the front of each. Beyond are the impressive corrugated iron warehouses, and compounds of the Alaska Commercial Company and the North American Transportation and Trading Company. And beyond still are several sawmills, including Harper’s and Ladue’s. Mixed in among everything are the stilted caches built to keep food and equipment away from dogs and floods and unscrupulous hands. We will have to build our own soon.*

*I wish I could say that underfoot there is an easily worked, firm and sandy soil, but the ground is far from that. Muskeg. That’s what they call this expanse of foul-smelling, oozing muck dotted with little domes of matted, tightly-growing plants. In one especially swampy area we had to leap from one to the next as we looked about for a lot for a cabin and the mill. They promise security, looking as they do like boulders standing proud of the water, so one is tempted strongly to use them. But the promise is an illusion. When you land, they are like sponges, giving away to your weight and producing a little pool of water around your boot. In addition, they are springy enough to throw you off balance if you do not land squarely. There is metaphor in there somewhere for how this country behaves toward us.*

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Saturday, July 10

Landed in Dawson yesterday and finished unloading today. Vee secured a good plot for the hotel, and a deal with Ladue’s mill for lumber and such. Lannark gave them a cabin to use for the time being. Sure made the women happy. We are off to celebrate as soon as the women put themselves together. They kicked us out onto their little porch

with an overhung roof so they can bathe. We are all too gentlemanly to look inside, but sheets went up over the windows in any event. They are in there now, yelping.

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Saturday, July 10, 1897

*Today we met again with Mr. Lannark and bought a plot for \$6,500 on Third Avenue several blocks from the Federal Reserve and the collection of saloons on Front Street. It saved us money to buy there – lots nearer the waterfront sell for between \$10,000 to \$15,000 – and it will be a better location for those who want to find relief from the ruckus of the saloon area. Ours will be a finer, well-to-do customer.*

*As part of our deal, we will locate our mill next to the Harper-Ladue mill and will be taking much of their waste-wood to use for our screens. They are primarily interested in planks suitable for floors, ceilings, joists, frontages and the like. This way they will be paid for wood they would otherwise burn, and, as a special favor, we guaranteed them the first screens off the line after our own. Such is the power of the mosquito.*

*While in Seattle, Max convinced us to buy half a dozen 100 lb. kegs of nails beyond our needs as they are in desperately short supply up here. Each keg cost us \$22.00 in Seattle and we sold them here for \$500.00. The profits will go toward our land purchases for hotel, cabin, and mill.*

*I suggested we also sell 1,000 feet of our 6,000 feet of wire screen cloth at \$1.00 a foot. (We paid 1.2¢ a foot for it in New Haven.) And Willoughby suggested we sell it only in four foot lengths, and only for half-ounce nuggets. “If you are trying to sleep in a cabin,” he argued, “you can open up the cabin and die of mosquito bites, or close it up and bake. Who wouldn’t rather pick a forgotten nugget trodden into the dirt of his cabin floor and get a nice cross-breeze? And when we get our mill up, those same miners will*

*want new screens because they will have nailed their mesh full of holes. We won't lose one customer by selling the raw lengths to them now." It is a curious thing, joy is. It comes at the most unexpected moments, and not always for the noblest reason.*

*Willoughby and I did some accounting. Our mill land cost a mere \$1,000. Construction wood is coming off the local mills at \$150 to \$200 per 1,000 feet (it costs \$6 or \$7 per 1,000 feet down south). Most of our construction expenses will be for the hotel, we well upwards of \$5,000 – perhaps even \$10,000 to \$12,000 – for the building and furnishings and our funds are not sufficient at the moment. I gambled in a manner father might not approve by spending a large proportion of our funds in Seattle for hotel furnishings which I was advised would not be available on site.*

*Garrett estimates his share of their spring clean-up will be more than what we would need to build the hotel and generously offered it to us. I asked him not to be offended, but I still wanted to try this on my own first. I told him I intended to meet with the bank and arrange a loan against the property. He understood, bless him.*

*He suggested we call it the Owl's Head Inn. I think that is sweet, and the old-time, relaxed allure of the name suits the atmosphere I have in mind. But I realize now, as I write this, I am already imagining an addition, a reading room and library, an octagonal conservatory with high shelves and windows galore to enjoy the midnight sun. The Inn will be the Waldorf Astoria of the North, and the Conservatory will see many brandies and cigars, will hear witty repartees, and substantive discussions – from both sexes – aimed at understanding and changing the world about us.*

*Mr. Lannark, when he heard where we were bunked at the moment, offered us the temporary use of his new cabin. Though he called it a cabin, it is approaching a single-*



*story house in size. There is a little front room which serves as kitchen, dining and living room, with two little bedrooms toward the rear, with a toilet between them! The cabin has the most delightful smell you can imagine, made of freshly cut spruce. Spruce beds, tables, chairs, chests of drawers, cupboards, mirrors, and even wash stands and wardrobes. And a BATH TUB. Small but clean. There were a few dusty foot-prints left by the workmen, but aside from that the place was SPOTLESS, and the color of newly-sawn wood. What a relief! We embarrassed Al (Lannark) we thanked him so profusely.*

*Fanny and I took one bedroom, Willoughby and Garrett the other. Roderick and Byron are camping out on the living room floor.*

*I sent everyone off to find a restaurant, but kept Garrett back for 'a talk'. Afterwards, lying limbs all woven together, we discussed marriage. It seems so natural. What we've always wanted ever since we were children. Like Cheshire cats, we were. Now, when I smell newly-cut spruce, I will think of being entwined, of being in love.*

*What a fine dinner for a frontier town! Clams in a cream sauce. Canned, of course. Fresh rabbit stew – so succulent I felt guilty: such a beautifully tasting little creature should not give his life for us. At least he didn't go down unnoticed, and the Burgundy we had with him might even have given the little fellow cause for pride for having been so elegantly partnered. And a fruit cobbler with fresh cream! Someone in town has a cow.*

*After dinner Willoughby tried – rather feebly, and probably more for show than anything – to lecture me, so I shushed him.*

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Sunday, July 11

Yesterday Vee said, I need a little help. It turns out she did. Like a little girl with a new toy, she is. She makes me so happy I can't think straight.

We showed up for dinner 45 minutes late, two of us in a mood we couldn't much hide. Rod, Byron, and Fanny thought it funny, but Willoughby? Not so much.

Today I helped Vee with her new cabin for a while, rented a team of mules, built a skid for the new steam engine, and then secured it on the skid. What a fine looking machine! Steel sparkling in the sun. Cannot wait to hear it turn over.

There's a new newspaper in town. Single sheets posted on buildings all over. I recognised the publisher's name. He's Californian; one of the four that bought my claim. He brought the press in on the Portland, and set it up in a tent to get his first issues out within 48 hours. First ones are free, it seems.

I kept the first one for posterity (below). I'll wager it is Max they are talking about.

The next edition, posted the same day, was about the complaints Americans make about having to pay royalties on "their" gold. There is irony here enough to rankle any Canadian, or any reasonable person of any nationality. In the United States you must be an American citizen or have declared their intention to become one to extract gold. Here you are free to mine it and, after paying a royalty, return home, which most Americans do. I read one copy of the San Francisco Bulletin which says this: "Canada cannot very well hold on to all the gold in the Klondike, yet the Dominion Government puts a royalty on claims and gathers in as large a share as possible. Let the Dominion go on if it thinks there is not such a thing as manifest destiny." They want Stars and Stripes to fly over the Klondike gold fields. Some suggest sending in the navy to enforce their opinion.

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## THE KLONDIKE CRIER

Vol.1 DAWSON, YUKON TERRITORY, CANADA, SATURDAY, JULY 10,1897 No.7  
Collis Schiller, Publisher

### FABULOUSLY RICH

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#### Great Strike on Eldorado Creek - Coronation of King Midas

A story such as this would ordinarily receive no credence. However, it was related to this reporter, under circumstances leaving no doubt of its veracity. The parties are desirous of avoiding publicity.

On a claim above Discovery on Eldorado Creek, workmen recently tapped a deposit of gravel so rich in gold as to fairly startle them. Pans running up into the hundreds of dollars were quite common, and for depth of two feet, it is deliberately asserted that \$200 per pan, on the average is no overstatement; and in addition to all this, two or three feet more of gravel runs so high in gold as not to materially reduce the average. So overwhelming was the effect of this find that the men sent word to the principal owner, one of Dawson's best known, who was in his native England at the time, to come and take out this deposit under his personal supervision.

The claim has long been known to be a very rich one. Some months ago the owner, out of curiosity, stationed a man on a spot known to be very rich, and instructed him to shovel as much dirt as possible during one entire day; the result was about \$25,000 in gold.

We are assured that the clean-up of one day of nine hours, when 11 men were employed, yielded nearly \$20,000, and that such a clean-up is not uncommon. What the result will be when active work is prosecuted at the point where \$200 per pan is the rule would not be difficult to calculate, but so sensational would seem the result that we prefer to let our readers make their own estimates.

Although the owner's modesty will not permit the formal use of the appellation of King Midas, we have knowledge that he is being talked of as such in social gatherings. We eagerly await his early return.

#### **Fire Proof Your Building...**

Use **Asbestos building paper** to line your cabin. Render it safe from fire and impervious alike to cold and damp. A better building paper than the inflammable tar paper so much in use. Use no other.  
For sale only by the **North American Transportation & Trading Co.**

#### **OWEN EAGLESON,**

#### **Mines & Mining**

**Properties wanted at once.** I have cash customers for several prospected placer claims at once. Options wanted on groups of claims for the Toronto, Montreal, New York, Boston, London and Paris markets. **OWEN EAGLESON.**

### **Norman McIver**

**BARRISTER - SOLICITOR, ADVOCATE, ETC.**

**Special attention given to Criminal and Mining Law.**

Front St. - Dawson

The idea of American “war vessels” in the Yukon River would be worrisome if it were not so laughable, as the ships have such deep drafts they would be hung up on the Yukon’s bars before they got a mile. They’d have to call in river boats to get the crews off, put the guns in punts and pole them up. Flotillas of tippy punts, crewed by a pair of sailors each, flying the Stars and Stripes. How absurd.

Because of its sentiment, it is nevertheless a worrisome story. Who would want to be subject to the whims of miner’s meetings rather than the law? I am caught between countries, as Father is, what with him being a Canadian volunteer in the Civil War, living in Canada, teaching at the U of Vermont. He and Willoughby are a marvel of reconciliation, though the Reb still jokes about him being a Yankee Canuck.

I remember what Charlie said: Riches only bring about a change of troubles. That seems true for territories as much as men.

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Sunday, July 11, 1897

*We lay out the lines for our cabin foundation and put up cribbing at the corners where the stove will sit. I went to cut some raw timber, but Willoughby intervened. Too dangerous, he said, and I’m not about to have my Vee injured on her first day. So he cut and I hauled. Byron went to sell screens and Roderick worked at setting up and leveling the cribbing. Garrett came by with rented mules. He hauled rocks for cribbing, then went off to Ladue’s mill for a load of joists and planks. He saved us a couple of days at least.*

*A fellow was at the mill looking for work. Garrett told him I was the boss. The fellow said he’d never worked for a skirt before, but would give anything a shot.*

*Haldron Sykes is his name. He appears to be a stalwart fellow, even by Klondike standards, with a face pock-marked from measles, a massive jaw, and a nose that looks*

*like some Navy fellow displaced it late one night in some back street, although perhaps not without paying a high price himself. For a man of his station his big square teeth are as white as they are prominent, luckily. He's stocky, not more than 5' 5" I would say, and a couple of inches less than me. His attention to hygiene and dress is notable. Even in his work clothes, he presents himself as a man well acquainted with laundry, a rare thing in this place. What an agreeable thing it is to smell soap on a man!*

*His hands are massive and his handshake is punishing. I had to rub mine vigorously afterward to get rid of the pain. He talks very quickly, in short choppy sentences, like a gun and just as loud. He seemed competent enough if everything he says about his experience is true, but his manner worried me. He is in contradiction with himself, somehow.*

*"I'm the boss," I said. "I take advice and then make up my mind. I expect hard work and good manners and in return I pay a fair wage and treat those who work for me with consideration. What do you say to that?"*

*"Suits me fine," he said, barking it out, almost forcing me back. "Worked hard my whole life. Won't stop now."*

*"You won't have trouble taking direction from a woman?"*

*"Only got trouble with fools," he said.*

*"Can you handle running a mill built for making screen windows and doors?"*

*"I've run mills up here at Fortymile, and a factory in South Carolina. Oak furniture. Easy peasy."*

*I talked it over with the men. Try him out for a couple of weeks, they suggested.*

*So I walked back to him. "Twenty dollars a day for ten hour days and Sunday off, and we'll see how it goes."*

*"Deal," he said and stuck out his hand.*

*"My first order is not to crush my hand," I said.*

*"Righto," he said, and crushed it anyway.*

*"Here are the plans," I said, shaking out my hand again. "Look them over. We'll help you with the hiring. Now come and help us with the cabin cribbing."*

*"Sundays off," he said, smiling. "I'll see you in the morning."*

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### Monday, July 12

First thing, I visited my friend at the recorder's. It cost me a tenner this time because I didn't want to wait around. The fraction still in Lefty's name only.

Hauled the steam engine up with mules up to the Hillup fraction. BadFoot loped half a mile from the hillside where Up-a-Creek was cutting a few trees. How he can tell Lefty and me apart at that range when others can't from three feet is a mystery to me. It can't be the smell; it must be the way I carry myself. We took time for a wrestle. Lazarus BadFoot Sundog! Felt badly about having to leave him. The ribs on his left side are unusually sensitive. Charlie would never... but Lefty might.

Lefty's been working hard the last six weeks I've been away. The dump was a good 75' long, and a third of it has been fed to the sluices already. Our dam and flume are working well. We have six new sluices, end to end, running past the cut and spilling the tailings out toward Max's. He won't be happy about that. Some water must be working its way back into our cut, so Lefty's fashioned a China wheel to lift it from a sump back

up to the head of the sluices. He rigged a little overshot wheel where the flume spills into the first sluice. Pretty clever. For the most part, the sluicing can be run by two men, one feeding from the dump at the top, and the other picking the biggest boulders with a pitch fork, and keeping an eye on the last sluice so it doesn't get to spilling gold. I didn't recognize the two men Lefty had working for us, though, and there was no sign of him.

I pulled the mules up just above the entrance to our drift. Each of the workers yelled a "Good day" to me. Friendly and smiling. Samson and Joseph, it turns out. Two Siwashes, but not from around here. Maybe from the coast. BadFoot did his rounds and got his pats. I asked about Lefty and they pointed toward a strange, new wooden palisade barring the entrance to our drift. It has a barn-like double door and spruce-plank walkway for the barrows. The walkway wound from there up-slope to our dump. One of the big doors had half-size door cut in it, just big enough to let a fellow through. When I tried the doors they were barred from the inside. The fellows just shrugged, like it was odd and normal at the same time. I banged on the doors with no luck.

In our cabin there were nuggets and dust in containers all over, lining new shelves. He's been using everything he could put his hands on. One gunny sack sat in the corner, all tied up. Couldn't budge it. 150 pounds by itself at least. I figure more than \$50,000 worth, spread about. I'm not used to calculating just from the look of it. A cabin with a fortune left unlocked, yet diggings with raw paydirt and waste all barred up. Near the Arctic Circle the world turns upside-down, it seems.

I spotted a smear of flakes on the floor like they were too much bother and I found a pea-sized nugget among them. What a wonderful sight! I've seen diamonds and platinum

and silver and emeralds, and they are all cold and regal. They push you back like a woman with ice-blue eyes. But gold is so warm and luscious. Give me gold, every time.

When I stepped out Lefty was by the engine smiling and stroking the tall boiler. Fine engine, Mac, he said. I noticed that BadFoot kept his distance when I walked over. Fine engine, Hillup, and fine fix. What do you mean? All this and I don't own a penny of it. What's the worry, Mac? We'll go down and fix it when we haul the gold in. You're a rich fella, Mac. I'll be happier when it says so at the recorder's, I said. Sure thing. Sure thing. Garrett McKenzie, it'll say, one very rich fella! and he smiled. Has a disarming smile. Hate it when he does that. Smile says trust me and don't, at same time.

And the barricade down there? I asked. It's very odd. Especially when you leave the cabin unlocked. We got some damned rich paydirt, Mac. It can't be so rich as to need a lock-up, I said. What's wrong with sleepin' peaceful? he asked. But it was locked, just now, and you were inside, I reckon. I don't want some fella creeping up on me, is all, he said. Take me down, I said, and show me the workings. Sure thing, he said, but let's get some grub first. Tomorrow we'll fire up the engine and see how quick she eats up the permafrost. Isn't it filling with water in there, I asked, what with the runoff and all? Sure is, he said. That's why that little engine is first class. He waved his hand at the other camps. All them got to stop drifting in the summer and we'll just keep on diggin'.

The moose was pretty good. The boys had some and disappeared to their tent. I tossed part of mine to BadFoot.

Lefty and I adjusted the sluices a bit, nailed a few boards tight on them and the flume, and called it a day. Big day tomorrow.



I started settling in, writing this, then damned me if Lefty didn't smile at me, get out a pair of scissors, and start trimming his mane and his beard to match mine. He kept looking over to make sure. Hair all over. I thought to challenge him, but what's the damned point? He's just doing it to gall me. He wanted me to trim the back of his hair to match, too, but I told him to go to hell. He whacking away at it now with a mirror.

---

Monday, July 12, 1897

*Garrett headed up to his claim. He's filled with excitement and optimism.*

*Haldron showed up early at the cabin and joined us for breakfast. He mostly just grunted and ate. Not a morning person, I guess.*

*Right after breakfast I headed to the Bank of Commerce to meet with the manager, a Mr. Clarence Grizwald, to see about borrowing money for the construction of the hotel. I had no appointment, so I thought I would get there early and wait. Wait I did. Until 10 AM when he marched in, fresh as a school boy, like it was dawn.*

*He didn't take me very seriously. He was excessively polite and patronizing – a duplicitous combination – but I held my temper as his is the only bank in town.*

*When patronization is coupled with duplicity, it can be deeply destructive. My experience indicates there are several forms and variations. When practiced by the feeble minded – usually unconsciously – it is generally overt, easily recognized, and easily overcome, either by direct countermeasures or by outright dismissal. But when it is practiced with skill, it is disguised as concern and politeness. Its message is therefore often taken to heart and the recipient starts doubting her competence in ruinous ways. Mr. Grizwald's level of proficiency was rather low, however, although he seemed to think otherwise, as those needing intellect improvement and of low skill generally do. From*

*what father has told me, banking talents also come in degrees. This fellow exhibited a lower level than I expected. Perhaps that is why he was sent to the frontier, though given the amount of gold floating about, it may not have been the wisest move his superiors ever made.*

*Mr. Grizwald asked me questions about who would be running the hotel, whether I had any experience at it, and so forth. They are fair questions. I would certainly ask them were I in his shoes. But he repeatedly paused too long at the points in the conversation where youth, inexperience, and the sex of the applicant would be logical considerations. Women know these pauses well.*

*He kept saying “Ahh” to everything I said.*

*So I countered. “If I were the loan officer for a bank,” I said, “and I were assessing the risk involving a loan to a young, apparently inexperienced woman, I might be worried, too. However, I will point out that I have assembled a very competent staff. You see the credentials of Masters Roderick Palagio and Byron Inger there, both highly experienced and well regarded in their trades. They will be making the day-to-day decisions – Mr. Palagio for the hotel in general, Mr. Inger for the kitchen. And with all matters, I will be taking their opinions and experience under careful advisement. A general who does not listen carefully to his scouts and his commanders regarding fact, strategy, and tactics is a fool, and I am no fool, Mr. Grizwald.”*

*He told me that was very well and good but that I had to have collateral. So I said that I already had purchased many of the furnishings in Seattle and brought them with me and pointed to the list of them – bed frames, toilet furnishings, cutlery, china, linen,*

*oil lamps, one magnificent crystal chandelier for the entrance – now stored by the docks in one of the company warehouses.*

*“Ahh,” he said.*

*I suggested that the hotel itself and the land would be the collateral. I argued that the worth of the land, not to mention the furnishings, was greater than the \$10,000 loan I was seeking, and their value is going up daily, given the influx.*

*“Ahh,” he said.*

*I said that I was interested in a builder’s loan, and he said, “Ahh.” Then he looked at me rather apologetically and asked, “Miss Baker, do I call you Miss?”*

*“Of course, if you wish,” I said.*

*“No, what I mean is: are you married? Is your husband coming in to see me?”*

*“I have no husband,” I said, holding up my left hand.*

*“Ahh,” he said. Then he re-organized the papers I brought and handed them back to me. “Well, I’m sorry”, he said, “but I am going to need collateral, and a husband usually has it.”*

*I pointed out again that the land and furnishings were the collateral.*

*“Ahh,” he said.*

*At that point I was going to stand up and shoot him right in the Ahhs, but I don’t have a gun, and we can’t have them here in town, anyway.*

*“I’m afraid the loan will have to wait,” he said.*

*“Until when?” I asked. “I have to get going on the building. I saw the gold going out to Seattle and San Francisco, and when those two treasure ships arrive, this town is*

*going to grow ten fold practically overnight. Only those who are well prepared will be assured of success, and I intend to be one."*

*"Ahh," he said, and merely sat there, thinking, looking at me rather dispassionately. Then, after a minute, he cleared his throat, and with an obsequious smile said, "Perhaps there is an alternative."*

*"What might that be?"*

*"Well," he said somewhat haltingly, "There are many men hereabouts who would look upon a beautiful woman as a desirable mate. In my short stay, I have met several who I believe would look upon you favorably. Shall I put in a word for you? Perhaps arrange for an introduction? I can be very discreet."*

*I could not stop myself. I arose and said to him, in as measured a tone as I could muster in my rage, "Clearly I have been in error," I said. "I was under the mistaken impression the Bank was interested in providing secured loans to sound business ventures, and not...",* and here I mustered as much sarcasm and contempt as I could, *"...in providing counsel and other services to the unmarried."*

*"I can see you are disappointed" he said as I left his office, "but the business of lending money is centered on the people involved."*

*"That is my point exactly, Mr. Grizwald!" I said over my shoulder.*

*"Good day to you, Miss Baker." He stressed the word Miss, it seemed to me, in a way verging on rudeness. "Let me know if I can be of further service."*

*What a very strange custom it is to wish a person a good day when you have ensured the ruin of it. Would a midwife hand me my stillborn child and wish me happiness? Would an assassin wish you a happy life? I regret I did not think to comment upon the*

*absurdity at the time, suffering as I was an unsettling mixture of depression, frustration, and unbridled anger.*

*Working on the cabin rescued me. Its walls are going up well. As we are well equipped with screening and glass, we are putting in more windows than many cabins have hereabout, which, with the extra framing and shuttering involved, is taking extra time but is a fine advertisement. No fear. It will be a fine cabin, and in the summer we will get the extra cross-breezes and in the winter the extra light. When it is finished, it will be the envy of all who see her, and a flagship for our new mill. Fanny's and my bedroom is the larger of the two, with a partition to give me a private place to sleep and work. We'll put a small Yukon stove in there, too, for the really cold months.*

*Haldron is a bull of a worker, it turns out. Very skilled in carpentry, and fast. He seems a good find. He's not much for conversation, but then we did not hire him for that.*

*Byron is calling us for dinner. What a treat it is to have our own personal chef. He takes what he can find fresh, locally, and uses the canned foods in imaginative ways. He says he's working out good dishes as he goes, looking for the right combinations of taste and economy for the hotel's kitchen. We joked that we were going to slow down the construction on everything just so that he can experiment on us further.*

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Tuesday, July 13 (written Wednesday, July 14)

We hauled the engine down to the mouth of the workings yesterday, close to the doors, set it up, oiled it, stoked it, and filled the boiler with water. I asked Lefty about the two fellows working the sluice. You riled about something? he asked. Just asking, I said. Had to smile when I thought of all the gold in the cabin. These two fellas run a fine sluice

– for Siwashes, he said. They know how to set the riffles, and they showed me where to put a little extra canvas in to slow the flour from escaping. At clean-up, after we’ve lifted the riffles and removed the concentrate, they adjust the sluices a bit, and run half the water into them. Joseph feeds the concentrate back in, and Samson there uses the broom-whisk. They’re good at it. They get rid of all the fine stuff and most of the black sand better than our old rocker any day. I just scoop up the gold, dry it, run the magnet over it, pan it a bit, and bag it.

Lefty promised them 5% of the clean-up between them. They still want good ground of their own, so they prospect up along the benches in the evenings. They have all this experience with gold, and they are up prospecting the benches. Seems crazy to me, Lefty said, but who cares?

We were rigging the steamer when I looked up. Max was standing upslope, staring like he was steaming himself. His foreman, Anthony, was standing next to him and was pointing this way and that. It was the first Max heard of the fraction, I guess, and he didn’t like it much.

Lefty headed up with me, and Max kept looking from one to the other the way they all do that when they first see us. To make it worse, we were both in our work clothes. What the blazes is this?! Not so much as a hello, McKenzie. Maybe he couldn’t guess which one was McKenzie? What gives you the right to steal my ground?! he said, all huffy.

BadFoot got off his haunches at Max’s tone, but I settled him down again. Samson and Joe were watching from the sluice. I signalled for them to stay out of it, but they would have anyway, I figure, knowing not to get between white fellows in a scuffle.

Call me Lefty, Lefty said and went to shake Max's hand. I'd call you a thief, Max said. I ain't no thief, Lefty said, and started to crowd him. The foreman and I had to step in. The Gold Commissioner can sort it out, I said, if that's how you want it.

How I want it is to have my land back, Max said. It ain't your land no more, said Lefty. You don't know a goddamned thing about staking proper, Lefty said. You balled it up, and we got our fraction fair and square. You got your fraction by hanging onto Ogilvie's back, the foreman said. You could have done it yourself, Lefty said, if you didn't spend your time in the cribs with Horseface Alice. That set the foreman off like dynamite, but Lefty shoved him and sent him tumbling back. Max was a boxer in his day, I figure, because out of the blue he jabbed Lefty several times in the nose – pop, pop, pop, like a woodpecker. Then he round-housed him in the stomach – oomph – and it was all done. BadFoot would have been at Max's throat had it been me. Lefty went to his knees in the dirt, gasping and growling, one hand on his nose, other wrapped around his middle. You saw that, Max said to the rest of us. He jumped my foreman. Well, it was a shove and not a jump, but I'm not complaining, I said. Good, said Max. I'll see you in at the Gold Commissioner's. And they walked away. Any day you want, yelled Lefty, through his hand, spitting and spraying blood.

I ran a line off the steamer with a nozzle at the end, and Lefty joined me after a while, cursing under his breath. He stopped when he figured I wasn't listening to him. What can I say? He threw the insults. He did the shoving.

We rigged the engine to a small pump I set up in the runoff ponds outside Lefty's big door. We'll send the water back up to the top of the sluice to make good use of it, like Lefty had done, but it'll be much faster than the China wheel.

The piston cranked over, and away went the pump. Huff and puff and dollar and nugget. Musical steam. Power music. And power is money. We did the dance of drunken sailors, though Lefty had to stop because his nose started bleeding again.

So show me the diggings, I said to Lefty, pointing to the doors. Later, Mac. Later.

We were all hungry as hell, so I broke out cans of ham and peas and carrots and some “fresh” potatoes. (Actually wizened, like tree roots.) And a canned plum pudding I’d been saving. And whiskey. The four of us ate like dogs, gulping, imitating BadFoot, and drank like kings. It was the first all-round decent meal the others had had for over six months. We joked and forgot about the diggings and Max and the miseries of this place.

Samson and Joe seem like nice fellows. Quick to laugh at anything, even things we would consider ‘too simple’ or child-like, as Mary did. It’s something I enjoy, that they don’t take themselves too seriously.

But the moment they left for their tent, Lefty lit into them, washing it down with the whiskey. I couldn’t believe it. Thievin’ this, beggin’ that, born stupid and ugly, and stay that way. Women dumpy and after the age of twenty they ain’t worth kickin’. Even that bitch Mary of yours. He wouldn’t shut up, though I told him to. I stopped drinking and BadFoot went outside, looking at me and the door, working his eyebrows like I was supposed to go, too. I was going to slug him but I’d just hurt my hand. If you felt that way, I said, why’d you hire them? He ignored the question and bragged about telling them that if either stole from him, he’d kill them both. They’re cousins, ya’ see, he said. Only good thing about them – the stinkin’ cowards – is that they won’t see their cousins killed. That’s hardly the sign of a coward, I said, my stomach getting all tight and spoiling my dinner. Lefty just carried on drinking, and laughing, talking at me but to



himself, really, getting more and more slurry. I've seen him drunk, but not ugly like that. A black soul, the sap has. It must be like a cave in there inside him, all dark, and cold and hollow. Empty and alone. I might have felt sad for him if he hadn't made me feel sick.

When he finished with the Siwash, he moved on to Niggers, Chinks, and others, and he got smaller and smaller as he went, and would surely have disappeared altogether except I got up and walked out. I sat on a log, fighting mosquitoes and thinking of Mary.

Many up here have no time for anyone not white and English, calling them Siwash, Nigger folk, Chinks, Polacks, or Kikes. I have, too, sometimes, when I'm not thinking, when I'm going by habit. My father talked about it because my mother, being "a Frog", was the brunt of it, but I'm ashamed to say I didn't think about it much then. Like shit – though it stinks, it is part of my life, however much I dislike it now.

For my part, I never attacked a fellow because he was this or that, and even when I defended Harvey Greenspoon, it wasn't because he was a Jew, but because he wasn't a bad sort, and was alone and could use some help at the time.

Mary changed many things for me, just by being herself. Lefty called her names, even smiling to her face as he did because he knew she didn't understand. Two-faced, he was, and objectionable, but I left it alone rather than making a fuss, knowing she couldn't understand and so couldn't take offence, and also knowing what fights do to partners. But it made me wonder why he did it. He felt free to say things anyone who knew her would know to be false.

The more he went on, the more she seemed more like me than he did. Her "Siwash" melted away. She was a pretty woman, an enticing woman, a warm and tender woman, but not a Squaw woman, like they say. The irony is that Lefty became to me the very

things he thinks those who he calls Siwash, Niggers, Chinks, and Kikes are: ugly and stupid and worthless.

I have vowed never again to use one of those names, and if ever I'm about to, thoughtlessly like Lefty, I'll ask myself: And would you call your mother a Frog, too?

He was out cold on the table when I went in – brain dead and bottle dry. I felt like tipping him over onto the floor, but figured he'd end up there all on his own soon enough.

But I'm bound to him, now. We are cell-mates in our little golden jail, half buried under the hill. It's like living with a boil on my arse; it festers and it won't burst.

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Tuesday, July 13, 1897

*Garrett is still at his fraction. I miss him. Other men are good company. Max is fascinating, and he is an impressive man, but my Garrett is a natural one.*

*The outer walls of the cabin are up with the openings all framed. A few shutters are left to be done. Tomorrow we start on the interior walls.*

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Wednesday, July 14

I'm lying in bed, having just finished last entry. Samson and Joe were at work early. I'll get up in a minute and help them with the clean-up. I'm anxious to learn their tricks.

Lefty's still unconscious, breathing hard and drooling out the corner of his mouth onto our dirt floor where he ended up as predicted. I looked at the rifle on the wall (not for the first time), but figured it wouldn't be worth it. It would haunt me all my life. Maybe I can lance the boil some other way. Besides, he has to straighten up the register first. Register first, lancing later. Or the rifle??

Evening, Wednesday, July 14

I never got to see the workface this morning. Lefty stumbled out about noon, a faltering stench, two little red raisins for eyes, run-away clothes, hair in mutiny, beard in knots with splinters and lumps of dirt mixed with vomit. Growly-like and painfully slow, he said, Let's load the damned gold. Get it to A.C.C. before the bastards go drinkin'.

I didn't ask him what he meant. I harnessed the mules and pulled the skid up to the door while Lefty groaned on his bunk, having collapsed back there within minutes of having got up. When I dragged the gunny sack of gold over myself, it felt like a dead man. Like poor old Pete. I loaded the rest and dragged Lefty over to the skid, too. Help yourselves to the food, I told the fellows, and we took off to town.

I walked behind holding the reins. BadFoot picked up a couple of tins of gold that rolled off and brought them to me so I could stack them back on the skid. Lefty was slumped at the back. After a hundred and fifty yards, he yelled for me to stop, staggered back through the mud, and fired the boys on the spot. Then he stood over them while they struck their tent and packed up. I heard some yelling. Let them try and collect, he said to me when he got back. I waited for Lefty to slump on the back of the skid again, and then went around to the side where he couldn't see me and waved back at the fellows as they were leaving. I gestured to them that Lefty was crazy and that they shouldn't worry about it, and I know they understood, because they waved.

We started to Dawson again, with Lefty bouncing up and down, head flopping about until it dove between his knees and spewed the rest of his dinner into the mud. What a waste of canned ham. Worse – a waste of plum pudding. I want to die, he said. It came out in a pathetic growl, like a bear with one twisted, mangled foot in a trap. I'll help, I

said. Wait here while I get the rifle. He wagged his head up, slowly, to look at me. I winked and he threw up again, head snapping forward, like a huge sneeze. Straight out. A fountain of stink with a spray to boot. I had to leap away. Hope it kills you, I said, winking at him again, but not before we get to Dawson.

On Lower Bonanza just below Grand Forks, a NWM Police Constable asked me to hold up. There was a crowd gathered around a cabin. Some men were taking a poor fellow out on a stretcher. He tried to kill himself, the Constable said. Shot himself in the chest and made a mess of it.

He seemed healthy as a horse, someone said. When they cleared the doorway of his cabin I could see gold in every sort of vessel, like Lefty: jars, pails, tin cans, sacks and suitcases. Worth \$125,000, someone said. Afraid to leave the cabin, day or night, for fear someone might get his gold. Never got farther than that, his neighbour said, pointing to his stench pile not fifteen feet from the door. The neighbour told the poor fellow that he would watch over his gold if he needed to get supplies, or, better yet, help him bring it to Dawson where it would be safe, but the miner wouldn't listen. I've been friends with him for a year, the neighbour said, but he just looked up and pointed his rifle at me.

They are taking him to the hospital. If he survives, they will pronounce him insane. Then it's off to a long wait in the North West Mounted Police Post, under arrest for attempted suicide. And a trial in the end. A doctor will examine him first, of course, but the catch is that no sane man attempts suicide. They got him cold. Coming and going. Open and shut. Dead to rights for not being dead.

For murder there is the attempted kind and then there's the kind where you get the deed done. They charge you with which ever one they can. But with suicide, it's really

only the failure that's the crime, because the other way they can't get you. So do it right. Through the head, like Nevada. That's the law.

The Constable wanted us to rig up the stretcher on our skid, over top our gold. He ain't our affair, Lefty said, his face still between his knees. He's my affair, the Constable said, in a burly kind of way, and I can make it yours if you wish. That shut Lefty up.

We were too late for the Alaska Commercial Company, and for the Mining Recorder's office, so Lefty sat with the gold and mules while I hunted Vee and Willoughby down at Lannark's cabin. We took turns watching the gold all night, and brought it down to the A.C.C. in the morning. In early summer the trading companies' safes were full, so fellows packed their gold away in saloons and wherever they could. But there's lots of room now. Even the seasons are upside down here.

My heart pounded as the A.C.C. assayer weighed our gold. 3,784 ¼ oz.; \$59,600 gross; \$50,660 net after the royalty and paying the boys. Damn! We each took some cash and left the rest 'on account'.

With only a third of the dump sluiced it will give us \$150,000 total, not counting what's still in the ground. I'll buy a hotel for Vee! A hotel for me! And I'll have a hotel left over for father, I said, and the assayer laughed. I make \$15 a day, he said. That's an ounce of dirty gold. Twenty five years for me to earn that. You think I'll be here that long? he asked. Not bitter like. Just happy for us, maybe. But likely not.

When we got outside Lefty and I forgot our differences and danced in the dust of the street. It was busy, but no one paid much attention. It must be a common sight. Gold makes friends out of enemies as quickly as the reverse. Like liquor. We went to the

nearest saloon and ordered a drink for everyone. I ordered a second, then I stopped suddenly and went back.

On account for whom? I asked the assayer. For him, of course, he said. Hillup's the owner. It's all in his name. Every penny, he said, slowly, like I was slow in the head, which I guess I was – just a slow-witted, trusting soul. Lefty was gone from the saloon when I got back. I caught up with him in another, buying drinks there, too. I dragged him back to A.C.C. and told him to give me my money. Sure, sure, buddy, all slurry like. And tomorrow you change the ownership? Sure, sure, buddy.

He filled out a slip, crumpled it into my hand, then made a fuss getting out the door, like he was too drunk to walk. I handed the slip to the clerk, helped Lefty out, and watched him stagger down the street. Off to see his girl, I guessed, and whoop it up.

When I went back in to get my money, the clerk had \$5,000 in cash waiting. I said what the hell is this? And clerk handed me the slip. It said \$5,000 but I wanted my whole amount, every \$25,330 of it. I rushed out to catch the rotter, but he'd already disappeared.

I'm sitting now in Lannark's cabin – in the bath – writing this, half happy, half uneasy, half angry as hell. One half too many. That's the problem. Something doesn't fit. I hate depending on him. I'm meeting Vee in an hour. Maybe she'll know what to do.

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Wednesday, July 14, 1897

*The interior walls are well on their way. Haldron blocked off a section of the dividing wall where we will put our stove between the living space, the two bedrooms and the toilet. Over top of cribbing he lined a small rectangle with field stones, and built a stub field-stone wall on three sides, open toward the living area. The other sides of the*

*stone stub walls will face the bedrooms and toilet, providing all of them heat throughout the night without having to leave our doors open. Clever idea. Clever man.*

*Garrett came in today with their gold. He was very upset about Lefty. I don't blame him, as Lefty seems to be playing with him for power and control. I used to think it was just what rich girls did to one another, but clearly not. From my experience it is best to let the aggressive ones believe they have the power, as their weakness is usually a debilitating feeble-mindedness. Their hubris will bring them down.*

*Garrett may be frightfully impulsive at times, but he is both intelligent and humble enough to take good advice when it is given, even when it comes from a woman. We talked about their arrangements and I expressed my belief that Lefty does not have a leg to stand on. Thankfully, we live in a country of Constables, Courts, Judges, and laws.*

*Willoughby joined us and we had a delightful dinner. I have three men in my life whom I dearly, dearly love: one is a grandfather to me, in whose presence I will always seek solace; one is my patient and supportive father whom I miss deeply; one slashes the air proudly with the hooves of a wild stallion, then wags his tail like a Labrador pup.*

*I told them of my loan adventures, of my low opinion of both Mr. Grizwald and the Bank, and that I would have to sell more nails and screening to finance the building. Once the building was up, I'd seek a small loan until I have a cash flow.*

*Garrett smiled and said he may have a solution. "I have \$25,000, Vee! \$26,820.50, to be exact. And I want to invest all in your hotel."*

*"I haven't even built it yet!" I said, laughing at his enthusiasm and persistence. I had to tell him that I consider my bank troubles just a bump in the road, and that I still wish to do this as much on my own as possible. He slid a little packet over to me*

*nevertheless. Inside was \$5,000, more than enough to get started. "It's just a loan," he said, "and there'll be more if you need it." We shook, arranged the terms, jotted down a note with Willoughby witnessing, and concluded our business with a toast.*

*"To spunk!" Willoughby said, as he raised his glass.*

*Lefty wandered in after dinner. The famous Lefty. I think people in town have gotten used to the pair of them, but this was my first look. I have to admit there is a strong superficial resemblance, but it would hardly fool a lover. Even hidden behind his facial hair, I could tell Lefty's tight lips would never be a pair I would want to kiss. And their eyes are a dead give-away, certainly to any woman, as Lefty's are more flighty, somewhat easily unsettled, while Garrett's are thoughtful and sometimes uncomfortably intense. (It is as if, by being afraid of revealing himself, Lefty shows you more than you care to see; Garrett, unabashed and open as he is, becomes the more inscrutable.) Their voices are similar – in the same way that two trombones are similar, I presume, but their vocabularies are distinct, Garrett's being more cultured, and carefully chosen. When I made that point, each took pride in convincingly imitating the other. Lefty used the word "however" in Garrett's bookish way, while Garrett used words of no more than three syllables and dropped every 'g' he came across. When Lefty had moved on, I mentioned how any lover would know the difference between them. I can make Garrett blush with the greatest of ease. Willoughby turned a different kind of red and excused himself.*

*Garrett and I went off to Harry Ash's where my presence seemed to cause a bit of a stir. Was it my womanly charms? Or the fact that they are packaged in pants? Garrett got mildly out of hand parading me about.*



*Fanny was there and later took me aside when she could. It seems she has a lead about some surprising finds up on the benches. Nothing is certain yet, and she points out that none of the old-timers place much stock in the benches.*

*“But then,” she said, “old-timers are full of opinions widely generalized from their experience in one or two workings. I wouldn’t discount the lead yet. I’ll let you know.” Thank you, Max, for the idea of hiring her. I smell good things on the wind.*

*Garrett and I walked home under the crepuscular sky. He pointed out Venus, saying that it is a ‘morning star’ at this time of year. Our future together is secure. I believe that, as does he. What luck to have found my love so early in life, and one who is not overanxious to satisfy his marital desires at the expense of broader experience, and who is not so insecure in his manhood so as to require lording over his mate to bolster his shortcomings. I accept fully now that had I pushed for marriage earlier, Mary would never have happened, but his ‘broader experience’, though different, is as valid as mine. We both know our day being together openly will come, and soon enough.*

---

Thursday, July 15

Dinner with Vee at a ‘Café’ last evening, the best one in town, they say. They gave BadFoot a bowl by the door.

Told her about my ownership woes. I didn’t bother about the Siwash thing because I didn’t want to spoil dinner. Get a good lawyer, she advised after she heard it all. The way she smiles seems to smooth things. You are right, I said, I’m more worried than I need be. It’s the gold, she said. Little pool of warmth and happiness is what she made of me.

White linen in the restaurant. Oak chairs. Elegant for Dawson. Willoughby joined us, and I made it my treat. Fresh rolls and butter, and a bottle of their best French Red. Caribou steaks, tender and tasty. Beats beef steak any day. One of the Woodland herds, the waiter said. Carrots and potatoes with a wine sauce. The restaurant garden is doing well, so a nice salad, too. Salads are not my favourite, but after a winter of beans, it tasted fine. Then: an upside-down fruit cake – take that, Mr. Scurvy! I wiped my mouth with a white linen napkin, tossed it on the table, ordered cigars and brandy, and Mr. and Mrs. Klondike King and friend practised being rich.

Rod and Byron went off to ‘hunt’, I guess. Not much ‘game’ in town that doesn’t cost you for drinks or \$3 for something more. They don’t seem the type to spend their money that way, particularly since they have so little, but this is a country that seems care little for rules, and custom, and even common sense, sometimes.

I tried again to invest in her hotel. At least she took a loan of \$5,000.

Afterward Willoughby went back and I took Vee to Harry Ash’s. She told me to stop strutting about like a peacock.

I went early this morning to the Mining Recorder’s, but there was no sign of Lefty, and no one had seen him. I had to pay another fiver to see the books and there’s still no change! So I went to see Norman McIver, Barrister and Solicitor. I told him how we worked for Mr. Ogilvie, how it was he who surveyed the fraction, and how he was there when we staked it. I told him how Ogilvie even took Lefty’s affidavit right at the fraction. Ogilvie knew we were working together. I showed McIver my journal, sketches and all. He wanted to know about its potential, and I told him everything. He took notes.

I asked him if he'd take that case, and he said, just a minute, as he did a few calculations. Then he said yes, but I'll need a retainer and \$30 a day plus expenses. That's expensive, I thought, so I asked him about my chances. Stories and questions and facts are free, he said, but you just asked for a legal opinion, and they cost money. The retainer was most of what I had left, as it turned out. Once he had his money, he told me that I have a decent shot. There's lots of history with Lefty all the way back to Circle City. We'll get the records for the McKenzie Fraction and for our Circle holdings. It's all 50-50. Too bad Ogilvie just left Dawson for St. Michael, he said, but we can draft a history which Ogilvie can verify when we catch up to him. That and my word should be enough. As it's not a criminal case, if it comes to trial, the judge will rule on the balance of probabilities. Piece of cake, he said. Come back tomorrow and I'll have a letter for Lefty.

While walking back, I ran into Samson and Joseph and I asked them if they were still wanting to work, and whether they could work in a mill. They said yes, but that really wanted to find a claim of their own. I told them if they came to work we'd give them \$1.00 an hour, tips on where to find good ground, and lots of time to prospect. They talked it over, and came along.

I brought the fellows over. Haldron said it wasn't my place to go making any offers, and Vee told us both to get it straight whose mill it was. I saw her point and apologized, but he didn't seem anxious to, so Vee took Haldron aside and had a powwow. He gets red, his neck does. Vee does, too, in the cheeks. I love to see her vexed, as long as it is at someone else. She brought Haldron back and told us both how it would go: Haldron will decide if he wants the two to work for him, and she will decide what deal she offers if he does. I wonder if Haldron will last. His neck stayed red for a long while.

I spent the rest of the day helping with Vee's cabin. They all have been working hard on it the past few days with Rod still selling screens. They have a good foundation, sound walls, and have finished the interior walls. Today they got started on the roof. Long day. No chance for Vee and me.

I saw her writing in a diary and asked to see it. She laughed and put it away.

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Thursday, July 15, 1897

*Garrett brought along two Indians named Samson and Joseph who worked for Lefty and him at their claim. I hired them for the mill but first had to straighten out my presumptuous men. Sam and Joe set up their tent just beside the cabin.*

*Garrett saw me writing this. It's all about you, I told him. Really? he asked. He smiled. My gullible Labrador.*

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Friday, July 16

I went looking for Lefty again. I tried Molly Larson's European Emporium, Spa, and Bakery. I'm looking for a fellow, I said. You didn't come to see my Emporium? Of course, but to find Lefty, too. Lefty? she said and laughed. Is that what he's been saying? Sort of. Well, he followed me around for a while but gave up. Charlie Hass is my man. Up-A-Creek? He's a good man, I said. He visits me. Brings food, and cooks, but says just about nothing. That's him, she said. Does he talk to you? I asked. Of course he does, she said, though that's hardly your affair. He's a fine, wise, attentive, well-mannered, well-educated man. That's a lot of things, I said. And a good looking one to boot, wouldn't you say? she asked. I wouldn't know about that, I said. Of course you would. You only

need look in a mirror. That got me embarrassed. I have a girl, I said. Of course, you do, Garrett, she said and smiled. Look about the Emporium, why don't you?

The first thing I saw was a large, polished brass telescope on a wooden tripod, engraved all along its barrel. Beside it sat a set of magnificent sundials and astrolabes. All next to an ancient, enormous globe with North and South America squished and filled with big holes and with dragons flying around the Pacific. Thick Persian carpets hung on all the walls, filled with rich blues and reds. A Buddha (I was told) with a fat belly and a fat smile sat prominently on a pedestal in the middle of the room. Around him were Chinese ivory carvings with little people climbing interweaving staircases which spiralled amongst flowering trees, all of which you could stick your finger through. Hanging with space all around it was an engraved sword which had belonged to a Japanese Samurai warrior (I was told). A little sign said that it would slice a body in two as easily as it would a melon, and asked you not to touch it. Several grandfather clocks with perfect, bevelled glass stood guard in front of it, back to back in a little circle, with half a dozen smaller clocks sprinkled about, clicking away and chiming on the quarter hour. There were paintings with horses, and castles, and angels, and Greek temples (I think), with nude ladies (having nice breasts) and nude men (having small uncircumcised attachments). An old trunk with wrought iron fasteners squatted in a corner between a pair of big, upholstered chairs with feet made of claws on little globes. At the front of the room was a table with marquetry top (I was told), which was elegant beyond words; I counted eight kinds of wood on it from the colours. There were brass baths with high backs perched on lions' feet, draped with furs of muskrat, fox, polar bear. One flying eagle swooped toward the front door, made of solid gold, whole damn thing, it looked

like, though it couldn't have been because it would have collapsed under its own weight. And candle holders, chandeliers, crystal ware, silverware china pitchers, and bevelled mirrors sprinkled about everywhere. But no prices. Not one damned price tag.

Molly came back and I asked her why? She smiled and said if I had to ask, then this was not the store for me. Generally I eye the customer, she said, and judge what he can afford. Then I quote a tailor-made price. My chattels are inexpensive at any price, my customers say. My last one bought a four poster bed made of mahogany and Brazil wood, with embroidered curtains, silk sheets and pillow covers for his wife. It seems she's tired of spruce. He'll have to widen the door just to get it in, but does he care? He bought so much from me I threw in a brass bath, a large china pitcher, bars of scented soap, and some thick towels. All for \$3500.

I want that sword, I said, pointing. Very good taste, she said. It is rumoured to have belonged to Takeda Nobushige, the younger brother of Takeda Shingen, a famous warlord. He died at the fourth battle of Kawanakajima in 1561. Whatever the case it is a fine sword. Will you hold it for me? I asked. Perhaps, she said, and sat me down in one of the chairs looking west out her front window. She told me to drink my coffee and relax, and handed me a plate of English muffins, and she went to finish the sale of one of the grandfather clocks. She told me later that he was one of the poorer miners on Eldorado so she didn't charge him much.

She floated about the room in a dress that swung like a bell, with a long blonde hair curving down across her forehead, her gleeful eyes and ampleness. She has a smile that makes you feel at home, then makes you think of other things, under all that finery, and my thoughts turned to Vee.

Then a fellow appeared through the door at the very back marked “SPA”. It was the same Gregory, with the same red cheeks and sweat on his forehead. Molly took his canvas bag. Got a bear in there, Gregory? she asked, holding her nose. Must be a routine they have. I’ll be back tomorrow, he called back. You’ll melt away, Gregory, she said, but I have a great ceramic tub I’ll catch you in. I’ll buy it tomorrow, he said, and laughed.

Good coffee? she asked. The best, Molly. Everything in here is, she said. Like you, I said. Careful, she said, smiling, I have a man already.

A couple of fellows took the grandfather clock out through the front door. Molly excused herself and went to a ledger and wrote notes. I wandered close to peek. She wrote down not just the price, but the buyer’s name, claim, home address, the item, identification marks, maker, the price, everything. You are very thorough, I said. They will need me in the end, she said, and smiled. What do you mean? I asked. Have another muffin, she said, and went off to sell a green and blue cockatoo.

I went by McIver’s. He said the letter for Lefty will be ready tomorrow morning.

I helped sod Vee’s roof. Fine looking cabin. What about us? I asked. We’ll have our moments, she said. Incentive to get married and build our own, don’t you think? I nodded. Moving day tomorrow. Heading back to the fraction in the morning.

Though I’m looking forward to another clean-up and seeing how the new engine is helping us drift, I know I’ll miss my Vee.

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Friday, July 16, 1897

*BadFoot hauled more sod for our roof today than all of us put together. He drops his hind quarters like a draft horse, spreads his front legs, and powers forward, his beautiful, puffy white tail wagging throughout. It’s impossible not to love him.*

*I sat on the porch under the big overhang, shaded from the sun, and joked with the men. Even Haldron managed a smile or two between his rat-tat-tat sentences. Samson and Joseph held back a bit, but Willoughby got them smiling, too, in no time. Garrett could not stop talking about Molly Larson and her Emporium and some samurai sword he saw there. While he went on, and on, and on, Samson carved a “sword” for him from a branch and presented it to him, at which time Garrett leapt up and gave us a hilarious demonstration of his sword skills. Life can be such a delight.*

*When the breeze died, the mosquitoes drove us in from the porch. Byron brought dinner over from the Lannark cabin, bless his heart, and we feasted on the floor of our new abode.*

*When we had a minute alone, Garrett said he was surprised to find out that Molly was not Lefty’s lady friend, although from knowing Molly and hearing about Lefty, that doesn’t surprise me a bit.*

*Tomorrow we break out some of our supplies in the warehouse. I can’t wait.*

*Garrett is off in the morning. He’s snoring in the front room. I miss him already.*

---

*Saturday, July 17, 1897*

*We took the day to move into our new cabin and get our new lives in order. I am filled with excitement and optimism, just like Garrett.*

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*Sunday, July 18, 1897*

*We cleared at the mill site and stacked wood for construction. A couple of mules pulled the stumps. We’ll concentrate on leveling the site and preparing to build a roof*



*and supports – tentatively, of course, until Haldron shows up tomorrow. As we will get no relief from mosquitoes at any rate, we thought that leaving the structure open, protected only from the rain, would give us the best breeze and working conditions. Once we have started turning profits, we can close it in for the candleworks. We might turn from making screens – which won't be in high demand in winter, of course – to some other sort of furnishing. Haldron will guide us there.*

---

*Monday, July 19, 1897*

*Haldron showed up early, which was expected, but had a tantrum, which wasn't. What are you doing? I am the foreman of this mill. Et cetera, et cetera. We all stood by and let him blow off steam for a bit, and then I just said that we had done what had to be done anyway, and that we were waiting for him to finalize the plans. His neck stayed red for an hour before he calmed down. In the end he announced that we would be building the roof first and leaving the sides until later. He said he wanted the engine here – and he stamped out a spot on the ground – and the saw over here and a work bench here, and so forth. It was close to what we had laid out in our rough plans but it did him as much good to hold the reins as it did us to have him settle down. We were wrapping up for the day when Garrett came walking up.*

*Although he was now clean-shaven, I have never seen him look so ghastly! He was wearing clothes which don't seem to be his. He was sweating and looked exhausted. His face was drawn, and his eyes were bloodshot. He must not have slept since I last saw him on Saturday morning. I could not have hidden my horror well because he gave me*

*the completely unconvincing smile of someone who was about to deliver a dire message about a loved one.*

*I thought writing this would help. It did, marginally, until I started describing Garrett. I have to go and walk it off.*

## Chapter 12 I'm Done, Now.

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Sunday, July 18, 1897

Hell on earth! I'm exhausted. When I finish this, I'll have to keep these journals locked away, and pray no one else ever reads them.

As I got back from town, I saw Max wandering about, but not Lefty. I figured he must be mucking out, getting ready for the next steaming, so I went down to see.

Our new engine had mostly ashes in the fire box, though it was still warm to the touch. The steam line led under the doors, the padlock hung loose, but the door was bolted from the inside. When I couldn't get an answer, I went back to the cabin and waited – two hours – without a sign.

Finally I axed in the small door to the workings where Lefty had to be. I had only candle light after a few yards. Water dripped and ran steadily, pooling on the floor. The walls and roof looked unstable as hell – the idiot didn't shore up the diggings as he went.

BadFoot started sniffing about, and then fifty feet or so in I saw where the roof had collapsed and I could make out Lefty's boots. The toes were pointed into the ground and the soles were covered in wet muck, reflecting the candle-light. They had dug little holes in the ground, after a struggle, I feared. As I got closer I saw gravel covering his body from the shoulder blades up. The bugger had worn my buckskin again!

I felt his ankle. He was gone. Long gone.

The rubble that covered his head blocked the drift beyond. A single big boulder lay next to him. It had knocked him out cold, I figure, and rolled away. His arms were

stretched out to the side, like a cross, ironically, and his fingertips were raw where they had been clawing at the ground. If he had been trying to free himself, his hands would have been by his head, pushing and scraping, but there was no sign of that. So it was clear he had been convulsing, fitfully working his toes and fingers for a while, like Nevada's coyote. Better that than being conscious, face buried, mouth filled with pebbles and mud, air cut off, thrashing about. I would have preferred if he'd had a few last moments to think. Yet even then, I wager his thoughts would not have turned to me. There would have been no last minute remorse. And he would not have cursed his own stupidity, but just the boulder for being what it is.

The steam line disappeared under his arm and under the rubble, and I figure the generator must have worked for some time, after the boulder did him in. I set the candle off to the side, gripped his feet and inched him back slowly. The steam had cooked his head like a ham, wrinkly and puffy and white as a ghost. Strips of skin led back under the gravel from what been his face. Made me sick as a dog.

I and sat outside for a long time. Among the sadness, shock, regret, fear, and anger, it was anger that won, going away.

I went to the cabin, but I couldn't eat, and couldn't rest. I paced and talked to the walls, cursing and spitting. Half the time I swore at Lefty for being a fool, for not shoring up like any good miner would, and the other half I swore at myself for having taken him on. Briefly, I had thoughts about his parents and how they might take it. Then it dawned on me suddenly. A couple of years with him yet I didn't much care that he was lying there dead, didn't care at all, in fact. He had bloody well used me. He had chipped away at our friendship, if we ever had such a thing. He took me for granted. Not one damned

nugget belonged to me. It will all go to the widow whom I'd never met and for whom he never had one kind word. He left everything behind, and left me nothing.

When I finally lay down. BadFoot came over and lay down, too. My thoughts raced. Now I'd have to fight for my ownership in front of a court. There's no written agreement. What would his family do? Why would they give a damn? From what Lefty had said about them, they are just a bunch of scoundrels and horse thieves, and if they ever got wind of Lefty's gold, I could be worse than poor.

Having solved nothing, I went back down and turned him over. Why, I do not know. His dried blood had soaked into the front of my buckskin (damn him!). He was stiff as a board. Like a wooden doll. Rigor mortis. His whole face was skinned and lifted from the bone, leaving just white skull and jawbone, and grimacing teeth, and little strings of muscle, smeared with blood. Half his beard was left under his chin, and by his ears, and he had lidless eyes – blood-shot, blood-smeared, staring at the ceiling. I swear his eyes were about to turn and fix me and accuse me of what I don't know, so I got the hell out.

I threw half the cabin's contents at the walls. I ripped out what was still attached, and threw more. I kicked, yelled, swore, and punched the door. My knuckles were cut and bleeding. I stopped, exhausted, and collapsed. I whimpered, I'm ashamed to record. And then I became doubly angry that I had. All this time BadFoot stayed cowering outside.

It was evening before I was spent. Mindlessly, I uncovered my mattress from the pile of rubble and crawled onto it. Finally, when I called for BadFoot and he sensed it was safe, he came over, belly on the ground, looking at me, as if I were someone he had never seen. He was greatly relieved to know that I still loved him, and we drifted off.

I had a nightmare. Lefty crawled through the drift, dragging his flopping feet after him, as they were held on only by a few cloth strips, both his legs having been cut through at the shin. He left trails of maggots, white and wriggling. His wife and three kids followed, moaning and crawling out of the darkness. None had faces. Just bloody white balls for eyes. They collapsed like rag dolls before me, and one by one, their eyeballs rolled out and started pulsing and nosing around, and burrowing into the dump, looking for something. They were after nuggets. They sucked them from the gravel bed, and engulfed them, and became bigger and bigger – bigger than human heads, but all veiny and red. They moved like snails, sticking out lobes of flesh to grip and drag themselves along. And they left trails of maggots, too, in the manner of dreams, where everything is self-evident. Then, by the time they were double the size of heads, they stopped, and pivoted slowly, and looked at me. Then they looked at one another as if to communicate, and started inching my way. There was only a dozen at first, nothing I couldn't handle with the sharp corner of my shovel, but then their maggoty progeny turned to eyeballs, too, and began massing toward me and covering me. They wriggled into every orifice, ears, nose, mouth, like blackflies do, with me in a fit, spitting and whipping my head about. Having consumed the gold in the drift, they were after the nuggets I had stuffed in my pockets, so I emptied them onto the ground and kicked them in their direction, but the gold wouldn't stop coming and this slowed them only for so long as it took to swallow, in any event. Then they began again, gazes fixed on me, leaping now like hoppers, relentlessly, making nauseating squishing noises whenever they landed, more and more rapacious until they swarmed me and I could feel their slime on my face and taste salt and bile in the back of my throat.

I awoke in the middle of the night with a start, my shirt dank with sweat and my pillow soaked. I staggered about like a crazed idiot, falling over the mess of the cabin, cracking my head in the process, and in my delirium, I forced myself to go back down into the drift, perhaps to make sure he was still dead. BadFoot wouldn't come in.

I brought a long stick, figuring that perhaps I wouldn't dream about it if the corpse looked more like Lefty than a ghoul. Who knows the mind of a madman? Not the madman. All and anything is reasonable. My madness was an island of dreamy logic, perfectly sensible within itself, but set adrift from the continent of common sense.

I stood as far away as the stick would allow, in the heavy shadows and orange candlelight, working to untwist the grisly flaps of skin that used to be his face, nudging them back over his skull in stages, but I could not get them to sit properly. The edges were wrinkled and wouldn't match; clumps of hair congealed with blood, on his chin and over the top of his head, made a mess of it. Gruesome. Unrecognisable. I'll never, never forget. I yelled at him, Leave me alone! and I leapt up and down, and whipped his skull with the stick as if to beat some sense into it, or beat it into submission, or to beat back the evil that rose from it like noxious fumes and snaking wisps, I do not know. Then I felt something behind me, creeping toward me out of the blackness of the drift, like a cold, insubstantial hand, and I turned to ward it off, slashing and whistling the stick, shrieking in panic. Nothing materialised. I felt like an imbecile. But then it came again, from Lefty's side, and I turned and saw that hideousness confusion of boiled, twisted flesh, blood, hair and bone that used to be his face. My stomach turned as again I smelled the sickly sweet, repulsive stench. And I got sick.

I ran out, shivering from the cold and my wet shirt. A stupid thing to do, I thought, trying to fix his face like that. Pointless. Who cares? You are such a FOOL, McKenzie, I screamed to the cabin walls. I spat it out and sent poor BadFoot reeling. When I punched the door and threw things about again, he wound himself into a tight circle just outside the cabin door, suffering a pathetic, terrible uncertainty.

Finally, when I found no satisfaction, when I had exhausted my madness, I again tossed off whatever had landed on my bed: pieces of table, a smashed chair Lefty built, clothing, pots. I lay down, quiet, shivering, staring at the underside of my roof. BadFoot came back again, after a time; he put his head on my chest and we fell asleep.

Sometime mid-morning today, Sunday, I got up, dazed, with no idea what to do. I figured if I only got to town someone would help me. Vee would. Willoughby would. Maybe McIver would. And I figured I'd take as much of the gold as I could, to leave it with Vee, but there was none left in the cabin.

The only thought that came to me then was to get Lefty squared away, and head in, so I covered him with a blanket, found some pants under the rubble of the cabin – Lefty's denims were the only clean ones. My buckskin was still on Lefty, but I would never again wear it, anyway, so I used his coat.

Starting to walk cleared my head marginally and got me thinking. Should I jump his claim? Because of abandonment? So I stopped and went back, and found my Placer Mining Regs, parts of which I had underlined.

*21. A claim shall be deemed to be abandoned and open to occupation  
and entry by any person when the same shall have remained  
unworked on working days by the grantee thereof or by some person*



*on his behalf for the space of seventy-two hours, unless sickness or  
other reasonable cause be shown to the satisfaction of the Gold  
Commissioner...*

I could stop working, I thought on the way to town, wait for a few days, then jump it, given that the sole owner had died and would not have worked it. Max might jump it first, though – or have one of his flunkies do it. And it might look bloody suspicious as it might get people thinking I did him in. (Lord knows it has occurred to me.)

And in front of the Commissioner their damned lawyer would surely ask, Mr. McKenzie, did you never think of doing him in, as you fellows say? So I'd have to ask, Honestly? And the Commissioner would say, You are under oath. Then, I'd have to say, Why, then, yes, of course, I thought of doing him in, and more than once. Any man would in my circumstances. He hoarded all my gold. And their damned lawyer would say something like I seeeeee, in a long drawn-out way, emphasising it theatrically, his head cocked, his eyebrows raised, looking over his spectacles. And then he would ask, pausing for emphasis, Your Honour, is not being... *murdered*... reasonable cause for not working one's claim? enunciating the word "murdered" and pronouncing it with a subtle and strange prolongation of the Rs so as to float the word to the surface of everyone's imagination, like a dead body on the Yukon River. The Commissioner would look at me with squinty eyes, imagining me bludgeoning Lefty in the darkness of the drift, and prying loose the unstable sediments from the ceiling to hide my handiwork. So I would have to smile casually and say, But why would I be that stupid? with my lawyer saying, Why indeed? No intelligent man would commit a crime in such an incriminating manner. And the Commissioner, having had his experience with so-called intelligent and

reasonable men would just continue squinting at me and decide against me in the end, reflecting rightfully, in slow and deliberate language: Madness and Intelligence are widely known to be frequent Bedfellows.

As I walked, such absurdities paraded through my head until, suddenly, I came across a miner who had paused on the trail, bent over. I asked if he were in distress, but he was just getting out some dried beef and a can of fruit salad. He had a huge smile on his face – a fearless, open smile that warmed me right up. Just having some lunch and looking at this, he said, turning to gaze down Bonanza toward the Klondike, the ant flats of Dawson and Louse Town, the hills beyond, and the Yukon River disappearing north, with its determined sternwheelers and their trails of troubled, white water. He handed me some jerky and I sat on a rock beside him, chewing, remembering I hadn't eaten since the day before. Blue sky, he said, and enough breeze on your face to suppress the flies. And drifting clouds which all the gold in the world couldn't buy, he said as he looked up, allowing the world to wash over him. You must be a rich man to be so happy, I said. Oh no, he said. Just a moiler. Like you, I reckon, grubbin' and diggin' away. But does it matter, in the face of this? he asked, as he pointed to the waving magenta fireweed on the hills, the sudden curl of a Red-tail hawk. We watched it dive into the trees. When it didn't come up again, he said, Rabbit, you think? Or a mouse? I reckon, I said. Then after a minute to listen to the breeze come and go, smiling at me, he asked, Are you a rabbit, or a hawk? Who wouldn't want to be a hawk? I asked, worried I was a rabbit. He handed me the can of fruit salad and encouraged me to have a spoonful or two. I suppose, he said, smiling. But as I reached for the can, he looked at my knuckles, all mauled and raw from punching things, and his smile died. Forgive me for saying this, friend, because I do not

know you. But those frenzied folk down there in Dawson, and those fellows up there crawling all over the creeks are all crazed with The Fever. They run around like blind dogs in a slaughterhouse. But it's only gold, you know. It is *only* gold. And gold does not taste like that, he said, nodding toward the can.

A sigh escaped me. How true! I said, and slid off onto the ground to lean against the rock. Yes, I said, it is only gold, isn't it? We lingered in the silence, feeling the sun's rejuvenation, tasting sugar from a can and drinking in the wilderness, breathing air so clean a person might wonder if it was there at all except for the hot, dusty perfume of spruce. The breeze whispered past us and chattered through the aspens, and somewhere a raven rattled and clunked. On the other hand, he said, chuckling, breaking the spell, Who wouldn't want a ton of it? I suppose, I said, I wouldn't mind. And we both laughed.

Clear as crystal, the whole thing became: For the love of God, McKenzie just keep your head. Don't be a blind dog running about the slaughterhouse. Get the Mounties, claim your rights, fight if need be, and take your chances. All will be right in the end. A good plan. A sensible plan. The right plan.

And suddenly I felt so much better. I asked him if he was on his way to Dawson, and if he wouldn't mind sending a Constable to our cabin on the Hillup Fraction, above on Eldorado. Tell him there's been a mining accident, I said. I'm sorry to hear that, he said. We shook hands, with him being cautious not to squeeze too hard, having seen my hands. You are a good man, he said. It's in your eyes. I thanked him and he carried on his way. He was my saviour and I never told him so, and I didn't get his name.

Walking back, I continued to reassure myself. *It is only gold, you know*, I said to BadFoot. He nodded wisely. We had something to eat, fed, and I made up to BadFoot.

Bless him. It's so easy to do. I cleaned up a little, fired up the stove, and washed up. Then I shaved myself clean, face-rubbing, baby-skin clean. Never again do I want to see that beard in a mirror. You are not a bad-looking man, McKenzie, I admit I thought, when you spruce up. Save those red eyes.

Things are in hand. One more piece of bacon for BadFoot. Not enough? Okay, Mr. Sundog. Two. Enough, enough. Stop licking my finger and go to bed.

Written in the middle of the night

It took me a very long time to get to sleep. Despite everything yesterday, I started arguing with myself. Then Lefty appeared again in my dreams. I choked him until he evaporated, and things were fine after that.

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Monday, July 19 (written Tuesday, July 20)

I woke up early with BadFoot nuzzling me. North West Mounted Police Staff Sergeant Mallard filled my little doorway. I tried to force some daylight into my morning fog, to make out shapes, to make sense out of yesterday.

Good morning, he said. I am Mallard, Staff Sergeant Mallard. I opened my mouth to say, I know, we met; you don't recognize me because I just shaved clean. But it took too long to haul the words up from the chamber where they were suspended, tumbling slowly in some thick sludge. I'm here to investigate a death, he said. And you are? he asked.

Half-dead, I said, but with my mouth still not working, who knows what it sounded like. I walked outside, still in my union suit, to my wash basin, which was half-full of water from an overnight rain. I threw water on my face and was about to say my name

when he said, from behind me, Alright, we'll get to that in a minute. For now, take me to the body. Without thinking or speaking I pointed toward the workings, pulled on some overalls and grabbed a candle.

I told him what happened in grunts, and gestures, and short, slurry sentences that stumbled from fact to fact like a drunk in a back-street maze, how I had found the body, what I guessed about the rock falling on his head, the drift collapsing because of all the steam, and the fact that he didn't shore up as any good miner would. It probably went something like: partner dead, rock on head, steam pssssst, cave in buchhhhh (with hand gesturing), idjut no shoring up – with a few other words thrown in. Surprisingly, he understood everything.

When we got to a few yards from the body, we stopped to look things over. He (it) was still as a gruesome sight as you'd ever want to see, with his top half ending in that nightmare of a mangle that used to be a face.

The Staff Sergeant was all business. He pointed at the spot on the boulder next to him where there was a bit of flesh with a few head hairs sticking out of it like a brute's facial mole, and nodded. What was the poor fellow's name, then?

I looked up at him, holding the candle in the air to get a better look at Lefty. I looked at the strips of flesh, and the dark, red-brown clots of hair where the beard used to be. And I looked back at Mallard, a big fellow, with a massive moustache peppered with bits of grey, under a husky, volcanic nose. I could see no sign of an upper lip – until he talked – and for whatever reason, I took note of it, and then asked myself why on earth would that matter in the face of all this, all the while staring at his moustache like an oaf. So he said again, Sir. The poor fellow's name?

So I opened my mouth and what we heard was a disembodied voice, as if there were a ghoul speaking, sounding only vaguely like me, muffled and hollow and as slow as molasses, like a wounded bear growling underwater. Mallard leaned his head forward and turned an ear slightly while he stared at my lips to grasp better what was coming out.

McKenzie, is what came out. McKenzie. And then, sounding more intelligible suddenly, I said, You wouldn't know it from looking at him, but that's Garrett McKenzie, Francis Garrett McKenzie, lying there, face in ruins... Poor sod.

Did it come from the Bowels of hell? Was it a message from Lefty to finish the job? Or my own personal madman again? Or maybe it was just me, speaking my mind before I was truly awake, being angry and spiteful because things were not the way they ought to have been. But who knows, truthfully, why we do what we do? The mind is a mystery to itself. All I know is that the voice sounded more like someone else's, and I bloody well just listened to it coming out and go about its dirty business. It burst and spewed like seepage from a wound, or a lanced boil.

Francis Garrett McKenzie, he repeated slowly, a syllable at a time, asking about the double Rs and double Ts and whether it was McK or Mack, writing in his notebook. Now that's a shame. And you are? I paused for a second, as one would having climbed a great hill, standing at the peak of irreversibility, where the road suddenly falls away in both directions, where a nudge turns into a plunge. Then the nudge came and I said, Hillup, Lefty Hillup. And how do you spell Hillup, there Lefty? Just like it sounds, I said, up a hill, and down again.

And that was that. The world came into focus. I looked at Mallard, massive in his crimson and blue, and shiny brass buttons, all humourless and official, on his two square

and black-booted feet. The walking and talking Law. Eyes steady. Brown, with their crow's feet splaying out and his layers of experience. Maybe not this, though, I thought. Maybe he's not experienced in the likes of this.

And it was then, I remember, looking at those unflinching eyes, that my stomach turned and twisted and wrung itself as I suddenly knew it was all a huge mistake. I knew that for sure, and I thought, Bloody hell! I'm done, now, aren't I?

## Chapter 13 What a Dreadful Way to Die.

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Monday, July 19, continued (written Tuesday, July 20)

I excused myself and went to the cabin for our oil lamp. I thought about what I'd just done. Thought about confessing, saying, Forgive me, you must think me mad. It was just a joke, a cruel and stupid joke. I've had a rotten couple of days. I don't know what I was saying. Perhaps it was just me, Garrett, wishing I were dead.

But that's a madman's joke, and madmen get taken away. I've heard the reports. Who told me? The Constable who dealt with the poor fellow who botched his suicide. He later told me what the doctor wrote:

*I have the honour to report to you that Eldon Warfield, now being held at the hospital, is as far as I can make out at the present of unsound mind. I would like to have him under observation for a few days longer before finally pronouncing him insane.*

I finally pronounce F. G. McKenzie delusional, to wit: a madman. As such, for his own and society's safety, he needs to be confined... etc., etc.

Ride it out, I told myself. At least for a bit. If Mallard concludes it's an accident, no one will care much. I'll deal with Lefty's family later. So I got the lamp, then all the way back I practised Lefty's style of talking. Bit of a drawl, not too much. And street talk. I practised his walk, too. Low. Slithery, kind of, sticking your feet out, and leaning back. I lean into my step. I wondered why, briefly.



I found Staff Sergeant looking about with the candle, water dripping all around him from the ceiling of the drift. He couldn't get past the collapse because it filled the tunnel almost to the top. What a dreadful way to die, he said, taking the oil lamp from me. Looks as though the ceiling collapsed on him, just like you said. He held up the lamp and pointed at the ceiling, at the gaping hole where the boulder dropped from. Only hole like it, he said. It look like a crater in the moon, but upside down, and ringed with water drops. (Observant fellow, I thought.) His head was right here? he asked, and pointed to the spot on the floor of the drift where I pulled him from. Yep. He lifted the skin off Lefty's skull with a pencil. There's another crater there, too, he said, a little one. He was talking about his skull, where it was cracked in. Yep, he said, agreeing with some thought he'd had, and lay the skin down carefully. He wiped the pencil, made notes, and stood right under the hole, looking up, running it through his mind, I could see, and pretending to fall forward as Lefty must have done, to see where Lefty's head would have landed, before I pulled him out. Yep, he said, again, That makes sense.

He looked around at the ground. You moved him? he asked. I pulled him out and turned him over, I said, thinking him still alive. Awful sight he was. Face boiled by our steam generator. I left him there; I didn't touch him after that. Good thing, he said. He undid Lefty's clothing (my buckskin!) so he could see his chest. It looked dark, strangely dark, darker than the strips of skin from his face. But the skin over his ribs, on his sides, and on his back was white as snow. Post-mortem lividity, he said. What? Pooling of the blood. Goes down, of course. That tells me he was lying on his face for some time, a few hours or more. You must know a lot about these things, I said. Yes, he said. We get used

to what to look for. A lot of accidents? I asked him. A lot of death. Disease, accidents, and otherwise. So, Lefty, will you give me your full Christian name, please?

Lefty Hillup, I said, as he had caught me by surprise with his sudden turn. No, I mean your Christian name, or names, he said. Lord help me, I couldn't remember! Never called him anything but Lefty, and I panicked. Probably for only a second, though it seemed longer, much longer, as a strange electricity blossomed in my body. His eyebrows started bunching up. What did you ask me, Sergeant? I had to ask, stalling. Then, suddenly, before he could repeat the question, I blurted out, Leland. Sorry, this whole thing is very upsetting. It's alright, sir, he said, I understand. Your middle name, then Leland?

Yes, I said, like an idiot. I just looked at him again, and then "Idiot" is what I almost said, Leland Idiot Hillup. Oliver is what I did say, thank heaven. Stupid thoughts, though, thinking of calling myself Idiot, then saying thank heaven as if heaven would care to save an idiot who's digging himself an idiot's grave. Leland Oliver Hillup, he repeated. Yep, is all I said. Mind a like a hurricane, thoughts flinging themselves wildly about.

And how did he feel when you turned him over? Pardon me? What kind of a question is that? I thought. I mean, was he stiff when you turned him? Stiff like a board, I said. Ah ha, rigor, he said, and made a note. Yes, I said, rigor. He reached over and moved one of Lefty's feet. He wiggled it back and forth. Rigor's dissipating now, he said.

When do you figure he died? he asked. I was working on the sluices there when he got back from town on Saturday mid-day. He went straight down and fired up the engine, and started in the drift.

I see, he said, slowly. Most fellows are working on their clean-ups now, he said. In fact, most are finished working their winter diggings. I see your dump is still pretty big. Tell me, why do you think he would work in the drift when the clean-up needs doing? No idea, I said. McKenzie was a bit of an odd duck. Could never tell with him, I said. And the door, he asked, by the opening? Why is there one? And why is it broken in? There you go, I said. An odd duck. He built the door so he could drift in private. Locked himself in. I had to smash it in when the engine ran out of steam and he didn't come out. Odd, he said, nodding. Odd indeed, I said, and he made more notes.

By then, the word was out about the accident. The curious came to look from the top of the cut. Max, too. He came down and introduced himself as Max to the Sergeant. Lefty Hillup, I said and took Max's hand. He took a close look at me, with squinty eyes. Have you just shaved, then? he asked. Yep, sure did. Your nose looks like it didn't suffer. I thought I had a better punch, he said. Oh, it still hurts somethin' fierce, I said, you can count on that, rubbing it gingerly. Max looked through the door. Is that McKenzie lying there, then? he asked the Staff Sergeant, pointing at the corpse. Yes, sir, that seems to be McKenzie. Max backed off, suddenly seeming puzzled. He looked at me in an uncanny way, then looked at the Staff Sergeant, made a noise like a bear's snort, and walked into the drift. Mallard went with him. I didn't.

Both came out after a minute. Max left. He stopped by Ainsworth, his foreman, and they talked feverishly. Ainsworth pointed at me. Lord, how can it be over so soon? I asked myself. What does Max know? I felt I was falling back into the hurricane. Confess! my mind yelled. But I held on. First I'll transfer ownership. Then I'll confess, but maybe only to Lefty's family. By then I could get Ogilvie's testimony and have my case laid out.

If they're smart they'll be happy with half right away rather than less than half after a long court battle. Not one else need know.

Staff Sergeant called up and asked Max if he'd seen Garrett coming back from town or anyone working the sluices. I didn't see anyone at the sluices, he said, but I saw McKenzie and his dog coming back from town, shortly after noon, I would estimate. Anyone else see anything? the Sergeant asked, looking at the other fellows that had gathered. They all shook their heads. Thank you very much, he said, and took notes.

Forgive me, Mr. Hillup, he said, but tell me about your arrangement with the deceased, meaning ownership, and the like. I told him how the claim was in my name only. I see, he said. But we shook on 50-50, I said. You'll be changing the ownership records then? he asked. Yes, sir, sure will, I said, seeing where he was headed. Wouldn't want to see McKenzie's folks cut out.

Alright, he said to me, you will need to come to town. Me? You'll need to swear an affidavit, identifying him. Is that necessary? I asked, low, under my breath. Yes, sir, otherwise we can't notify McKenzie's family.

No need for you to do that, I said, panicking again. I'll write them myself. Yes, that is a good idea. But I'm afraid I'll have to send them official notice. Tidy things up, you see. I'll be in next week, I said, stalling. I'm sorry, sir, we should do it right away and get him in the ground where he belongs. But I'll be back tomorrow with the undertaker to examine him, so I could bring the paperwork with me, how is that? Unless there's another who knows him well enough to identify him, officially, he said loudly, and looked up in the direction of the miners still there, talking. But they got all shifty on their feet and wandered away. Just you, then, sir. Give us a hand to cover him up. You just

going to leave him? I asked. Yes, he said. It's cool down here, and it's just until I have someone look at him. Then we'll do him up as best we can. I figure it was just an accidental, I said. We'll get another opinion, shall we? he said, and took more notes. He looked at the body again, and lifted up Lefty's left hand. Was McKenzie married, Lefty?

Stomach dropped out. Lefty? he had to ask again. Oh, the ring you mean? I said. No, McKenzie wasn't hitched. An engagement ring, he called it. That so? he said. Odd. Looks more like a wedding ring, don't you think? He looked carefully at the ring, which had some sort of inscription I never noticed it was so finely engraved, then wrote a note. Where was McKenzie from, do you know? he asked. Eastern Canada, I recall. A Canuck. Ahh, he said. And you, Lefty? I stalled for a second. Omaha, I said. There's a Waterloo just north of Omaha, he said. It's strange, isn't it, he said, that I'd remember that? Must be the name, I said. That, he said, and the tenth grader from Nevada who came to our school. He thought it was Napoleon's Waterloo, and Mallard laughed. So, is there one in Eastern Canada, too? he asked. I reckon there must be Waterloos all over, I said, not being able to think. Probably are, he said, scrunching up his mouth and nodding.

Is his lady up here or down south in Eastern Canada? he asked. Again I stood there like an idiot, staring at him. Oh, Jesus, oh, Jesus, oh, Jesus – only thing that went through my head – that and the thought that he must be coming to the conclusion by now either that something is fishy or that I (as Lefty) am dangerously close to being a village idiot.

Lefty? You don't mind me calling you Lefty, by the way? No, Sergeant, don't mind. So, Lefty, he said again, where can I find McKenzie's lady? Couldn't tell him she was down south. He would ask for a name and address. What a muck up! Lord help me.

I think her name is Viola Baker, I said, finally. Ahh, yes, he said. The hotel lady with the grey-blue eyes. I guess I should ask her to identify the remains, poor woman, he said, and thanked me. I'm sorry for your loss, he said, and turned to go. I couldn't let him ask Vee to look at Lefty, so I called after him. Might be better for me to tell her. Would you, Lefty? It may come as less of a shock from you. It's never easy to hear a law man say to you, "I have some bad news about your fiancé." I don't know her too good, I said, but I'll just tidy up here a bit and come to town. I'll see her later, then, he said, and arrange for her to identify the remains.

That is far too gruesome a sight, I said. It will distress her. And he looked at me, quizzically, without saying anything but still making notes. Then my face got flush and hot as I realised what it was, surely: Lefty never talked that way – it is far too bookish. Does he know that? Can he remember that from our short conversation in Dawson? Was that one of the notes he made about me? So as a desperate afterthought, talking as much like Lefty as I could, I added, As my poor buddy woulda said. It'll throw 'er for sure. Ain't my word enough? But he still just looked at me. And then I realised he'd never met Lefty as far as I knew, so maybe he didn't know that, after all. And my mind went amok. I'm not a prevaricator! I can't think that quickly! I felt like yelling at him. Bloody hell! Give a fellow a chance to think it through, to make things up!

But he just thought for a minute, and said, Righto. And I wanted to ask, Does that mean you believe me? But of course, I couldn't. That's the hell of an honest man trying to lie, right there. Not knowing. How the hell can we know? We don't do it.

But I'll have ask her about the ring, he said. And don't take offence, Lefty, but I'll have to talk to her first. You know, for appearances. It wouldn't be right me calling this

an accident investigation, accepting your identification, and then letting you talk to her first. Suspicious minds. You see what I mean.

I just said, Sure. Fine, he said. Now let's go take a look around the cabin, shall we?

For the life of me, couldn't remember where I'd put my journal. This. It would be awkward if he found it. Stories about Lefty and Omaha. Stories in here about Vee and me in New York, in Quebec, in Vermont. Nothing in it about us and Waterloo – whatever that Waterloo thing was about.

Walking up to the cabin, he said, You seem a different person. I didn't recognise you without your beard. It must be the combination, he said, Being sober and having no beard. I had to ask what he meant, starting to panic. That night you spent with us in the barracks, you were a little worse for the wear, as I recall, he said. Guess I was a bit roostered, I said, thinking he did know Lefty after all, and here it comes! More than a bit, he said. You were soused. And belligerent. He laughed, recalling that night, and said, You called me Sergeant Dullard all night. But you seem like a nice enough fellow, now. It seems to do you good to stay away from the drink, if I may be so bold as to say. Been doing that, I said. That's good, he said. Whiskey is quicksand. You've seen quicksand? I asked, being greatly relieved and wanting to shift the topic. Well, no, he said. Like muskeg, then, he said, How's that? Comes from a bog – the best whiskey does – and returns you there, he said, smiling, pleased with his cleverness. Keep clear of the bog, Lefty, he said. I had to pretend not to get it because Lefty didn't know Scotch from Sherry, though he would have said, he didn't know Scotch from piss.

BadFoot jumped all over me when we came out of the drift. Your dog, too, then, Lefty? A fine looking malamute. Max mentioned that he was McKenzie's. What's his

name? BadFoot. Ahh, he said, as he looked down at BadFoot's scar. Observant bugger. They are going to be the death of me, I thought, the two of them. You can't teach an investigator to stop looking, and you can't teach a dog to lie. He was McKenzie's, I said, but took to me. I see, he said. They never lie, do they, Lefty? I beg your pardon, Sergeant. Dogs, he said, they never lie. It was like he was reading my bloody mind!

Be like BadFoot, I thought, suddenly. Charm him.

The drink balled up my memory, I said. Can't remember a damn thing about that night in town, truth be told. Don't mean to be rude. I'm just an Oki. Oh, he said, I thought you were from Nevada. Same thing, I said. Oh, is that so? he said, and made a note. Good work, McKenzie! I yelled at myself inside. Lefty was from Nebraska. Omaha, Nebraska. Not Nevada. And not Oklahoma!

Yer a clever cop, I said sarcastically, swaggering a bit like Lefty would, hoping to cover up my snowballing gaffs. Yer fishin' for something. Ya know I'm from Nebraska, but ya said Nevada.

I apologise. Let's just start over, shall we? I'm Staff Sergeant Bruce Mallard, he said, smiling and extending a hand. Leland Oliver "Lefty" Hillup, I said, from Omaha, Nebraska. And we had good laugh. But he kept on making notes anyway.

When he stuck his head inside the cabin, he said, Oh my goodness! What happened here? Bit of a muddle, I said. More like mayhem, he said. Odd way to show grief.

Let me fix it up a bit, I said. McKenzie went on a bit of bender. (Well, that was the truth, at least!)

Hand me things as you come across them, he said, after he made a note, And we'll pile them up out here.



Sure thing, I said. I went in and looked first for this, my journal, on the little shelf I made for it over my bunk, but it wasn't there. No shelf even. I didn't realise the extent of damage. I started handing things out, saying, McKenzie's, Mine, and Garbage for each one, then I spotted my journal lying along the wall with Vee's letter from Long Island stuck in it. Refuse, I called out, and threw the remains of Lefty's chair. As he dealt with that, I stuck my journal and the letter down the front of my pants. I found Lefty's little cross, too, between two floor boards. McKenzie's pile, I said, figuring I may as well send it with Lefty as it will be use to me anyway. I am past redemption, I thought.

My pile was a few papers, clothes, tools, pen, ink, cutlery and tin dishes. Not much to show for anything, really. It's only this journal and my letters that I value. And my ruined buckskin. Not much in McKenzie's pile, he said, echoing my thought. It's a bit odd that there are no letters, don't you think? he said. Fellows usually depend them. Looks like you do, too, he said, and pointed at Lefty's bundle of letters I had seen Lefty read many times. Yep, I do. He wasn't much for writin', I said. So, do you have any idea where I could get addresses? he asked. Nope, I said. Alright then, I'll find Miss Baker and ask her. He thanked me for all my help, and headed off to town, swinging his arms smartly.

The second he disappeared, I ran down into the drift with the oil lamp and held up Lefty's left hand to look at the inscription. "I remember Waterloo", it said, in tiny letters. My mind started racing. Suddenly I remembered the Waterloo-Magog Line and our adventure involving it. Thank heaven.

I left BadFoot with Charlie and headed to town, mostly running, keeping an eye out for Mallard all the way, running high on the hills because there weren't enough trees left

around to hide me. I had to get to the scow across the Klondike before he did, but when I got there, I saw him already stepping off on to the north shore. I gave the miners waiting their turn on the south side a line about “my wife being in labour” in town. They had to let me on, but didn’t really believe me. I’m becoming like Lefty. I grabbed the cable to help pull us over, watching Mallard head up the high trail that comes down into the back of town. But damned me if he wasn’t still there, at the top of the bluff, when we got over, so I had to take the cursed, swampy trail along the river into the south end and run right past the Mounties’ post. I fell up to my knees a dozen times. Once on my face.

Vee saw me coming. I must have been a sight – sweaty from running, soaked from swamp water, dressed like Lefty, but clean-shaven all of a sudden. I took a dozen starts at explaining but couldn’t get much past I need you to help me. What have you done? she kept on asking.

I finally got it out that Lefty had died in the drift, that I told Staff Sergeant Mallard it was me, Garrett McKenzie, who had died so I could change the registration of the fraction and make everything right. That was a very stupid thing to do, she said. When it comes out, they might well think you killed him. It’s done now, I said, and I told her what I needed her to do.

Let me understand this, she said, looking about nervously. By telling Mallard that your engagement ring says “I’ll remember Waterloo”, you want me to help convince him that it is you who died up there. Yes, I said. I see, she said. Well, that’s simple enough, she said, sarcastically. And where’s my ring? she asked, holding up her left hand. Engagement rings usually come in pairs, don’t they? Bugger, I said. I could barely stand the way she just looked at me. Finally she said, You are mad! and walked away.

I know, I know, I said, and begged her to help. Do you realize you are asking me to do something illegal? she asked. You are asking me to risk everything I've built here. I hadn't thought of it that way, I said. Just how did you think about it? she asked. I just want to put right what Lefty has done, I said. That's all. The way things should be. She sighed, deeply. I love you Garrett, but you just have to find another way.

Then she said as she didn't want people to think she had changed lovers the moment her betrothed died, so as long as I played Lefty I was to stay away from her.

Will you come to my funeral? How would it look, you not coming? I had to ask her. Not on your life! I'll not pretend to mourn you in front of the coffin of a scoundrel. Who'll deliver the eulogy? I asked, like a dog who can't be kicked off his bone. You could not possibly have thought that I would! And she sent something whistling by my ear. What a stupid thing to ask her. How incredibly stupid.

But I couldn't leave it that way. I had to talk her into it or be lost, and she finally gave in. But all she'd do is confirm the message on the ring. Wouldn't say anything more about it after that. And wouldn't see me anymore, no matter what.

I ducked away and hid by the cabin when I saw Mallard coming. She went inside and did not answer when he knocked. He waited a full five minutes and left.

Then she came out and headed into town. I waited for her to return, sitting against the side wall.

She came back a short while later and told me to get the records of the \$5,000 loan I gave her and destroy them. I balked for a second, but she said either that or she'd not take part at all. So I said I would and she told me she'd give me the money tomorrow.

I'll send a quick letter to father to reassure him. I'll keep up the ruse for a week or so, until I can change the ownership and clean up as much of the dump as I can, get our gold, and leave for Omaha. My house is in order now. Under control.

Except that I don't quite know how to confess. If I do, there'll be trouble. If I don't I'll have to live as Lefty.

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Later. Monday, July 19, 1897

*I am feeling marginally better, now that I have walked and now that I have talked over with Molly the most bizarre exchange I have ever had with Garrett, ever had in my entire life, for that matter. She is an anchor of good sense.*

*I described to her how Garrett had found Lefty's mutilated body in their workings and all the consequences. Her reaction was exactly what I needed to hear.*

*I assured her that he seems to know he is asking for something illegal, but that he was convinced, somehow, once the change of ownership was registered he would be able to confess and everything would be forgotten. Gold fever, she said with a physician's authority. His idiotic plan has all the signs. I hope you didn't give in. When I said I had, all she said was, Goodness!*

*In my defense, I told her that I would not be seeing Garrett afterwards, as I did not want to be seen with the dead man's partner and I did not want to entangle myself further. Well, that's a relief, she said. But you're already indebted to him, and once the note for the loan is uncovered, you'll be embroiled in the probation. It is money owed his estate. Give it back and get rid of the paperwork. It will be as if it never took place.*

*And I suggest you pretend to be unable to speak on hearing the news about Garrett, she said. I told her that it would not be difficult for me to do as I do love the sod,*

*despite his current bout of insanity, and that I had several lead parts in theatrical productions while at private school. Good, she said, then just keep reacting noncommittally until you have allowed Mallard to believe that you have confirmed the identification – without actually doing so. When he brings up the ring, just think of that adventure and react naturally. I will be there to support you. If he asks to speak to you alone, acquiesce and then break down on the bad news, and I come over “to comfort you”.*

*Garrett could do nothing but agree. I could see he wanted to talk more, so I once again escaped to Molly’s to spend the night.*

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Tuesday, July 20

This morning I was propped against the back of Vee’s cabin when Mallard’s voice inside woke me. Miserable night. A thousand bites. My back killing me. I caught only fragments. He was giving Vee the news. I heard her wail in a way that broke my heart, but beyond that I heard little else until Molly came out with Mallard, and she said something about Vee’s engagement ring, but I couldn’t hear the rest. However, it seemed to satisfy Mallard. When he left, Vee turned me away, so I came back to the fraction.

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Tuesday, July 20, 1897

*When Molly and I went up to the new cabin this morning we didn’t see Garrett. As anticipated, Staff Sergeant Mallard was at our door before noon.*

*“From the look of you, I fear you have bad news,” I said to him, preparing myself to let my imagination and emotions flow.*

*“I regret it’s true, Miss Baker,” he said. “It concerns a man very close to you.”*

*"I have only Willoughby and Garrett and my father," I said, reflecting the concern I felt naturally felt on imagining that some horrible accident had befallen one of them.*

*"I am of the opinion at this moment that it is Garrett."*

*Thank God, I almost said. "Good heavens, Sergeant," I said, "how can you be 'of the opinion'? Is there some doubt?" My look of grief gave way to desperate hope, my hands crossed over my breast, my eyebrows lifted, and my face turned toward him.*

*"I am afraid, Miss Baker, his partner has already identified him as Garrett."*

*As I imagined the horrible plight of my beloved, I let out such a pathetic scream Mallard immediately rose from his chair and Molly came rushing in from outside. A few seconds later, an out-of-breath Willoughby arrived, too, with dread on his face. I had to signal Molly to guide Willoughby out; I did not want him muddling things. By the time Molly returned, I had collapsed my head onto my lap and the kind Staff Sergeant Mallard was on one knee at my side, trying his best to comfort me.*

*After some minutes, I appeared to gather myself, somewhat. The Sergeant told me he was profoundly sorry but he must, for proper legal reasons, ask me a question or two to be certain of the unfortunate man's identity.*

*I sobbed Garrett's name over and over. Happily, that worked to get my tears flowing and I started crying, quite convincingly. "I assure you, Miss Baker," the Staff Sergeant continued, "that I have looked over the site of the incident very carefully, and I am virtually certain that his passing was not only accidental, but painless and quick."*

*He waited for a minute, out of respect.*

*“But as his face has been... altered, let us say... beyond recognition, I cannot confirm his identity in the customary way.” I forced the details out of the poor man – more than I wanted to hear, in fact – and almost broke down in reality when my imagination started getting the better of me.*

*“My poor, poor Garrett,” I wailed.*

*“I have one question,” he said. “Did you give Garrett a ring?”*

*I moaned so pitifully at that the Staff Sergeant concluded I had.*

*“Did it have an inscription?” he asked.*

*I moaned again.*

*“Can you tell me what it said, please, Miss Baker.”*

*Tears dripping off my cheeks, I lifted my head and opened my mouth, but appeared utterly incapable of speaking. Molly rubbed my back. I appeared to try to speak again, and failed.*

*The gentle Staff Sergeant could take no more, poor man. “Was the inscription ‘I will remember Waterloo’”? he asked.*

*At that, I leapt up, fled to our bedroom, and threw myself at my pillow on my bunk, burying my face in it. My continued wailing filled the cabin.*

*Staff Sergeant Mallard rose, expressed his deepest regrets and apologies, and left.*

*I smiled into my pillow, congratulating myself for a fine performance. But my elation was forcefully dismissed by my guilt at having misled the poor Sergeant so well.*

*Then, to my utter surprise, he reappeared not three minutes later.*

*“I have one more question for Miss Baker,” I heard him say to Molly at the door.*

*“She is in no shape to see you again at the moment.”*

*“I notice that Miss Baker was not wearing a ring herself,” he said, “which struck me as rather odd, given the circumstances. Why is that, do you think?”*

*Damn! I had forgotten all about that gap in our story. But Molly told him that, not a few days before, I had thrown a ring at Garrett’s face and called off our engagement. She said the ring was probably still lying in front of the cabin somewhere if he wished to look for it. Apparently he looked about at the stumps, crushed undergrowth, sawdust and mud from construction, and said, “Perhaps later.”*

*When she re-entered, we must have hooted and snorted for a good five minutes. I had dangerously approached the unintended farce of an amateur, summer theatre production, she told me, barely being able to speak for laughing. She was referring to my expression of ‘desperate hope’, my hands crossed over my breast, and lifted eyebrows. Whenever Molly’s laughter seemed to abate, I repeated it for her. But slowly reality ate away at our giddiness and I realized it was only a measure of our uncertainty and trepidation. My laughter was a flight from terror. Certainly it was that for me.*

*When we settled, we concluded that we had managed to deliver the message without ever lying. Even Molly’s description of me throwing a ring in Garrett’s face was not a lie of any consequence as she had been careful to say ‘a ring’ not ‘the ring’. And, metaphorically speaking, I had virtually called our engagement off when I told Garrett I would not be seeing him under these circumstances. These are small points, to be sure, but ones we will be able to maintain in court, should things ever come to that. We would argue that it was not our fault the Staff Sergeant drew certain conclusions from my emotional responses. But after reflection, seeing how thin that logic is, I reaffirm my utter commitment to the straight and narrow from here on in.*



*By then Willoughby was back, asking what on earth was going on, and we had no choice but to take him into our confidences. I was not prepared to lie to him, too.*

*“What an idiotic thing to do!” was all he could say. “What an idiotic thing to do!”*

*“Me or him?” I had to ask.*

*“Both of you! Idiots, both of you!” And he left shaking his head. However, I know I can count on him to keep his silence.*

*Later*

*We have not seen Garrett since yesterday. I hope he is managing to keep himself from sinking completely. He has put himself in a pickle. I feel pain for him, but it is mitigated by the fact that it is all about gold. I wish there were some secret way I could help him without putting my future at risk, but I cannot save him without drowning myself. And I am not at all happy that he has forced me into this position and that choice.*

## Chapter 14 Up-a-Creek

My name is Thomas Charles Haas, or as I was known, Up-a-Creek Charlie. As you may have guessed, it is I who have been assembling this history from original documents, with the occasional bridge of my inadequate prose based on my recollections and interviews conducted at a much later date. I enter the story as the author, in a sense, only because the narrative's events force it.

Shortly after the accident and after Garrett returned to the creek from Dawson, he showed up at my cabin door, looking pale and exhausted. He clearly had a mission, so I waited for him to speak. But he said only, "I trust you, Charlie Haas. Francis Garrett McKenzie is dead."

"Do not be absurd!" I told him. "Although others may not, I know well what Garrett McKenzie looks like, clean-shaven or otherwise."

But he merely repeated himself and continued, more emphatically. "If anything should ever happen to me, please look for this." In both hands he held a small wooden box which was clasped and locked and had on its lid a roughly-carved inscription, saying: PROPERTY OF CHARLIE HAWS. Given how grave he looked, I did not have the heart to challenge the misspelling of my name.

I reached to receive this strange gift, but, oddly, he withheld it. "I deeply regret having to draw you into this," he said. "I trust you will forgive me and that you will keep this conversation to yourself." He handed me one of the box's two keys, and shoved the box back under his arm.

“And just who is it for whom I should watch in the event of ‘something happening’?” I asked, in my awkward way, trying to make light of our absurd situation.

“Please just do as I ask,” he said, ignoring me, and left with BadFoot, having thanked me for looking after him.

“Are you up a creek, there, mate?” I called after him, still trying to make light, and at quite the loss.

I did as he asked. And when the time came, I did receive the box as you will see in due course. And although I have kept my silence well beyond the time when it mattered to him or anyone else, I keep it no longer.

No one but Garrett and I were involved in that bizarre conversation, and since he did not record it in his journals, I have stepped forward from the shadows in this clumsy way, rather than fashioning some sort of equally clumsy and duplicitous fictional device to satisfy the needs of the tale I am relating.

Before I once again slip back into the shadows, I should briefly say something of myself. It will help make clear how I have come to know so many things about this story.

Up-a-Creek is what they called me, as it was one of my favorite expressions. Almost everyone up there had a moniker – Diamond-tooth, Swiftwater, Midnight Fanny, Three-Inch. Three-Inch’s sprang from the irony of the size of the fraction he aggressively wrestled from someone else’s claim, imagining it to be rich and a coup. The fraction was found to be three inches wide, in the end, narrower than the shovel he needed to work it. Irony is why I believe there may be intelligence in the universe. Maybe not in Dawson, but somewhere.

I was born in 1840, near Metigoshe, a little border spot on the line between Manitoba and North Dakota, within a stone's throw almost of where Viola and Willoughby passed in the Great Northern Flyer. She even makes mention of seeing the Turtle Mountains out the window, ones I knew well growing up.

My father was a trapper and fisherman. Metigoshe Lake and the Turtle Mountains were exceptional for that, in the early days at least, before the folks from North Dakota came up and built their retreats. Around Metigoshe my father would meet people, Americans, Canadians, Englishmen, Scots, Germans, people from all over the place, among them captains of industry, bankers, lawyers, doctors and such. As a result of his exchanges with these men, his determination formed to educate me, which he did – magnificently – with Melville, Aristotle, Twain and Thoreau. No Cervantes, thankfully.

I would use the trips on which he took me to my advantage, welcoming his guidance, absorbing all that he knew. And at night, I would read Kant, and he, having saturated his need for probing other men's speculations, a Western, and sometimes a tale from the California gold fields which he would share with me, in bits and quotes, after loud introductions by way of a belly laugh and "Oh my lord! Listen to this!"

As I matured I realised that I could make a living from the wilds as he did, and it is there I learned the value of not talking much. This came about by accident.

I was standing by my canoe on the shore of Metigoshe, and was recovering from a punishingly bad sore throat. I looked as you would expect any bushman to look: tawny deerskins, my favourite moccasins with the bead work along the instep, a rugged aspect, being unshaven and having chestnut hair looking as wild as underbrush. I had become known around Metigoshe as an accomplished trapper and fisherman, and visitors would

be directed to me to find the best spots. That day, a North Dakota fellow asked me about the fishing, but I could manage only a kind of choked grunt and a point. He followed my finger, but soon his eyes were dancing about the lake, and he turned back to me. Rum-maging about in his denim pants, he pulled out fifty cents. "Take me there, fellow, if you please, and I'll give you another fifty cents when I catch a trout."

I accepted his offer, of course, that being my business. The moment we shoved off, he began talking by asking the obvious questions, "What's your name, sir, and where are you from?" My answer sounded like a frog choking. It was too painful to try again. So I just shook my head and kept my silence.

He was filling the uncomfortable void, I believe. Or he was operating on the mistaken presumption that I was next to mute, and anything he told me would not be passed on. In any case, he told me all sorts of personal things I found surprising, given that I'm generally not really very outgoing. It's not that I feel unkindly toward others. It's just that I don't bother to make overtures: small talk about the weather or admissions of guilt, apologetic smiles, that sort of thing. He may have assumed that I was both mute, and an idiot, I do not know. In any event, within the hour he was admitting that it was only once that he stole money from his father's wallet, and only once that he took a look at his mother's breasts as they sprung loose while she was undressing, and so forth. I will not repeat what he claimed to have done with the dull-minded, ample-breasted girl down the street. I reckon, if I had given him a day, he may even have admitted to murder – provided he had done it, of course, and, if he hadn't, he might well have made it up just to fill the silence. As a writer, I found this approach of aping the mute to be invaluable.

Before writing, however, I turned to the prospecting business, grubbing for gold. I watched the whole, sad and poignant Klondike affair. I participated in it, as you are well aware, though I was not a stamper, as such. I was up there already, starting in 1894, before the real madness started. I turned my bush skills to ferreting for the metal which turns housewives into determined fools, bankers into raving idiots, and, sometimes, the most reverent of the reverent into beguilers, prevaricators and schemers, and, only sometimes incidentally, into fornicators.

Oh, I don't want to pretend that I never caught it, that disease that keeps a person dreaming all night, doing sums with vast arrays of zeros, and wandering about fantastic, bejewelled places in the thousand corners of tropical worlds, those place of the imagination that drip with colored, exotic fruits and salacious pleasures. It is just that I was lucky to become infected in a backwater of British Columbia at a time before the Klondike volcano blew, before the days when the world was convinced one could run about with an umbrella and a bucket, catching all the nuggets you wanted. When I fell in and out of love with gold, recovery was possible, and I am grateful as I may well have joined the Klondikers in their madness. My first experience, rather than being destructive, built up my resistance. I saw clearly that I had been infected, that I had welcomed gold as a cure for a stagnant life. In that state, our blindness and lack of awareness often prevents us from applying a real solution to our problems. Instead, and ironically, we welcome a new, much more destructive ill to replace the old. Only now do I know that.

Luckily, that is also when I discovered that the habit I had cultivated of not talking played right into my desire to write. While I went about my prospecting and mining in the Klondike, people I chanced upon would start telling me their stories, their parents'

stories, their ancestors' stories. I talked so little and listened so much, I am surprised that they didn't call me Charlie No-Talk, or Charlie All-Ears, except those names sound like the native Indian ones, which I am not. Nope. I'll stick with Up-a-Creek, so long as I know enough to avoid finding myself up one.

But that is enough of me. You have come for Garrett's and Vee's stories, not mine, and it is to theirs' we now return.

## Chapter 15 Laying Away and Cleaning Up

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Tuesday, July 20 (continued)

Walking back from town I thought about what to do. Seems strange. To do the right thing I would have to save all Lefty's money for his widow, and give all my money away in my Last Will & Testament.

I wrote it, giving everything to father, Ted, and Vee. Vee and Ted will give back what I bequeathed them, certainly. Father's portion I'll leave with him. I didn't name an executor. I dirtied and crumpled the paper a bit and left it handy on a shelf.

When the time comes, I'll leave a note with the NWT Police and take Lefty's half and his remains to his family. That should work. Sometimes Natural Justice just needs a nudge.

In the middle of doing that, Byron showed up with the \$5,000 from Vee, but I can't spend it because it's "Garrett's". He looked at me long enough to make me uncomfortable, as if he were trying to say something, then turned and left.

I had something to eat, and straightened out my things, and piled up Lefty's. I built new shelves, bundled up all my old clothes and threw them in the fire along with my bloodied buckskin. Lefty wore denim, so I'm all denim now.

I found a small box among Lefty's things. It was padlocked. I went down to the cut looking for the key. It was very unpleasant looking through his pockets, because although it's cool down there, it is not cool enough. Found a pair of keys on a ring with other keys. I took the right ones, stuffed the key ring back in his pocket, and tidied him up. I could



live life happily without ever seeing or having to mess with another dead body. Hell is not in the afterlife; hell is what's left behind with us.

Inside were years' worth of letters, all yellowed and fingered. He had read them dozens of times, I reckon. I bundled them up to give to his family, then carved an inscription on the box identifying the box as Charlie's and went up to see him.

BadFoot leapt all over me when I arrived. He loves to try to lick my face, but can't quite reach it. I lean forward to tease him, then lean back. We are made for each other. He had a little trouble with the smell on Lefty's clothes, but accepted it soon enough.

I felt better when I got back to the cabin, but very tired from the night before. I started reading some of Lefty's letters and fell asleep.

About dinnertime Mallard, Charlie, and a ghoulish-looking undertaker named Green were at my door. (Are all undertakers ghoulish?) I figured they wanted me to go down to the body again, but the three of them just looked at me for a minute, then said I should stay here. They just wanted to inspect the victim and the scene of the incident.

They seemed satisfied when they came out. I gave Mallard the Will I had "found". They took the corpse away, thank God, and Charlie went to his cabin without a word.

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Tuesday, July 20, 1897 (continued)

*I sent Byron to return the \$5,000 to "Lefty". Money is going to be tight.*

*The whole business of Staff Sergeant Mallard and the great ring farce this morning put me behind reaching the mill site. When I did, I was greatly pleased to see that Haldron had everyone working hard. Willoughby insists on helping, too, though I keep telling him he should be looking after getting a claim before the mobs get here. But what can I say? It's Willoughby, and he's not going to listen to me about that.*

*The steam engine is in place, as is the saw. They have three work benches already underway, one for the miter saw (for the corners, including the cornerbridles), one for our fancy new Stanley's Patented Adjustable Beading, Rabbet and Slitting Plane (for laying the grooves into which the screen will be wedged, and for adding a touch of fancy beading to our more expensive models), and one for the final assembly (screwed-in screen corner irons for the cheaper model, hardwood doweled corners for the fancy ones). We have space for a fourth work bench where we'll do our four-panel screen doors eventually. The miners are clamoring – and I do mean clamoring – for window screens. Let the screen doors wait for next winter and spring. I saw Haldron crack a small smile in conversation with Roderick, though admittedly, it was small, and fleeting.*

*The mosquitoes on the site are wicked, of course, and I long ago realized how prudent it is to have the protection of pants. To fight them, our smudge fires go all day long and join all the other ones in this area in creating a veil over Dawson on days when there is no wind. In the evening, when the sun swings north and settles toward the hills, it sometimes sets the smoke aglow and we find ourselves flooded in an eerie orange light. I cannot imagine a better place to test our screening, except, ironically, we ourselves have none. We are shoeless cobblers.*

*And as if these creatures were not enough torture (are they really creatures of God? Are they??), there are armies of black flies and noseums, and a group of particularly nasty, iridescent, green-eyed flying beasts called the deer flies. (The things we missed on Long Island!) Luckily the latter come in singles, not in plagues. You hear them coming and you can kill them with a good swift slap. But if you are not quick enough you will be treated to a viciously sharp and localized pain of an intensity far*

*greater than thought possible for a creature only a half an inch long and so marvelously colored. Dawson is still a swamp, so I expect we will be treated to an endless variety of these torments.*

*Samson described to me a larger version even than the Deer Fly (which I now capitalize out of respect). From his rather strange antics in holding his open-palmed hands above his head, I conclude it is called a Moose Fly. As the spread of his finger and thumb indicated that this scourge is an inch long or more, I worry if I see one, I shall run flailing at the air in fear and desperation. I do not think Moose Flies will allow me to retain the pretense of dignity. Sam must have told Joe of our conversation, because I heard a kind of giggly laughter every time my eyes turned toward the skies.*

*About half-way through the day, Sam approached me and, with a mixture of gestures and pidgin English, managed to convey a suggestion to me which I think is both brilliant and surprisingly self-evident. We should encase the building in a kind of open-framed-wall structure, made to take our screens off the line. They protect us until sold.*

*The next step was to deal with Haldron. I have learned that he's a bit of a impostor. He says he can 'work for a skirt' but grumbles about men I want to hire and winces when I ask him to make sure the fellows keep a tidier work site. (I've had enough to do with Willoughby over the years to know that tools left lying about, especially sharp and heavy ones, are just bait for accidents.) He treats Samson and Joseph fairly, but he seems abrupt with them. After they had been on the job for a couple of days I asked Haldron how he thought they were doing, and although he said good things about them, he struggled to do so. I've seen them work, and they proceed at their own pace, that is for certain, but no job has been left unfinished as a result, and they've made no serious*

*mistakes. When he didn't know I could hear him, I have heard him complain about the "Siwashes". I think he suffers from the same negative view most people up here have about the red men. In any event, I have learned how to 'skirt' his prejudices.*

*So I gently suggested the open-framed-wall idea to him in a manner so as to lead him to discover it himself, and he took to defending his idea immediately. His design, which he showed me not ten minutes later, has our mill split in half down the length with the saw remaining under the open side, and the work benches under protection – from insects during the summer and the bitter winds of winter. The engine's fire box and boiler will be moved so as they can be enclosed in the winter to provide heat, but remain open in the summer to save us from same. Clever, Mr. Sykes. The milling side with the saw remains open, of course, so as to facilitate the advancement of the limbed spruce trees which we feed into it. In addition, the cut stock can be stacked in the open racks filling the remainder of the open side, drying for the day when we start making doors. The first window screens will necessarily be made of green lumber, but no one will care much about that.*

*It is well after dinner, and the fellows have returned to work for the evening to take advantage of the light. The days are hot here, too – surprisingly hot – so the evenings are good times to do heavy hauling. It is also time for the insects' change of guard. Now that the breeze has died and the sunlight is weaker, the mosquitoes will remount their attacks. I think the men are working so hard so as to bring the day forward when they will have their shelter and be rid of the bulk of them.*

*I am working hard on the construction, too, of course, but utterly lacking the skills to wield axe, saw, or hammer, I restrict myself to supplying the men with what I*

*anticipate they will need. I'm getting very good at that, having watched them closely throughout the construction of the cabin. When I see them getting ready to bring in another log, I help haul it. When I see them finishing barking and bucking a log and about to fashion its end to receive another one, I have chisel and mallet ready and waiting. Otherwise, of course, the disorganized fools spend five minutes stumbling around yelling, "Where did you put the chisel?" when, in fact, it is usually the yeller that misplaced it. When they seem hot, I have water for them. When they take a break, I give them biscuits and hardtack. When they are tired, I sit them down and give them tea. Some would see this as a kind of servitude. I see my role as being freely taken and far more important than that. I am the engine's engineer. I am the one, who oils the beast's joints, who feeds it fuel, who keeps it thumping along with minimal complaint. I am the driver who keeps it safely on track. Or, one could say, I mush my dogs, though my dogs think they mush themselves.*

*Unfortunately, one of the results is that my hands are twelve layers deep in spruce gum, which, while smelling much more pleasant than any of my co-workers, is a devil to remove! I have taken to using cheap whiskey. This, of course, provides my fellows with opportunities for jokes in seemingly endless, minor variations and repetitions. My dog team has little wit at times.*

*I stayed in this evening to work on my hotel plans. I need to have drawings done as soon as the mill is finished. Roderick is very keen to get it started, of course, and will come down from the mill site shortly to look them over.*

*Byron has done well selling the screening. Each time he comes back with several hundred dollars – a handsome profit indeed! – but still not enough to finance the start-up*

*of both enterprises. Although we have accomplished much in our ten days here, this nasty business with Garrett has left me wanting for money. I will not ask Willoughby, no matter how desperate. Father is too far away to help.*

*Unfortunately, that leaves only Max.*

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Wednesday, July 21

First thing, I wrote a letter to Father, which he will find strange. At least it will keep him from being surprised about whatever news reaches them at home. I decided not to write to Lefty's family. I'll explain things in person when I bring their money. I believe having a pile of cash in front of them will make them more trusting.

I went down to the cut and put in a good day tidying up and getting the sluices ready. Tomorrow they'll run again. That lovely sound. The chatter of pebbles.

Went back through some of Lefty's letters, mostly out of boredom and curiosity, but also so I could better portray him if I had to. More than thirty letters in all. He saved them and re-read them for over fifteen years. He was away from home for over half that, in stretches, and seems to have had a kid every time he went back. It's hard to figure how he and his wife stayed together, and I couldn't figure why he kept re-reading the letters. I guess when you've got little, it's still the 'little' you hang on to.

His wife's writing is bloody hard to read. Beatrice Lily Hillup; maiden name: James. Hates to be called Lily Hillup, yet Lefty only called her that. Seven kids, not counting the dead ones: Leland Jr., Lelandia, Leeson, Joseph, Elijah, Malachi, and Job. Lefty was there for the first three births, I wager, and away for the next, starting with Joseph.

Malachi is the sickly one, seldom out of bed and limping about on a tiny frame when he is. Junior, Lelandia and Leeson are the wild ones. Fitting.

Lelandia took off with a knife thrower and spent three years on the road with him in side shows. When he cut part of her breast off during their act, Lefty's wife, Beatrice, got a letter from the thrower saying, if they didn't compensate him for the loss of his investment in her, he'd do worse. Beatrice sent the letter on to Lefty asking him what to do. No idea why he kept it. Lefty must have told Beatrice not to pay because Beatrice later wrote a letter telling Lefty the knife thrower had kept his word, then left Lelandia in Galveston with a macque relative of his. Lelandia later begged Lefty for a train ticket and money to escape. Stuffed among the letters was Galveston newspaper article, which seemed to be the last word about her:

#### KNIFE THROWER UNDER THE KNIFE!

*Bloodied fragments spread over several blocks!*

*Galveston, Texas. In the second such death in as many months, police say certain undisclosed, gruesome aspects of the killing of Salvador de Jesus, circus performer and knife thrower, draw clear links to the death of a local pimp just last month, whose remains, authorities say, were carved up and dispersed in a strikingly similar fashion . . .*

The article went on to describe the difficulty police had in identifying either a suspect or motive behind such a brutal killings. Clear enough to me. But then I had the letters.

Junior's still in prison. Leeson was scheduled to get out a few months ago. Both were in for theft, arson, public drunkenness, lascivious behaviour, nuisance, et cetera. I wager Junior's latest buggery conviction rankled Lefty. Seems Junior went out of his way to send Lefty a copy of the judgement against him:

That he, the said Leland Oliver Hillup, Jr. at etc., etc. in  
said District etc. etc...

. . . with a certain man then and there feloniously, wickedly,  
diabolically, and against the order of nature, had a  
venereal affair with the said man, and then and there  
carnally knew the said man, and then and there unlawfully,  
wickedly, and against the order of nature with the said man  
did commit and perpetrate that detestable and abominable  
crime of buggery (not to be named among Christians). etc.,  
etc...

There was no shortage of friction between Lefty and his father, Uriah, either. They had some argument about money – over \$5 – and went to court over it!

All this made me wonder why I should bother doing the right thing by him. In the end I concluded I could not be their judge. I'll get them their money and leave.

I know more about Lefty now than I care to, but enough to fool whomever I must.

I can't fool BadFoot, though. My pal forever. He sleeps at my feet, and snores like a trooper. The only problem is that he dreams and wakes me up when he's chasing something. I had a rabbit for dinner a while back and kept its skin. Not good for much, rabbit



skins, I find. They rip. Too thin. Not like marten, or wolverine, or beaver. But it was fun to put the skin under BadFoot's nose when his running wakes me up. It doubles his pace. Until he wakes himself. Then he looks at me with what-just-happened all over his face. Love that dog. As much as Vee sometimes. Though, maybe not.

I was just finished the last bit, and was calling it a night, when who should I spot but Vee, heading not for my cabin but for Max's, just a little down-creek from me. I stood up and waved – discretely. I could tell she looked briefly at me, then turned her head away. I won't go down there, though I am dying to.

---

Wednesday, July 21, 1897

*I cannot believe how kind the weather is being to us. Eighteen hours of daylight, and lately we've had nothing but sunshine and gentle breezes. When I get the chance to escape the bog that is Dawson and stand on a breezy promontory, I can see this lovely country with its soft hill tops fading to the horizon, the lavender Fireweed, and Lousewort – so much more elegant than its name – the yellow Poppies and Goldenrod, and the little white, perfectly five-petalled flowers with the oxymoronic name of Bog-Stars.*

*The mills in town have been running non-stop, with miners and others waiting to catch planks as they come off. We've had offers to cut wood for others, but I've turned them down. Once the framing was done, the roof and floor for the work area was getting planked rapidly. The fellows have put in another long and hard morning, and if it is like yesterday, they'll still work for a while after dinner.*

*I will head up to the creeks this afternoon as I have to see Max.*

---

Wednesday, July 21, 1897 (written Thursday, July 22)

*I just got back to Dawson. Yesterday's trip was both difficult and delightful. First, I saw Garrett yesterday standing by his cabin door, trying to wave at me. I can't respond. He's made his mess. I can't make it mine. So I nodded as I might have done to Lefty and carried on. Damned hard to do. I miss him, terribly at times.*

*Some fellows pointed out Max's cabin to me. He came out as soon as he saw me.*

*"I would have sent my calling card," I said, "But my driver ran off."*

*"Never fear," he said, "The niceties of Long Island and the rest of the civilized world have not yet infected the Yukon, Miss Baker. I am pleased you have dropped by." He smiled. He is a most charming and cultured man. Such an anomaly here.*

*Even Dawson deserves a little culture, though I often wonder how culture – other than the moldy kind – can flourish amid the sometimes foul stench of the place on hot days. I hope that whatever diseases lurk will not be the death of culture in general and us in particular. (What an odd diversion in my thinking. It is a reflection of what we all know to be true in Dawson – namely that the lack of proper drainage gives rise to a hovering, sometimes even sickening unpleasantness which constantly assaults our olfactory senses, as it is doing right now – but which none of us addresses openly.)*

*Max immediately got a comfortable chair for me, a fan for one hand (to cool me and to keep the little monsters away) and a sherry for the other. Sherry, I say!*

*"To neighbors, and neighborhoods," he toasted.*

*"To strolls and accidental encounters," I answered, laughing.*

*"Indeed," he said, smiling at the unlikelihood of there being any accident in my visit as his cabin is over ten miles from town. "Have you eaten?"*

*"Why, yes," I said. "I stopped for lunch at Chez Louis, overlooking town. A light salad with a simple vinaigrette. A few biscuits and an aged Canadian cheddar for substance. Washed down gently with a glass of house Burgundy. Very nice, I might add. Baune. Modest. And then went on my way to Miss Mulrooney's new roadhouse which she's constructing at the juncture of Eldorado and Bonanza."*

*"Oh," he said. "I wasn't aware it was finished."*

*"It's not, just yet. We sat in the unfinished dining room and had an early dinner nevertheless. A rack of New Zealand lamb, rare. New potatoes. White asparagus. Some lovely French rolls and another French wine, as luck would have it. A Pomerol '92. Perfectly aged. A little heady for the lamb, perhaps, but how can one complain up here?"*

*"I take it you are hungry," he said, smiling broadly, cutting through my fantasy.*

*"Famished!" said I, and we had a fine dinner of tinned pork, with evaporated potatoes and canned peas. He held back the Chianti until we broke out the hardtack and canned butter, as we didn't want to overwhelm the pork. It was heavy on the tannin, but we toasted, and drank the bottle anyway. A second bottle came out, this time a modest Alsatian white, a little flowery we thought, but it went very well with a can of peaches.*

*"You are trying to compromise me, Mr. Acton-Jones," I said, feeling the wines.*

*"I wouldn't think of it, Miss. Baker. You must take me for a scoundrel."*

*"Perhaps not a scoundrel," I said, "Possibly a scamp."*

*"I have never been called a scamp in my life! A knave, and a rogue, but never a scamp. Scamps are so... so... common. Worse even than rascals."*

*"I do apologize," I said, "I had no idea you were so sensitive."*

*When I put it down now it all seems rather silly, but alcohol, when combined with the absurdities of this place, does have the effect of rendering funny the merely silly.*

*It was a very fine evening. I told him I had business to discuss but was not prepared to do it over a bottle of wine. He said he would walk me to Miss Mulrooney's where I might find a bunk for the night, and we agreed to meet again in the morning.*

*The rest of the evening we spent exchanging stories, although, as usual, his were much more exotic and long. Mine I offered only to give him the opportunity to have a sip or two and gather steam for the next of his. He loves telling stories – it gives him a chance to reminisce – and as I have before admitted, I love listening to them. It was about sun-down, midnight, when we arrived at Miss Mulrooney's and said goodnight.*

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*Thursday, July 22, 1897*

*We reconvened over a cup of camp coffee. Max brews his in a pot, settling the grounds with a shock of cold water. It requires careful sipping so as not to reinvigorate the layer of grounds in one's cup and turn the brew muddy once again. The mosquitoes were still strong, so he had several smudges running. My hair has smelled smoky from the first day here. Ahh, the Klondike: camp coffee, smoke, and the whine of mosquitoes.*

*Then we played a game. He knew full well that I needed money, so one might think the game would be over before it began. But I know that he wants a share of the business, with which I am still unwilling to part. I decided to go in via the back door.*

*"I want to thank you for your kind offer of help with my finances, Max."*

*"Ahh," he said, "You have come to accept it then."*

*"Oh, no. I merely wanted to thank you."*

*“That’s a long walk, for a ‘Thank you’,” he said.*

*“Dawson is a cultural desert, Max. You know that. If one has no interest in Faro or whiskey or dance hall girls, and if one does not enjoy the company of the few gossips and nuns, Dawson has little to offer.”*

*“I understand,” he said, smiling.*

*“Last night was a treat. Better than a fine novel in the sense that we went distances in one evening several good novels could barely cover in that time.”*

*He reached for his coffee pot. I could tell from the grin skittering about his lips that he was feeling complimented... smug, even. Flash them an ankle, throw them a bone. Even the most sophisticated.*

*“You are a clever woman. You are also an extremely busy one, what with construction going on two projects. I’m afraid I don’t believe you, Viola. I wager you are here to negotiate bridging finances of some sort.”*

*“There’s no hiding from you, Max.”*

*“I’m afraid not, Viola. And please stop trying to charm me. Just tell me what you want and we’ll see if we can reach agreement. It is just business, after all.”*

*“I’m just here to ask you your opinion of the Bank of Commerce. Is there someone in particular you recommend I talk to?”*

*“My dear Miss Baker,” he said without a discernable trace of arrogance, “You have already been to the bank for a loan, and have been refused.”*

*“That should be confidential information.”*

*“For some I suppose it is. Come, come. Let us talk bluntly.”*

*He left me nowhere to go. "I need a loan, Max. To cover the shipment and some building materials. But I don't want to give up a share of my business."*

*"I understand. On what terms?"*

*"I thought you'd push for a share."*

*"Do you want me to?"*

*"Goodness, no."*

*"Then I'm happy to lend you however much you need, on condition that if it is not repaid by an agreed date, the loan would convert to a share of the hotel."*

*"That could be onerous," I said, worrying.*

*"It could be but I don't intend it to be. Is two months enough?"*

*"It depends on the amount and the share I would be risking."*

*"Make sure it's enough to keep you liquid. How much do you need?"*

*"\$15,000."*

*"That's not much," he said.*

*"It will do. How much of a share would you be looking for?"*

*"I'd settle for a quarter. But I would be willing to lend you more, under the same terms. \$25,000, say, to make sure you don't have cash flow problems."*

*"You surprise me, Max. You are driving a soft bargain."*

*"I tell you, Viola. I have no interest in forcing onerous terms. I just want to help you and give myself a decent chance of getting what I really want. I have plenty of cash and gold at the moment, and it's just sitting around being useless."*

*"You are a gentleman. I would like a day to consider it, if you don't mind."*

*"With pleasure, as that means I'll see you again tomorrow."*

*"I'll send someone, Max. One way or the other."*

*"How disappointing."*

*I did not see Garrett as I headed back toward town.*

*By the time I got to Dawson I had resolved that I would be comfortable with the loan as proposed. The extra \$10,000 I saw as a backstop, and which I would leave in the bank to earn interest. The \$15,000 I was confident I could make from a combination of the mill and the hotel well within the two month term.*

*When I got back this afternoon, the fellows had the roof under way. Progress is intoxicating, especially since this is only the second time I've seen a building appear out of a few of my scribblings.*

---

Thursday, July 22

I waited a good hour for Vee to leave Max's last night. I fell asleep against the door. Awoke, sore, and bitten and crawled into bed.

Today was a good day. Stephan "Maudite" Côté and "Half-boat" Joe Millar saw me pulling the stops on the sluices this morning. They came over and I hired them on trial. They worked like dogs, and knew what they were doing, and they had just arrived, so the whole business about me being Lefty posed no problem.

Maudite says that every second word. Sounds like Moe-dzit! Sometimes he doubles it up: Goddamned Maudite. He pinched his thumb and let out a stream that went on for several minutes. Then he broke out laughing.

Half-boat Joe got his name at Bennett Lake when he and his partner were stuck there at freeze-up last winter with the thousand or so others who came over the Chilcoot. Quiet

fellow. You wouldn't think he had a temper, but he and his partner got into an argument over whipsawing lumber, apparently. Maudite watched it all from the next camp. They ended up splitting their kit in two. Joe's partner snuck back during the night and sawed the boat they were building bow to stern and left him with half a boat. Half-boat Joe. They called his partner The Other Half-Boat Jacob. They are still attached – in legend.

So, while Maudite blows harmlessly, on schedule, making a lot of noise like Old Faithful, it's Half-boat I should be wary of. Maudite says he's "comme un volcan."

We got six sluices running end to end. I love their sounds: clatter of cobbles, chatter of pebbles, clank of spades, the rush of the water at the top, its babble at the bottom. We got a rhythm up, with the barrow and the spades. Near the end of the day, we lifted the last sluice and Maudite worked the whisk-broom, swishing the water back over the riffles until it flowed clear. Dull, golden yellow against a trail of black sand.

I told the fellows this evening I'd give them a week's more work and 2½% each of our cleanup. They set up their tent and ate with me. Maudite's a natural entertainer, telling us stories from old Quebec. He told how his friend as a kid pissed into a neighbour's sap buckets, laughing when the neighbour called his brother over to show him how rich the sap was from that tree. Then the rascals shortening the harnesses on the horses so when they were whistled over, they went in circles among the maples. He says the piss was boiled down with the rest. No harm done. I suppose.

Kept an eye out for Vee all day, or any strange doings by Max.

---

Friday, July 23

I came in to mail my letter to father and see to my funeral. Kept an eye out for Vee.



First thing I went to see my friend, Newton Morris, at the Recorder's office. Another \$5 and in through the side door. He wears a clerk's pair of glasses, a vest and a loosely-knotted tie, and a shirt too big in the collar with a frayed and yellowed neck. He deals with fellows who don't care if they sneeze more gold onto the floor than he makes in a day. I told him what I wanted to do, about changing the ownership, but he said, You can't do that, Garrett, and I said, I'm Lefty Hillup and that's my signature there. McKenzie is dead. He stared over his glasses at me for a long second and stuck his fingers in his vest pockets, looking like a featherless chicken. You jest, he said, like he was taking a stand. No, I said, he's dead. Clothes don't make the man, he said. You may have lost your beard, but your moles and freckles are the same. Check with Staff Sergeant Mallard, I said. I will, he said, next time he comes in. He was just here, as a matter of fact, looking at the very line you want to change. Oh, I said, trying to disguise my panic. What the hell did he want with that? I asked, but I made clicking noises with my mouth, it was so dry. Then I said, perhaps I should talk to Staff Sergeant Mallard to see if there's a problem. That would be best, Garrett, he said. I told you, Garrett's dead, I said. As you wish, he said. Come to the funeral, I said, and see for yourself. I will, he said. I headed back to the fraction without talking to Mallard, needless to say, and with even more to think about.

I arrived mid-afternoon. Maudite and Half-boat had been eating through the dump like BadFoot eats a rat. Gulping until there's just a tail hanging out. We decided to work as long as it takes to get finished – one more big gulp – so we all had a good meal to fuel up for the evening's work. Jocular. Good fellows. They've gone ahead to fire up the sluices again, and I'm joining them now that this and my coffee are done. Work will soothe me.

---

Friday, July 23, 1897

*Max and I have a deal. I get \$25,000, interest-free, two months to pay back \$15,000, and four months to pay the rest. If I miss the first deadline I'll have to pay 8% interest on the full term. If I miss the second, he'll get 1/8 of the hotel. He wanted a quarter, I offered a sixteenth. Roderick and I went over the books, and we could see we'd have no trouble with either deadline. He gets a very good deal, I think. My father would be amused by how topsy-turvy this world is. This place is awash with money, so it's a lucky fellow who can put his to work. And, given that I'll be paying back the full amount within six to eight weeks, I get a good deal, too.*

*Only a couple of days to go before the mill is done. Many have dropped by to ask what we are up to. Enough have said they would be back to keep production going for at least a week and we haven't even started!*

---

Saturday, July 24

We finished the dump last night around midnight. Only a little bit of panning to go.

I reckon we've got well over 15,000 oz. in several small canvas bags. That's \$250,000 or thereabouts; over \$100,000 my share, after royalties, and paying the fellows 750 oz. apiece for a few days' work. Can't see how any of Lefty's folks are going to argue when I deliver his share. I did a jig outside the cabin when I'd finished the reckoning. When they heard me, the boys came and joined in, Moe with his mouth organ, slapping his thigh and Half-boat twirling with his hands high. Grown men. Little boys.

I'll have a bit of bother now and again, to be sure, but the bulk of my troubles are over. Well, except for those with Vee.

Slept late. The boys are loading up our skid now. The load is over 900 pounds, but the three of us and BadFoot can haul it. Hell, BadFoot could haul it himself, I reckon, he pulls so hard, but we borrowed three other dogs, just in case. Big long skids sticking way out front and curved up so as to ride over roots, rocks and stumps, which is all this country is these days. It went pretty smoothly, all things considered. We only got wedged between stumps once. The ferry caused us a heart-stoppage or two, wondering whether it would tip, but all turned out well.

The whole way in I thought about how to handle things. I decided not to leave all the gold with A.C.C. as I don't want it sitting there in Lefty's name.

A.C.C. gave us \$15.75 an ounce. Have 15,264 oz. @ \$15.75 = \$240,408!!! Got them to set aside the royalty. The fellows are off to celebrate with their shares (\$5,400 each). A.C.C. will split the remainder, boxing up one half and holding the other aside in Lefty's name. I got them do up my half of our earlier clean-up, too, and after the funeral, I'll haul what belongs to the real me back to the fraction where I have control over it.

I got a spot at Harry Ash's. Noisy as hell. Next time I'll get a rich man's room.

For years I have stopped myself from thinking very much about what being rich would mean to me, but now I find myself freely imagining myself with Vee at my side with every reason to feel her equal. I will be able to buy a fine house for her in Manhattan. My plans to become a financier will turn New Yorkers' heads soon enough when we ride by. They'll say pleasant things about her dress and hat and hotels, and calling me McKenzie, the money man from Quebec, the one who made his first fortune in the Klondike, and his second buying railroads to ship asbestos from Thetford Mines to a growing New York City, and his third in real estate. As our carriage turns the corner on

Lexington Avenue, toward our Upper East Side address, they'll say, That block there, that's his. That's his third fortune.

---

Saturday, July 24, 1897

*When Garrett came by the cabin this afternoon, at least he was careful enough to wait until he could catch me alone. Nevertheless I said, "I don't want anything to do with you, Lefty. Harry Ash's place is down the road there." And he left.*

*The mill is done! This evening we do our first test runs!*

*I had just finished writing that when Haldron showed up to remind me that the crew won't be here tomorrow (it being Sunday), and that he had told the fellows that our tests will run on Monday. I found this quite surprising since I had given clear instructions that I wanted to run at least one this evening. When I reminded him of this, Haldron put his hands on his hips in a rather defiant pose. He reminded me, in turn, that the men had been working day and night for two weeks and deserved an evening off.*

*"They deserve," I retorted, "a good job and good wage, not a foreman who contradicts the owner." I told him that I had not seen any sign of fatigue or dissatisfaction among them. We must take advantage of the summer sunshine, it is as simple as that."*

*"I have worked in the north and have wintered up here. I have also worked in several mills," he said, implying I lacked experience.*

*"Haldron, I am well aware of the men's efforts and am grateful to them for that. But you will admit that I am paying them a very competitive wage, including compensation for evening work. I should have thought they would be happy for the work." But as I looked about at them I didn't receive much support, and it became clear they had been looking forward to a night off. Without meaning to, I had caught myself in a spot.*

*“Are you pushing this to the point of us risking our employment, Miss Baker?”*

*“Mr. Sykes, it is you who has countermanded my directions, so, as I see it, it is you who is pushing me! The understanding was that we would do a test run this evening and that they would have their Sunday off. I am under considerable pressure and time constraints at the moment and I would appreciate you following that direction.”*

*“Under what penalty, Miss Baker?”*

*“Do not push me too hard, Mr. Sykes,” I said, now that my back was up. “You will find me stubborn when it comes to points of necessity and principle.”*

*I heard Willoughby, off to the side, snorting in agreement.*

*“I would still like to know what the penalty would be,” Haldron said.*

*“I will not hold the men responsible for the actions of their head-strong foreman, Mr. Sykes. For you, the penalty would be your job.”*

*Haldron looked long and hard at me, I suspect to assess my determination. I had the feeling that he was about to lose his job rather than lose face to a “skirt”. So before he could say anything more, I asked the men to leave us for a few minutes.*

*When I had him alone, I immediately relieved some of the pressure by saying how much I appreciated him as a foreman, that I recognized his significant contribution to our enterprise, and that I sincerely hoped that he would continue working for me. As I feel all this to be true, I delivered it quite convincingly. His face relaxed as, I suspect, he sensed he was about to get his way. Then I said that under the circumstances, however, he had placed us both in untenable positions. My decisions could not be seen as being over-ridden arbitrarily and without consultation by a willful foreman. And as I had no*

*more interest in losing face in front of my employees than he in front of "his men", we were facing an awkward situation. His face tightened again.*

*"What if we run the tests Sunday night to get us back on schedule?" he asked.*

*"I cannot ask the men to do that, it being the Sabbath," I said.*

*"I'll pay a helper out of my own pocket," he said. What a surprise that was!*

*"That's very generous of you," I said, "but I do not like the idea of a helper unfamiliar with the set-up working with you. It creates an unnecessary risk."*

*"As you wish," he said, sticking his hand out to acknowledge his fate.*

*I was just about to shake hands with this bone-crushing man of whom I had become quite fond, when an idea suddenly occurred to me. "You know what, Haldron?" I said. "We'll give the men a break and I'll help you run the tests."*

*"That's a bit unorthodox," he said.*

*"This is an unorthodox country," I said, "and I am an unorthodox woman. But I'll only do it on the condition that you never again go against me that way. Bring your concerns and ideas to me first. We will reach agreement, compromising if necessary."*

*"Done," he said, with a clear sense of relief.*

*An exhilaration overcame me. I had just avoided certain disaster. Being pleased with myself, I said, "Not bad for a skirt", as we waited for the men to reassemble.*

*"Not bad for a pair of pants," he said, smiling. And that was that.*

---

### Sunday, July 25

Got caught up in a Faro game last night at the Monte Carlo. I did well for three decks, then lost on the last turn. \$1200 in the hole. Stupid me. Better than Maudite,

though. He joined in the game only on the last turn, and in less than a minute, he lost half what I paid him, \$2,500. I told him, never mind, you still have a job. He looked at me and said, Maudite! I don't care. I dig it out de main, der chief! Half-boat took him off and got him drunk.

---

Saturday, July 24, 1897 (written Sunday, July 25)

*It's late Sunday afternoon, and I have now recovered from Saturday Night in Dawson and several whiskeys too many.*

*Willoughby and I had dinner together. It was at a curious little place called La Guitarra, which has only three tables. The owner-chef serves whatever she happens to be cooking that night. Last night it was a kind of stew or "cocido" with bacon, chicken, and fresh vegetables – they have a small garden – accompanied by a "tortilla de patata" or potato omelette, with custard for dessert. They even had Spanish wine, a Rioja, I think it was called – deep red, full and strong. Throughout most of the meal, her husband sat outside the door of their small log building, leaning against the front wall, quietly playing the most wonderful gypsy music on his guitar. Occasionally he broke into song, in a wavering, hypnotic tenor. We could not help but stop our conversation and listen. Not knowing Spanish, we imagined our own lyrics and shared our speculations. There were several broken hearts and lost loves, one highway robber who died in trying to escape (Willoughby) and one spurned Seniorita chasing her lover down the back alleyways of Seville (me, of course), who, having crowned him with a mallet, broke down in tears over his lifeless body. The last song, we were told, was actually one of a young Matador hoping to avenge the death of his Matador father. The sadness weaving its way through the song was for the father, for the brave bull that killed him and died anyway, and for*

*the son who knew his death could well be waiting for him in the arena. Half a world from their home, a quarter of a world from ours, a little room transported.*

*I joked with Willoughby – who during the intermissions kept us going with tales from the Civil War and the California Gold Rush – that the food, the company, the intimacy of the little restaurant, and the music were enough to make me fall in love all over again, and he said, “Miss Baker, that would be just fine with me!”*

*Buoyed up by Rioja, I trotted out my Southern Belle: “I do love you, Willoughby,” I said, taking his hands in mine. “Spirit me away and marry me.”*

*He laughed heartily, then for just a moment, I could tell, he looked at me as if he were a young man again. “I would, you know, if I were of age. But for now, let’s just go gambling!”*

*We paid our delightful hosts \$20 for the meal, \$20 for the rest.*

*“Worth every penny,” I said, as I squeezed Willoughby’s hand to make him blush.*

*We ran into Roderick and Byron who, by then, had already taken baths (\$5 each), been shaved (\$1 each), and trimmed (\$2.50 each), and were feeling their several whiskies (50¢ each). They invited us to join them for a drink and a turn or two at the Faro tables at Pete McDonald’s M&M.*

*I had never seen Faro played before, let alone play it myself. The fellows called it “Bucking the Tiger.” No one knew why. It seems quite easy to learn, being that there is no bluffing, as I have seen at poker, and no real skill as there is at games like bridge or whist. All the “punters” put their bets (their “checks”) next to the card on the banker’s lay-out. If the card next turned up by the banker matches the one you have bet on – regardless of suit – you lose, and the banker collects the checks put on it. If the card*



*turned up after that – the “English card” – matches yours, you win, dollar for dollar. At the end, when there are only three cards left, the punters can “bet the turn”, which really just means betting on the last three cards all at once and the pay-offs go up. With a good banker and “coffin driver” (the fellow who, with a “case” or a “coffin”, keeps track of the cards turned up), they can run through the whole deck in fifteen minutes. It can get quite exciting, particularly at the end when they play the turn. I played for half an hour or so, deciding that if I lost \$5 I would quit. They started calling me “Piker” Baker after a while because I was betting small amounts all over the layout.*

*The House sets limits for bets at the Faro tables, but every once in a while – when things seemed to be getting slow at the bar – the owner rang a big bell, to signal that the next Faro round would have no limits. Fellows on the street would hear the bell, of course, and come in to watch, and have a whiskey. The big winners – there were a couple this time – bought drinks for the house, and Harry bought a couple more for big losers. However you cut it, Harry came out on top.*

*Max came in at the end of my run and stood by to watch, too. When I lost my limit he offered to buy me a whiskey and walk me home. I refused the whiskey politely – it is horrible stuff they serve, and watered-down – but accepted the company. Roderick and Byron stayed behind and were playing enthusiastically when I left.*

*I saw Garrett and had to walk past him, arm in arm with Max. It breaks my heart.*

## Chapter 16 My Eulogy

CANADA:

NORTH WEST TERRITORIES:

IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF F. GARRETT MCKENZIE, DECEASED:

I, J. Simon Green, of Dawson City in the North West Territories,  
Undertaker, make oath and say:

That I was the officiating undertaker in charge of the remains of  
F. Garrett McKenzie, who died at Dawson on or about July 17,  
1897.

That on July 20, 1897, I, with Staff Sergeant George C. Mallard  
of the North West Mounted Police, conducted an inspection of  
the deceased's remains and circumstances of his death at the  
site of the deceased's death on his claim, 32A Above, on  
Eldorado Creek, Klondike Mining District, North West  
Territories.

That the said Staff Sergeant Mallard and I concluded, independ-  
ently, following our inspections, that death was caused by a  
blow to the head from a falling bolder, followed by, and  
aggravated by, suffocation under collapsed earth.

That the said Staff Sergeant Mallard and I concluded, independ-  
ently, that nothing in the state of the remains, or in the  
nature of the site of said incident, or in the circumstances  
leading up to said incident, so far as we know, gives reason

to suspect anything other than accidental causes for the said death.

That I know the said body to be that of the late F. Garrett McKenzie, who carried on business as a Miner at or near Dawson in the North West Territories aforesaid.

That I received the said body from the custody of the said Staff Sergeant George C. Mallard at the site of the said incident.

That the said body of F. Garrett McKenzie was laid away by me at Dawson in the North West Territories.

SWORN before me at Dawson in the North West Territory, Canada,  
this 25th of July, AD 1897.

(signed A. Joseph Murray)

A Notary Public in and for the North West Territories, Canada.

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### Sunday, July 25

My funeral was this morning. Vee came, which was a relief, except that Max came with her. Staff Sergeant Mallard showed up. And Morris from the Mining Recorder's office. I gave my own eulogy, which was the strangest of feelings.

I started off writing it like this:

My name is Leland Hillup. Most people call me Lefty. I have been asked to say a few words about Garrett McKenzie, who lies before us, the victim of a tragic accident.

Garrett would have been very pleased to see that so many made it here from the creeks today to honour his passing. I note also the presence of Staff Sergeant Mallard at

the back and I can say without fear of contradiction that Garrett would be happy that he is here to insure the safe passage of his soul into the beyond.

Garrett and I looked alike. In fact some of you who did not know us well may be looking at me at this moment, unable to rid yourselves of the unnatural feeling that Garrett stands before you, delivering his own eulogy ...

Then I realised it was wrong. Very wrong. It had to sound like this:

I'm Leland Hillup. Most up here call me Lefty. I gotta say a few words about Mac, my partner, the poor stiff who lies in this box here.

He would have been glad a bunch of you made in from the creeks today. And glad to see the Sergeant back there makin' sure his soul started on its way, now that he's a goner.

Mac never saw the rock comin' which is what most of us would wish for ...

And so on, and so on, like that.

It went pretty well, considering.

I mentioned father, mother, and Ted. I talked about how I grew up in Quebec and Northern Vermont. How I found the guidebook published for miners and prospectors for the California Gold Rush in my father's collection and how it led to me to head north. How Vee first came to Northern Vermont from New York Island in 1880 to spend her vacation at her family's retreat north of Newport, off Eagle Point Road. About Owl's Head and the boat wreck off Eagle Point when we dragged survivors onto shore. About our lazy summer days, and picnics, and adventures. He tol' me all that over the stretch we worked as partners, talkin' long into the evening most times, I said, lying.

Then, after looking up and around the room, I launched into what I called "Garrett's favourite story", about the summer of 1886, when Vee and Ted and I hopped the Boston

& Maine freight going north on a dare, with Vee dressed as a boy, and how we caught the Waterloo & Magog freight – stressing the name, Waterloo, of course – and then how at Magog we caught the steamboat south to Newport. How we slept in haylofts, in freight cars, curled up on the hard bench in the back of a row boat, ate what we could find: tomatoes stolen from backyard gardens, raw, sweet corn on the cob, milk from a bottle left on someone's doorstep at five in the morning. And how we laughed and shook from the cold from beginning to end.

I mentioned the shock of our families. I told how my family got over it in a flash, bringing the wanderers in, feeding them and cleaning them up, and being just happy to have them back. But I skipped over how with Mrs. Belcher it was a different matter, how it led to talk of cursed Loyalist sympathies and the proclivities of certain races. And I definitely did not explain how it led eventually to my mother's suicide.

I talked about how, in 1892, at twenty six, I was disillusioned with society, and left for the gold fields. I didn't use the word disillusioned, of course, but threw in the phrase, He was sick of all that shit! Instead. I figured that would surely sway doubters as anyone who knew me would know I would never talk like that in public.

I related how I worked my way slowly though the ageing mining camps of California, picking up skills and tricks along the way, north through the Caribou Country of British Columbia and Barkerville for a stretch, until I was drawn by tales of gold at Forty Mile on the Yukon River. How, in 1893 I followed the trail to Circle City, with its dance halls, opera house, 28 saloons and gold, and so ended up here when the word of the Klondike find spread throughout the north.

I finished by saying “Garrett were right stylish in his buckskin,” but that “he were too shy a fella to say he were handsome.” That got a smile or two. And then I tried to help seal any lingering doubts about identities by looking at the clerk, Newton Morris, for a second and adding, “But Garrett sure got riled when I borrowed the buckskin once. I reckon it were ’cause I wore it better. So I never again.” No one knew how to react. I knew they thought it was a bad attempt at a bad joke. A couple smiled, half-heartedly, out of politeness and embarrassment. I think everyone who knew me would know I would never joke in such bad taste. And all who knew Lefty would find it consistent with him and try to block it out.

I finished this way: Mac always said he was not a perfect man. He tol’ me he messed up from time to time. But I can tell ya, he ain’t never backed away from a fight, never struck man when he was down, never kicked a dog for any reason, an’ never chiselled no one. An’, so far as I can tell, he ain’t never wronged a woman, or held a grudge.” I looked at Vee when I said that, but she quickly looked down.

After the funeral, I tried to intercept her, but she walked with Max.

Newton Morris came up to me as I was staring after her. Sorry about Garrett, Lefty, he said. I shouldn’t have doubted you. You should come in and we’ll fix up that ownership line for you. Thanks, I said, but you know what? To hell with the ownership. I’ll just give his family their fair share, I said. That’s a good approach, he said. It will save them the trouble of waiting. How’s that? I asked. Oh, the will being probated and things like that, he said. Sometimes it takes a year. I’m no solicitor, but a gift is a gift and there’s no standing around for that, I wouldn’t think. You pay your royalty on the gross production, then you do with the rest what you please. Take it out, buy hotels, give it

away. Or gamble, if you've a mind to lose, he said, cackling into his chest. Spectacled, and vested, but in spite of that, dishevelled and scattered, and covered with dandruff.

You may be right. I hadn't thought of it that way, I said and walked out.

I was worried about committing fraud on top of everything else, and worried about whether Mallard looking at the records makes a difference. The gift is a good idea. I won't bother changing ownership. I just can't get discovered before I leave is all.

I found Maudite and Half-boat in early afternoon, both heading back up to the creek to stay out of trouble. We loaded up gold at A.C.C. and dragged it back.

Water's everywhere these days. There was a pool under the doors to the workings. Inside, a creek trickled from back in the drift. Curious. I followed it back to the collapse where it had eroded an edge of the pile that smothered Lefty. It's melting back there somewhere. I pumped out the pool and mended small door that I axed through, and braced everything from the inside. Now my gold's all in there, under lock and key, secure, and more or less back where it came from. 500 pounds of it! 8,900 oz! \$140,000! I took some dust to keep me going. My poke's full now, plump, like Christmas.

My well-fingered Sears Roebuck & Co. 1897 Catalogue says with that I could order:

- 500 pairs of Dr. Wright's Best Non-shrinkable Winter Wool Underwear; and
- 500 Milan straw Swell Evangeline Hats with satin ribbon and ruffles and lace and rosettes, for Vee, which she'd never wear, I know; and
- 12 sets of Genuine Haviland Finest French China Dinner Ware (112 pieces per set) in case we have 120 guests; and
- 20 Highest Grade Columbus Carriages with Full Leather Extension Tops to ride them around the park; and

- should they stay the night, 20 (twenty!) fine Fullerton, three storey, Prefabricated houses with six rooms and a big porch each;
- with piles left over to buy the horses, harnesses, stable, and house furnishings, not to mention our fine Manhattan house!

Moe and HB had a laugh over my list. Then they grabbed the catalogue and made ridiculous lists of their own.

---

Sunday, July 25, 1897

*This morning I went to Garrett's funeral, thinking that if I didn't it would look very suspicious, especially to Max who knows of our long-standing relationship. I had no choice, really. It was either that or give him away. No more involvement for me, however. I feel extraordinarily badly for him anyway, and listening to him talk about our adventures during the eulogy made me feel positively hollow. But what was I to do?*



## Chapter 17 Booker's Thumb and Cyclone

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Sunday, July 25, 1897(continued)

*I just got back from running the mill tests. It was just the antidote to Garrett's eulogy I needed. Busy hands, as they say. Haldron was in very good spirits as he fired up the steam, and even better when we tried out each station, fashioning our very first set of screens. We made two, each nominally 2 feet by 3 feet. A fellow happened to be coming by and stopped to watch. As soon as we had wedged in the screen on the second frame, he asked how much? I wanted time to think, as that sale would be setting the price for all our output, so I asked him for a second while I did some calculations. In truth, I decided, under the circumstances to use the man as a test and start high, just to see what his response might be. I fully anticipated inching my way back to the point where the market (my first customer) would bear the price.*

*I thought about last night's dinner. We paid many times the New York price of \$1.25 to \$2.50 and didn't blink an eye. Sears and Roebuck sells window screens for \$2.00 a dozen. So I took a shot and said two ounces for the pair. To my great surprise, he just smiled and said, "I'll take them," and he took out his poke to pay me. I've never smiled so widely over money. I saw Haldron smiling, too, as did our customer walking away.*

*I asked Haldron how many we could make in a day. He grabbed his red lumber pencil and a scrap piece of lumber and started reckoning, mumbling to himself. "Two minutes... ripping... cross-cutting... mitering... grooving... ten minutes... corners... cut screen... wedging. Twelve minutes a screen," he said, looking up, "start to finish. Twenty hours of daylight. With two shifts a day, we can do between 90 and 100 a day."*

*“Two shifts?” I wondered.*

*“Yes, Ma’am,” he said, very sure of himself. “Two shifts, between 8 and 10 hours each, depending on the time of the month. We have 50 rolls of screening left. That’s about 1500 two by three foot screens. Fifteen to twenty days to make them. The bugs will start becoming fewer by then anyway, so that’s about right for timing.”*

*Once he started, I couldn’t stop him. “We’ll need a feeder,” he went on, “a man who does both ripping, cross-cutting, a corner-man, a wedger and a gofer...,” and then went back to his mumbling “\$1 an hour ... crew... me doing the corner work on my shift... \$75/day wages... fifteen days... \$17,000 profit more or less,” he said, looking up again, “not counting other expenses. I figure when the sales start tapering off ...”*

*“Wait, wait, wait!” I had to say. “You’ve forgotten that I’ll need the rip and cross-cut saws to get lumber ready for hotel construction.”*

*“Ah, yes, of course,” he said. “Well, we could do all the ripping and cross-cutting for the screens in the morning and then have them move over...Then when the market dies down for screens we can start doing planking and furniture.”*

*“Stop, Haldron!” I ordered him, but his eyes told me he was still calculating. So I said, “I have been thinking that we should call the mill Baker & Sykes and incorporate it, with you as a minor partner,” and that shut him up!*

*“The condition is that you invest \$2,000 for five percent,” I said. He frowned momentarily. “I don’t have that kind of money. \$15 a day is a decent wage but not enough for that.” So I told him I needed someone to take over responsibility for the mill, as I could then focus on the hotel. I told him he could take a raise to \$20 a day to be*

*foreman without a share of the business, or take \$25 a day, while re-investing \$20 of it each day toward his five percent.*

*“That’s only \$5 a day to live on.” He looked disappointed.*

*“But if you chose the latter, I’ll throw in free room and board. A cabin.”*

*“Ahh,” he said, smiling broadly.*

*“As before, all major decisions go through me first.”*

*He smiled even as he apologized for crushing my hand. “When you reach your five percent we’ll put up the new sign: Baker & Sykes, High Quality Screening.”*

*He suggested we call it: Baker & Sykes Screens Save Your Buggy Ass, and started laughing like an eight year old. I admit, I did, too.*

---

### Monday, July 26

I set the boys to work on a part of the cut next to where we first struck pay and went up to the cabin to fix it up a bit. I did up some moose a fellow sold us. I had to turn it into a stew and cook it for 4 hours, the meat was so tough.

Within an hour the boys had me down looking at a trench Moe had cut in the side of the old workings. They’d found bedrock just a couple of feet in, and damn me if it wasn’t blindingly rich. There’s a little trough of pay dirt some four feet wide or more running the width of the fraction. We each had pans with 10 oz. or more! We worked like fiends on the new find for a couple of hours, mucking and panning before we broke to eat.

Even heavily stewed, the moose was as chewy as a boot. We sat there, our mouths full of the first bits, looking at one another, chewing, and chewing. But we couldn’t swallow. The moose pieces refused to give way. Three minutes of looking at one another,

chewing, and chewing, and chewing, and we couldn't take it anymore. Laughed like idiots, spit out the moose and ate the rest like soup.

---

Monday, July 26, 1897

*Today was a very long day. We put the word out that we needed carpenters, and, while the line-up was forming (it very grew quickly), Samson, Joseph, Roderick, Byron and I laid out the location of the foundation for the hotel. Once that was done I went back up to the mill, leaving the fellows to start building the cribs and filling them with rocks.*

*Haldron and I split the responsibility of hiring. I took the men, one by one, and spent a few minutes getting information about their experience, looking them over for bad signs – poor hygiene, the smell of whiskey, and other things that might interfere with their ability to work – and getting a feeling for how each might fit in with a crew. I sent the 'nays' on their way, and gathered the 'yeas' in a group. Once I had four or five, I'd send them up to Haldron who would run them through their paces at the saws.*

*I'm pleased to say we had only two cut hands all day. The first one wasn't the fellow's fault. One of the saws bucked on him and sent a half-cut wedge into his palm. He'll come back when he heals, and try again. The second cut was more gruesome and required a quick trip to our new hospital. The fellow involved was a bit of a braggart, Haldron said, and claimed to know everything about saws – everything about everything, in fact. Haldron wanted them to test out on the 12" blade, but the fellow went over to the 40" blade we use for ripping logs. Haldron sharpens "his" blades every day, religiously, coming up before anyone else. Their teeth would put the fear of God into any sane man. Not our braggart, though, He didn't use a push block and he blithely sent his thumb through with the wood.*

*“Luckily the blade cut below the first knuckle, otherwise it could have been quite nasty,” he said. Good heavens! I would have thought losing the end of your thumb would be nasty enough. Haldron wrapped up the poor fellow’s hand, gave him back the tip wrapped in a spare handkerchief (as a souvenir, I guess), slipped a few dollars into his pocket, and thanked him for coming. The man didn’t complain, as it was apparent even to him that he had failed the test, and he only had himself to blame. “See you at the saloon, boys,” he said as he walked off with a smile on his face. In fact, I found out later that he went to the Monte Carlo where he drank with his left hand, apparently “To teach it how to do the most important thing in life.” He put his thumb in a glass of whiskey, and dared any and all to drink from it. Some took him up on the challenge. , I fully admit I don’t understand men well, generally speaking, but some men I don’t understand at all.*

*From the fellows I sent up as potential employees, Haldron selected two full crews and a couple of spares whom we might call upon, and started training them at their spots. We were both very pleased with the results, and believe we’ll be able to start runs tomorrow, though not yet at full speed.*

*I am feeling happy. Aside from “The Mess”, things could hardly be going better – knock on wood.*

---

Tuesday, July 27

We wanted to work all day on the trough, but war broke out on two fronts.

First a government agent from the Gold Commissioner’s office turned up. Too damned young for his uniform, he looked. So young his voice almost broke. He informed me that he had become aware of ‘my’ deposits of gold at the A.C.C. (meaning Lefty’s)

and that ‘I’ (meaning Lefty) had not paid the royalty on gross production due the Canadian Government. Told him I’d set aside the royalty and just hadn’t had a chance to pay him yet. He said that the A.C.C. had told him about that, but that he was talking about the \$53,000 deposit on July 14. Oh, I said, cursing Lefty under my breath.

Half-boat Joe is from New Jersey and takes offence to just about everything “British”. Usury! he yelled, and gave us a foulmouthed history of the Boston Tea Party. I had to remind him that here, in Canada, any and all foreigners, including Americans, can take their riches south and never show up again. He just looked at me, and shook his head, like I was missing something you had to be blessed, or American, to understand.

I straightened it out and the Gold Commissioner’s man left. Half-boat threw pebbles at him every time he turned his back and the poor fellow couldn’t get away fast enough. Good aim, too. Smarted like hell, I wager. See now why the he and Moe get along so well. Mutual hate. Common enemy. Anything “British”, or that smells of it.

Next came a row with Max. Some time ago Lefty and Max agreed to create a dam and share the water. Max was reluctant, but the miner working the claim below Max, Jeb “Tree Stump” O’Malley, joined in, and convinced Max that it made sense. We were to split the usage, using a gating system. Max has had more than his share of late because of the trouble with Lefty. Nevertheless, today Max decided we had been using too much and cut us off, without warning. The dam is up the hill a ways. The three of us went up, and Max was there with his crew of three.

I told him that I felt we should have at least a couple more days to catch up, and he told me to sod off, calling me a rotter and a punk. So I called him a posh twit and a top hat. Looked at me and asked if I was trying to insult him. I told him yes, of course, and he

just laughed. He told me he'd give me a hand with that sometime, so I told him to go to hell, and he said, "Precisely. No imagination, old boy."

Moe stepped in and said something about Max and sheep's guts and made a comment about Max's harem: "Go back to your baa baa-rem" or something. I had to think about that one, but I got it in the end. Then he said something about Scots. I have been called a heartless Imperialist, Max said, of which I am rather proud. I have been called a squirrel-faced coward in short pants, which I found amusing because my accuser at the time, the husband of the poor woman I was seeing, was crying out from a cupboard where he had hidden. I have been called a money-grubbing Colonial, which rankled me somewhat because it is not I who am the Colonial, but the fellow accused me did not have an intelligence worth countering. And you have suggested I have an hareem of sheep, and therefore that I am some sort of English version of a swarthy Mohammedan with a mammalian fetish. However, that is at least original, and having had my life saved in the mountains of Kashmir by just such a dark-skinned shepherd who himself was a swarthy Mohammedan, I consider it more of a compliment than an affront. But just now you called me a highland Scot, and that, I fear, is too much!

You would do well, Mr. Côté, to remember what happened at Quebec in 1759, he continued. And to remember General Wolfe's handy victory and that the French militia showed their backs as they broke ranks and fled to the city. Moe exploded at that point so I didn't get to hear what Wolfe was supposed to have had said about that, but as Half-boat could barely hold him back, I assume it was nasty.

I ignored the shouting, thinking it a good diversion, and went to open the sluice again, but Max followed me, and the rest followed him. He stomped on my hand. That

hurt like hell, so I pushed him onto his back, and that's when the ruckus started. I spotted Max coming at me and put my heel sharply to his knee. I've never heard an Englishman yelp before. Bloody loud – and a little prissy, I thought. That brought in the rest. Max was rolling about on the ground in pain, so it was three on three, for a time.

I was right about my two fellows. Moe erupted first, but moved in and out, getting off shots regularly. Pop. Pop. Half-boat stood back and waited. His fellow was a ram of an Italian, and Half-boat got the worst of it to start, but then he erupted, fists and boots raining down on the Italian like hot rocks from Vesuvius. The Italian went running off holding various parts of his body. Moe's fellow, seeing the tide shift, bolted, too. My fellow and I were pretty much entangled on the ground, neither making headway, so that left Max facing both Maudite and Half-boat; Max vs. Moe and Joe. I reckon Moe wanted to avenge General Montcalm and Half-boat wanted to prove that Washington's victory was no accident, because they had Max pinned and sputtering in no time.

Jeb came along at the right moment. It turns out that Max, in his haste, cut his water off, too. He lectured us, in a gentle sort of way. Jeb's a huge fellow, with a deep voice, so fellows pay attention. We got up and dusted off. I felt like I was before the School Principal again.

Thankfully, Jeb extracted a workable agreement. Even Max acquiesced, having seen no decent alternative, I reckon. We get the dam for two more days of uninterrupted use, then we split according to a sundial. Part of the agreement was that there were to be no more references to Wolfe or Scots. Jeb waited until we all went back to work, then walked away shaking his head – in disgust, I reckon.



We mucked and panned for the rest of the day. After dinner I'm taking a few ounces and heading to town.

---

Tuesday, July 27, 1897

*We started our runs on the screens today. Goodness! As the word got out, a line-up formed quickly. My supplies will arrive any day now, so I'm in good shape and very happy about it. Soon I'll be free of debt. To my book and bath, and a twelve hour sleep!*

---

Wednesday, July 28

I got to Dawson around midnight last night. They'd finished the vaudeville at the Opera House and started the dance. I'm not much for winging it around the floor, so I went to the Monte Carlo to Buck the Tiger. Hambone Jack was there with that floozy who's always draped over him. Black Tart, they call her. Don't want to know why. She's as pale as a sheet, so it must be ironic. I'd call her Black Heart myself. While she looked around at the crowd, she had her chin on his shoulder and one hand in his pocket. She smiled at me like she was ready to jump trains and wanted to see if I was up and running. Hambone never caught her looking, poor fellow. He'll be looking around himself before long, wondering where she went. I took his spot when he busted out. He bought everyone a round to show he didn't care.

The Banker was hot at first. I lost every turn until I coppered my bets. Then I couldn't lose. Black Tart re-appeared and tried to get her hooks into me. A contrary night. Though the limit was only \$50, I came out \$1800 ahead in just an hour. Went to Harry Ash's for a couple of drinks, bought the boys a couple of rounds, and got a room at the Klondike.

---

Wednesday, July 28, 1897

*The John J. Healy puffed in this morning, screeching its whistle, causing bustle in town. My supplies arrived with it and are being stored in the N.A.T.&T. Company's warehouses for the time being. Willoughby and I went to the docks to look them over, and he stayed behind to see that all was offloaded properly. Now all we need is a hotel!*

*The mill is pushing out the planks (joists, studs, floor boards) for the first floor.*

*I quite love how I can write joists, studs, etc. as if I grew up a carpenter. What with building the cabin and mill I now know the difference between them, but I'm still nervous of making a fool of myself. There would be few things worse for my standing than giving an order such as, "Haldron, please cut more joists for the walls." Everyone would stop and look at me – wondering how to deal with the obvious gaff. I have devised a system, derived from the old carpenter's rule: Think twice, order once; never guess.*

*We do not yet need the waste-wood from the Harper-Ladue mill to do our screens. We haul logs from the river (they are cut up-river where they grow close to the bank), and what with all our cutting for the hotel, we can use our own waste for the screens.*

*The beat and hiss of the steam engine, the ring of a saw, the slap of new planks as they land on the stack, the shouts and curses of the crew. All songs of optimism.*

---

Thursday, July 29

I woke up in early afternoon today. Everyone was all excited about a solar eclipse. Seems I missed it. Oh, well. I walked past the site where Vee's putting up her new hotel, and decided to carry on like I didn't know her. I deposited my winnings at the bank, keeping just enough to have a good time tonight.

---

Thursday, July 29, 1897

*Molly shut the Emporium so she and I could hike up with everyone to watch the partial eclipse this afternoon. Just about the whole town was there – except for Garrett. The distant forest fires turned the light orange. “It’s an omen,” Molly said.*

*Fanny reported to us that something’s going on up on the Eldorado and Bonanza benches. Kresge and Peterson have been prospecting the one above Big Skookum Gulch. I got Willoughby to explain. He said benches are the oldest deposits in a valley. The modern creeks cut through them to make a new valley bottom, lower down, leaving benches high up on the sides of the valley. “No reason not to have gold in them,” he said, “as they are old creek beds themselves. It’s been so elsewhere.” We swore not to say anything to anyone for fear of stirring up interest.*

*Eighty-two screens yesterday. Over \$1,000 gross. Not bad for a débutante, I’d say.*

---

Friday, July 30

I ended up with a room at the Monte Carlo again last night. It is now sometime in the afternoon, I think, and as it faces south, it’s like a damned steam room in here. I opened the window, and smelled the rankness – Dawson in the summer – so I closed it again. Black Tart came knocking. Came because of a history with Lefty, I reckon. I turned her away.

I had a fabulous run last night against the Bank. Kept on betting big on the turn and guessing right. Over \$2,000. Nice roll in my pocket. Haven’t counted it. Got back to the Klondike about 7 AM. Going back to sleep.

---

Friday, July 30, 1897

*Haven't seen Garrett. Hope things are alright.*

*The first floor walls are almost up; two more floors to go.*

*I am very pleased with how Haldron and the crews are working out. It doesn't hurt that we have Byron cook them all a hearty meal as the shifts are changing.*

*We've had only one problem so far, knock on wood. One of the crew was giving Samson a rough time about his braid and how he was lucky no squaw had cut it off yet. I checked into it, then called the fellow out in front of everyone. I told him the only thing that mattered to me is that the men did their work and didn't interfere with others. Walked right up to him – the fellow is a full foot taller than me and twice my weight. I fired him on the spot, and waited for the worst. He was looking around for support, but he got none. So he left and I breathed a sigh. "Well done, Miss," Haldron said, and sent one of the boys to find the next one on the list of men we tested.*

*It was Jack Booker, the poor fellow who lost his thumb. He came right up to me and said, outright, "I'm sorry, Miss. I've learned my lesson." I took one look at his bandaged hand, wondering, of course, how much that would hamper his performance. Haldron said not to worry, that he had things the fellow could do until the healing was done. Then he put him straight into the production line.*

*One-Thumb Jack they dubbed him. At dinner Byron piped up and recited:*

*Little Jack Booker sat in the corner, Eating his Christmas pie,*

*He put in a plum and pulled out his thumb, And said "What a good feeder am I!"*

*That got them going with jokes about mincemeat pies, thumb puddings, et cetera, which had everyone holding their sides, including Jack. I'll never hear Little Jack Horner*

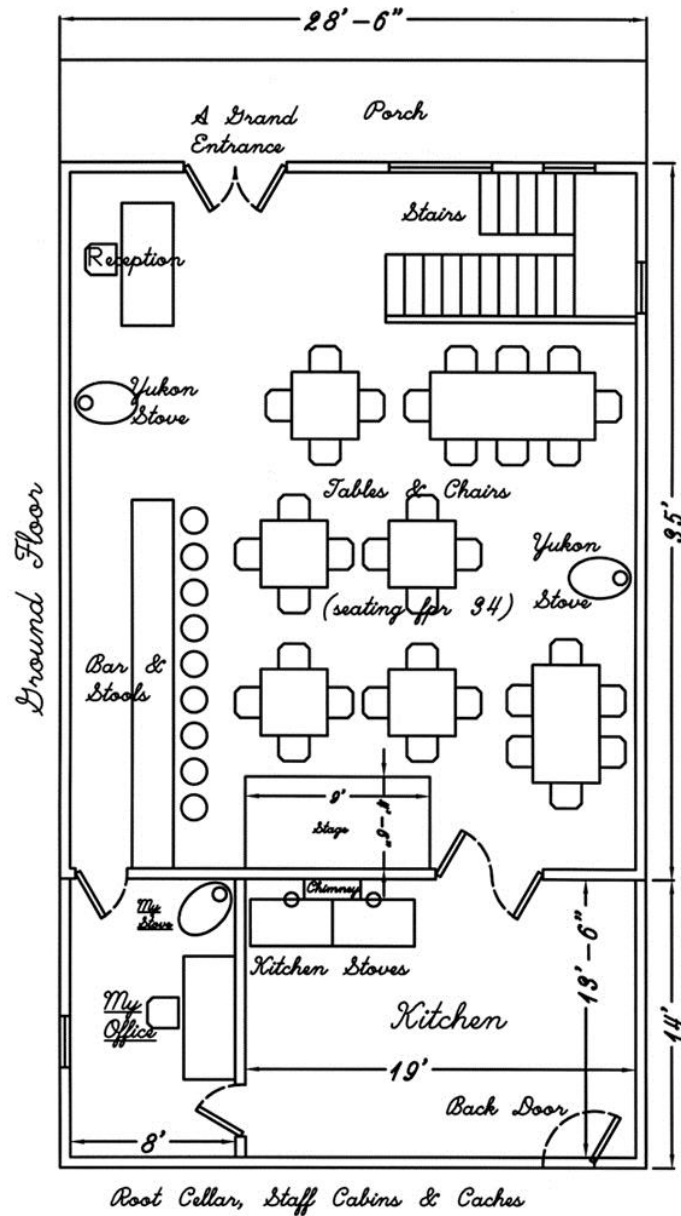
*without thinking of it. Then Byron served a mincemeat pie with uncut plums sticking out looking for all the world like the knuckles of a black man. "Watch out for the thumbs," he said. Then, as we all broke out laughing again, Jack stood up, got a shot glass from a shelf, filled it half-full with some cheap whiskey I keep for 'medicinal' purposes, reached into his pocket, pulled out his now shriveled thumb (which he carries everywhere), plopped it into the glass, and banged the glass onto the middle of the table. As he looked around the table at each of us, daring us silently to do what none of us could stomach doing, the laughter went south for the winter, and suddenly.*

*It looked like a little rodent, the thumb did, lying there, preserved and wrinkled and pallid at the bottom of the glass. Nothing on earth would have brought me to drink that whiskey. "No?" is all he said. Silence, as all stared at the thumb in the glass. Haldron suddenly stepped forward, tossed the drink back, carefully excluding the thumb, and banged the glass on the bar. Booker was not to be outdone. But when he banged his glass on the bar, it was empty. The thumb, he took pride in showing us, remained in the crook of his tongue. I broke out whiskey and cigars for that, and we toasted Booker's thumb.*

*After dinner, Willoughby, Roderick, Byron, Fanny and I sat on the porch, whisking away mosquitoes, watching the sun angle through salmon-colored streaks toward the hills across the Yukon, and I pulled out my drawings for the hotel.*

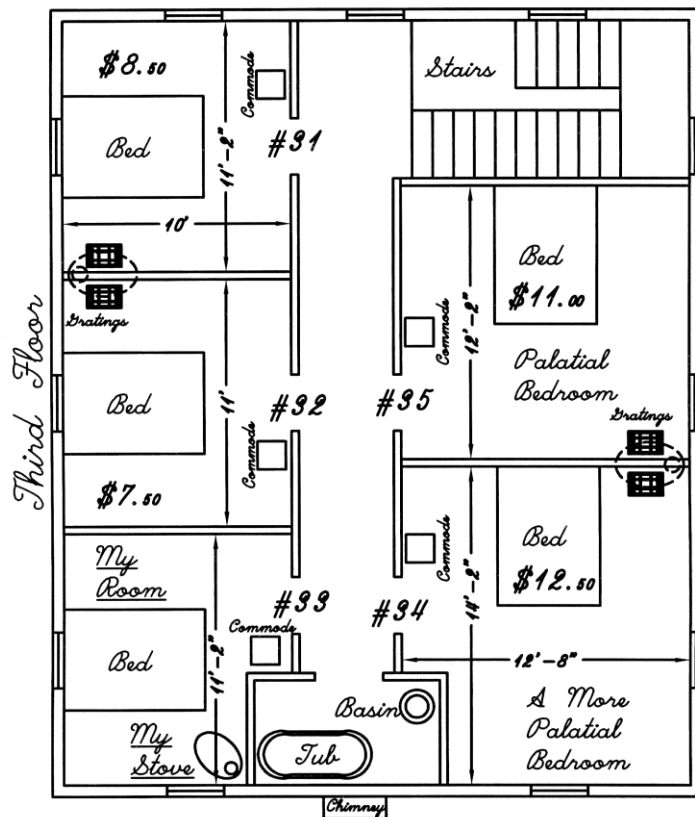
*A nice wide, arched doorway will our porch a sense of grandeur and depth. We are doing spruce clapboards, of course, customary in Dawson.*

*The main hall has a restaurant and theatre, with a small stage at the back. A bar runs half-way down the side toward the front of the house, complete with high mirrors, glass shelving and a brass railing we bought in Seattle.*



*For the interiors we brought wallpaper and some plaster, as the latter is not terribly heavy, being dry in the bag. Our entranceway and main room on the first floor will be plastered, for elegance. We'll set the lathes as we go and leave the plastering until later.*

*A grand staircase will lead up from the front to the second and third floors, which will each have five rooms, and a bathroom. Two of the bedrooms on each floor will be our more palatial rooms. And the prices, I think, are fair. The Second Floor rooms will be marginally less expensive. A total of \$79.00 gross per night for both floors; \$553/week.*



*However, the main floor is not to be just another watering hole with vaudeville and dance hall girls, or with wild card games. I long ago decided that I would go for a clientele willing to pay high prices for a very good meal, a quiet room for the presence of like-minded company. But I don't want a stuffy place. The men here are miners and businessmen away from family, and we are in Dawson, after all. So I threw out my new idea. I'd give the bar as endearing, but cheeky, name.*

*"Booker's Thumb! What do you think?"*

*"Only if Jack lets us put it up on the bar," said Roderick. And we all laughed.*

*So Jack will rent it to us for a dollar a week, on two conditions: no one gets to “drink it” but him; he gets to “drink it” in the manner he just demonstrated, every evening that he can, at exactly 11 PM, as a way of kicking things off.*

*“Call it Thumb Down!” said Jack. So we’ll put up a sign: Thumbs Down at 11PM.*

---

Saturday, July 31

Friday night at the Monte Carlo! You bloody well can’t beat it. Drinks flowing, crowd behind me cheering, running against the Bank all night. Except for a few big losses. But in the end, a nice take: \$1200 up. One more night then back to the fraction.

---

Saturday, July 31, 1897

*It’s been a long week. We are all looking forward to a break. Fanny and I are going over to Molly’s for a long, long, hot treatment. And then off to bed.*

*The boys are all going out to be... well... boys.*

---

Sunday, August 1

BadFoot jumped all over me when I got back to the fraction this evening. The fellows were happy to see me, too. Mining the trough has been paying well. They have a nice little dump which they’ll sluice this week. I showed them my roll from the Monte Carlo, to which I added \$2500 last night!

We jawed for a while over whiskey I brought. Moe has a mutt’s face but thinks he’s a lady’s man. He bragged about his conquests but I have the feeling they were all off the farm (or still on it) and happy for any attention at all. It wouldn’t make sense, otherwise.



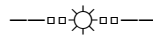
I haven't seen Vee, really, for a couple of weeks and it's beginning to weigh on me. This damned cabin puts me in a black mood. Lefty's ghost is everywhere. I figure I'll let the boys finish off the trough, then high-tail it with the gold to give Lefty's wife her fair share and head east. Maybe I'll be able to convince Vee to come with me. If not, maybe I'll start a business of some sort with father and wait for her there. Meanwhile, I'm going into town, where I can hide myself among the clowns and the fools. Being one.

---

Sunday, August 1, 1897

*What a lovely day off today. Fanny talked about everything under the sun, and Molly came up to join us for tea. Many of their stories were quite risqué, at least to my unaccustomed ears, and I realized, listening to them, just how sheltered I've been. Yet they are models of women who know how to live fully without sacrificing their self-respect and pride. I am a lucky woman to have such friends.*

*Later Fanny confided in me that Garrett has been hitting the Faro tables hard at the Monte Carlo, and is winning often. She says he looks healthy and seems to be enjoying himself. I am worried. He's not been displaying the best judgment of late.*



On August 1, 1897, the following telegram was delivered to Dr. Willis Robert McKenzie's home.

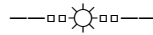
**Canadian Pacific Telegraph Co.**

**Received at:** Georgeville, Quebec, Dominion of Canada.

**Dated:** July 31, 1897.

**To:** Willis Robert McKenzie, R.R. #3, Georgeville, Que.

MESSAGE FORWARDED BY VANCOUVER DETACHMENT NWMP AT REQUEST  
NWT DETACHMENT DAWSON STOP REGRET TO INFORM ACCIDENTAL DEATH  
FRANCIS GARRETT MCKENZIE ON OR ABOUT JULY 17, 1897 STOP BURIED  
DAWSON STOP CONDOLENCES STOP LAST W&T IDENTIFIES WILLIS ROBERT  
MCKENZIE AND EDWARD ROSS MCKENZIE BENEFICIARIES STOP PLEASE  
ADVISE EXECUTOR LELAND OLIVER HILLUP DAWSON C/O NWMP DAWSON  
REGARDING REMAINS AND PROBATE STOP



---

Monday, August 2, 1897

*The floor joists for the second floor are going in well, although we had to contend with a bit of rain and the mud it created in no time at all. It's ankle-deep in the streets.*

*The screen production will soon reach Haldron's predicted 100 a day. Yet we cannot stockpile any as the line-up of eager customers never disappears. Lord bless bugs.*

---

Tuesday, August 3

I came to town yesterday and got my room at the Klondike. Tiger, tiger! You have no teeth! I was up again last night. \$900. The crowd chanting. Someone called me Twister because of the way I was sucking up the checks at the tables. Someone else yelled Cyclone! and it stuck. Cyclone! Cyclone! was the chant as I raked it in.

Tuesday, August 3, 1897

*Fanny reported on the benches. I hope I can see clear soon to start investing. I am anxious to get the hotel up and running so I can head up to look for some property.*

*Fanny says they are calling Garrett Cyclone now and cheering him on. Oh, dear.*

---

Wednesday, August 4

Had a bit of a muddle yesterday at the Monte Carlo. The Banker got my bets mixed up, and it cost me a couple of hundred, I reckon. So I told them to go to hell and went off to Pete's Place. There I met Pete McDonald, the owner, and Swiftwater Bill, in his silk shirt and diamond stick pin, and we bought each other drinks. I told them how I'd been treated at the Monte Carlo Faro tables. Pete said, "Come play here, Cyclone. Every once in a while I set a table at 'no limit'." Told him I just might, when I was sober.

I saw Fanny working the bar and watched her for a bit. The miners think she's there to give something up, foolish fellows. They buy the clever girl drinks and she slips them into their own glasses when they are not looking.

Limejuice Lil wouldn't leave me alone. She had me buying dance tickets and whiskey all night. I told her to scat, but she wouldn't until I bought her some Champagne. It cost me \$150 just for that, and \$200 for the rest. I bought some fine cigars and threw them into the crowd. I was still up \$560 for the night. Cyclone! Cyclone! followed me around the dance floor. A guy rather likes that, after feeling the cold shoulder.

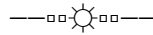
Bought myself a suit this afternoon. I'm going to dazzle them tonight. Swiftwater has his diamond stick pin; everyone wears nugget stick pins for their ties. I'm going to drop in at Molly's to see what she has for me.

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Wednesday, August 4, 1897

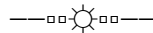
*The second floor is done. Starting the framing for the walls. The weather is holding, for the most part, thankfully.*

*Caught a glimpse of G. coming out of Molly's this afternoon. He must be doing well. He was dressed to the hilt, wearing what appeared to be a brand new black Worsted suit, a black Derby hat, a white silk shirt, a subtly striped silk tie and a bold stick pin. Scrumptious, though a little over-dressed. How handsome! Rugged and refined at the same time. I'll wager he causes a stir among the dancehall girls. Sigh.*



By August 4<sup>th</sup>, three days after receiving the telegram concerning Garrett's untimely death, and after discussions with his father, Garrett's brother, Ted, made arrangements for someone to help look after the family farm and for neighbours to look in on Willis, from time to time, to keep his spirits from sinking further.

Heart-heavy, Ted left for Dawson to recover his brother's body and personal effects.



---

Thursday, August 5

Even Molly called me Cyclone. I told her I wanted something to set me apart and she brought out a little box of stick pins from the back. Aquamarines, rubies, pearls, opals, turquoise, emeralds, topaz, diamonds, she said. Why would you have all of these? I asked

her. For fellows like you, she said. Ones with too much gold. The blue ones, like aquamarines and turquoises, are too prissy for me. One caught my eye, though. Big, and oval, nearly half-inch, top to bottom. Blood red, but brighter. Very rare for them to be that size, she said. Excellent colour. It's a garnet, she said, but it sounded like Garrett to me, so I looked around the room. "Gar – net," she said, smiling. How much? Nothing, she said. Too hard to sell. Why so? It's thirteen carats, she said. Just bring it back to me when you are done. Done? I asked. Yes, done, in the end, she said. You have to love her. Madame Molly from Istanbul. Halfway to the M&M, I turned back to ask her what she knew that I didn't. I know where to place my faith. And where is that? I asked her, but she just smiled. I place my faith in luck, I said, and headed back to Pete's Place.

I bet the turn hard every time Pete rang the bell, and walked away with \$3700. Lucky pin. Then I spent too much buying drinks and cigars for a room full of chanting fellows.

This morning, I bought another new suit and a half-dozen silk shirts.

---

Thursday, August 5, 1897

*Second story walls are up! Its windows aren't trimmed yet, but couldn't help standing across the street to admire our progress. The doorway looks magnificent!*

*We've taken on an extra crew to work on finishing the ground floor. The bar is half-done, and the first floor stairs are blocked, with the treads going on as I write this. The boys work hard and long into the evening. Byron feeds them very well out of a kitchen half-finished already. Haldron has become indispensable. He runs the two mill crews as well as the hotel crew, so I gave him another raise.*

*When the hotel is up, I'll get several photographs taken and send my parents prints. Although... perhaps I shouldn't. I know they would just lie about on the dining*

room table waiting for mother to look at them. "I don't understand photographs," she would say, as if images were a mystery to her. "And I don't understand hotels."

"Adella, it's just a hotel!" father would say. "Your daughter built a hotel!"

"She has never been my daughter, Owen," she would say, meaning I didn't turn out like her. And she would give her excuses, rise, and call for Oscar to clear away the dinnerware (if she hadn't driven the poor fellow to his grave by then, or if he hadn't finally found the semblance of a life somewhere where his ulcers wouldn't be daily aggravated). Then she would disappear into her chamber of shadows .

Years ago, out of the corner of my eye, I would watch father eat half-heartedly, his fork suspended as he looked out the window toward the paddock where Willoughby might be calming a rearing mare with a firm hand and gentle word. Then he would look beyond Willoughby to something in the distance. I used to ask what he was thinking about, and he would only smile and say, "The mysteries of life, Vivian, my sweet." But he would never elaborate, no matter how many times I begged him. Eventually he would just rise and advance on me with what I knew was feigned impatience. I never escaped before his fingers caught me by the ribs, making me squeal with delight, making me run in mid-air, and he would always say, "You must find out for yourself, my sweet." I cannot remember how many times we played that game. Mother gave us many opportunities, even well beyond the day when he neither could nor would any longer lift me off my feet.

No. I shall send the photographs to his office. He will be able to show his colleagues and employees, holding them up and pointing at me, there, in front, the one with the pants and wide-brimmed straw hat with knee-high boots, standing calf-deep in the mud of Third Avenue, and he will swell with pride.

---

Friday, August 6

Yesterday I went over to the Emporium to try one of those Spa things that Gregory is so crazy about. They took me to the back and worked me over. They shaved me, cut and washed my hair, and sent me into this little steam room (naked!) for a good half hour, then laid me out with hot towels. Someone kneaded me from top to bottom, with me groaning from pleasure. I had a mask over my eyes so I couldn't see, but it felt like a woman's hand. Then they let me sleep there while someone played a harp nearby. My word, I said to myself as I drifted off, who needs heaven? The smell of some spiced ginger tea and chocolate woke me. During the two hour they took my clothes, laundered them, dried them in a special dry heat chamber of some sort, and ironed them. A new man, I was. I understand Gregory's obsession now. Best \$30 I ever spent!

On the way back to the Klondike to get ready for my night out, a woman waved at me from across the street and started crossing over. Fine looking. Beautiful ruddy, country face. Wide mouth. I hadn't seen her in the dance halls or the casinos. She took to me like we had done more than go to church together. I like your new look, Lefty, she called out. When are you comin' over? Trouble there, I reckoned, so I ducked away.

I followed her for a bit until she ended up at her "bakery" mixed in with the "cigar stores". It said Katie Sutherland, Fresh Buns on the sign, and it all came together. Lefty's girl as well as many others'. It surprised me that she was so good looking though. Most of them down there are called Grizzly and Mare for a reason. Her macque must really have something on her. And how she saw Lefty in me, now clean-shaven and with new clothes, I don't know.

I went to Pete's Place for a few hours of fun and the women hung about breathing in the sweet smell of my clothing and my success.

When I was done at 4 AM or thereabouts, I asked Pete if he was ready to kick me out, being that I'd won over \$4700. He said, Just come back and lose it here, Cyclone, is all I ask! Don't plan on losing, Pete. No one does, he said.

My luck will hold tonight. My pin will see to it.

---

Friday, August 6, 1897

*Willoughby and I ran into Alex McDonald, the big Canadian from Nova Scotia, this afternoon, and had tea with us. We all feel that it won't be long before the first wave of stampedeers reaches us. He thinks most will land at Skagway and Dyea and come by the two passes, the Chilcoot and the White, as these are clearly the least expensive and most direct routes. Alex told us what they would be facing and it sounds gruesome. Others will come the all water-route, the way we came, but it is the more expensive. I asked him whether he thinks they'll get here by fall, and he laughed in a way that surprised us both. They have no idea, he said, in his halting way. The ones that come by the passes will get stuck for the winter just this side of the mountains, on Bennett Lake most likely. The word is the Canadian Government won't let them in without a ton of food and supplies, and you can't move quickly except by the river. It'll be long frozen by then. And the ones that come by St. Michaels will be lucky to get half-way up the Yukon before she freezes, too.*

*We talked about mining, of course, and how to make money from it. I plan to emulate his approach. He doesn't want one claim to work, he would rather have many and mine them all. What he does is buy a claim, then turn around and sell part of it, and*



*get others to work it on a lay (where they mine it and keep a portion of the proceeds). "Some fellas throw their whole poke on 20 Black," he said. "I spread my bets. There are many good numbers on the wheel." It is working handsomely for him.*

*We talked of other ways to make money, and decided in the end to go into business together. He talks very slowly but seems to have no trouble either thinking or acting quickly. The moment the hotel is finished, we are going to take the crews and put them to building cabins for the newcomers. He'll supply the land (bought from Ladue and Healy), and I the cabins, complete with screens. And I'll offer them a place in my hotel until their new abodes are completed, of course! He jotted down our contract on a piece of paper and stuffed it in a vest pocket with many others. Strange, magnetic fellow.*

---

Saturday, August 7

Only \$300 at Pete's M&M last night. Your luck's turning, Pete said. Turning you into a pauper, I said, and he slapped me on the back and bought me a drink. Reckon I've won about \$17,700 at the tables so far, though I don't have all that left, of course. A little over \$8,300. Easy come, easy go. For safe-keeping I'm going to deposit my winnings in the bank in Lefty's name, and head back to the fraction. I might actually do a couple of days' work for a change. I'm holding onto my room at the Klondike for my suits and shirts.

Late night back at the fraction. The boys have 1500 oz. so far, all bagged up neatly in my cabin, with still some of the trench to go.

There was no moon out on the walk back. Hard to see the trail. Stars are odd. They are damned small, but make you feel smaller. Thought of Vee all the way.

---

Saturday, August 7, 1897

*The floor joists for the Third Floor are in already, and they've started the flooring!*

*A long bath. It takes a bit of work to heat up enough water to soak, but Fanny and I pitch in to help each other. Byron helped, too, on condition that he got to use the water afterward. Not sure I'd do it the other way around. Actually, I'm certain I wouldn't.*

*Frontier baths are as much of a treat as they are unique. There are always tiny bits of charcoal, grass seeds, and dead insects floating about the surface because over half the water gets heated outside in buckets. It's the only way we'd get enough water to fill the little tub I bought. It's not very big. I cannot lie back and read as I used to on Long Island. I have to sit cross-legged and use a dipper to keep the upper half of me from getting too cool, but the feeling of the hot water running off my head to my shoulders and down my back is delightful, like warm caresses. I'm looking forward greatly to the day when we retrieve our porcelain-covered, cast iron bathtubs from under the tons of supplies and fittings in the warehouse.*

*When we were done and toweled off, Byron took his turn. I wonder about him. He's a very sensitive man, I observe, but he doesn't seem to have much interest in women. All the other fellows, save Willoughby, seem to talk about us endlessly, though when they see me coming they clam up. I have noticed that Byron never joins in.*

*I'm a prune, not a prude, I say, looking at my wrinkled hands and feet.*

---

Sunday, August 8

Last night, when I came back from Dawson, I brought some fine cuts of lamb with me. People there are very worried about how little food there might be for the winter, yet I can still get part of a freshly butchered lamb, even if I had to pay through the nose. \$50 for six little chops. I brought some wine, too, especially for my froggy friend, Moe. We kept the chops cool by the permafrost, and roasted them later with some fine potatoes over coals for Sunday dinner. An elegant dinner eaten in front of a low, dank log cabin with a sod roof and its carpet of mud and wood chips. We toasted everyone worth toasting, mostly for the taste of it. Then I opened a little packet of three very expensive plums. The juices of heaven! With two bottles of wine gone, we turned to the whiskey. Moe got out a mouth harp and started doing jigs. Half-boat and I joined in as well as we could. Clowns and fools, I say. No matter. We have 2200 oz. that I'm bringing to Dawson tomorrow. BadFoot will help me haul it.

---

Sunday, August 8, 1897

*An almost torturous sun and heat today which Southerners could never believe. I talk as if I am a Northerner. Am I truly one, now?*

*Roderick never stops thinking about changes and improvements for the hotel. If we move the seating this way just six inches, the waiters will be able to get into and out of the kitchen with ease. If we put the gratings here, the heat will flow more easily from floor to floor. If we put a cold air intake behind the stove and a stale air outflow here, at the corner of the roof, we will have fewer cold drafts as the stoves draw air. If we put*

*small doors here, we'll be able to keep the wood for the stoves ample without carrying it by your diners.*

*And Haldron. My loveable bulldog. And faithful, now he knows who his leader is.*

*Speaking of dogs Willoughby and Fanny are sniffing seriously about the benches.*

*He has narrowed his focus. It won't be long now, I sense.*

---

Monday, August 9

Charlie came by at noon, returning from Dawson with supplies. Haven't seen you for ages, Charlie! I wonder why, he said, looking me straight in the eye. He says food is short and folks are thinking about heading out before freeze up. But it's more than a month away, then there's always a dog team.

We sat by the cabin while the boys worked and Max wandered around his claim. I broke out some dried meat. Charlie brought some bloody good fresh bannock. We got a fire up and brewed tea. Wood's scarce on the hills now what with all the cabins, cribbing, and sluices, not to mention the flumes and trestles many rig up to handle their water. Firewood used to be free for the taking. Now folks sell it for an arm and a leg.

Charlie told me about that day after the accident, after I got back from Dawson, when Mallard and the undertaker came by. Mallard asked him to identify the survivor, and that's when the three of them came to wake me up. After they looked at me, Charlie says he just shrugged and told them he had never seen either of us clean-shaven, which was the truth, and then kept his mouth shut. Then they asked him to look at the victim since he was not clean-shaven, and they took him down to look at Lefty. He told them there was nothing left to identify besides McKenzie's buckskin jacket.

Mallard pestered him, but Charlie just kept shrugging. Mallard put him in a spot when he then asked Charlie if he planned to go to the funeral. Charlie didn't want to go, of course, but knew how Mallard would look at it. If he hadn't gone, he would either miss the funeral of his friend or confirm that the victim was not his friend, depending on who actually died. But, under the circumstances, if he did go, he could be found to be aiding and abetting in a criminal offense. So Charlie said that funerals are rituals for the living and he doesn't take part in them. He said Mallard was puzzled, but seemed to accept it.

He has not been forced to lie outright, so far, and he warned me that he wouldn't. He said he could not make this his trouble. I thanked him for doing what he did.

I told him about my pay streak and he responded by explaining about probabilities. I didn't understand more than two words. I asked him if there was anything he didn't claim to know something about. He said, I know I don't know considerably more than you seem not to know you don't. And then he smiled. It took until he had left for me to figure out he admitted to knowing less than I thought I knew, but I still can't figure out if it was a compliment or a clever but humorous slight.

While we were talking, Max and Ainsworth stood on Max's claim fifteen feet from the boundary with our fraction, looking at something on the ground, then looking at us and making a fuss. I went over with Charlie to look when they had gone.

It was a sink hole, a few feet across and a couple of feet deep, with a creek trickling into it and disappearing into the ground. Charlie said sink holes are signs of hidden corruption. I just shook my head. But, before he headed off, he walked me past the larger sink hole that had developed above the tunnel collapse that killed Lefty blocking our way

past the spot. I shrugged that off, too, saying there are sink holes all over this country, which we both knew to be an exaggeration.

I'm back at the Klondike Hotel now. The Finest Hotel North of San Fran, it says on the banner stretched across the street. May be so, but only 'til Vee gets done, I figure. Or maybe Miss Mulrooney. My unfailing companion, BadFoot, is wandering about the room sniffing thoroughly, exploring his new territory.

2,235.5 oz. is the haul from the trench. \$35,760 worth. \$3,576 to the Dominion of Canada, and \$1788 to the fellows. 950 oz. for me and the same for Lefty's widow. I'll haul it all up to the fraction. I've been making more than that at the tables.

Off to the Spa and Pete's Place. Pete smiles but I can see the pain on his face.

---

Monday, August 9, 1897

*Today marks our second week of construction on the hotel, and we are only inches away from completing the Third Floor.*

*After writing yesterday's entry, I heard a knock at the cabin door. Max, for heaven's sake! In the evening, and without invitation. He apologized and said he was hoping to visit and perhaps have a cup of tea before he returned to the creek. I took a few minutes to get myself presentable and joined him outside, on the porch, with tea and Byron's delicious biscuits.*

*Then began one of the most stressful and puzzling conversations I have ever had. As I deduced only well into it, he wanted to talk about Garrett and his childhood, but he was subtle enough never to mention him. It would have been heartless for him to do so, we both knew, given the recent funeral, and so forth. Yet he persisted, not aggressively, but by always finding his way back to it. He was after physical marks, ones which would*

*differentiate him from Lefty. I believe he had seen enough of Garrett to make him suspicious. But it was the gravity of the charge he would be leveling against Garrett that prevented him from being direct – you don't go about accusing others of personation without good grounds.*

*I started to fret. Luckily, it was a hot day, and I wiped the droplets of perspiration from my forehead without raising too much suspicion, I believe.*

*I could not address his implication candidly, as that would only confirm the ruse. Who but a co-conspirator would understand the basis for his questions and would have deciphered his motive? So, if I were to say, "Max, Lefty is truly Lefty, you know," he would know without doubt not only that Lefty wasn't Lefty but that I was complicit.*

*He told me about his childhood – as if I cared to know – and asked me about mine. He would then find some oblique way to ask about Garrett by referring to childhood playmates, et cetera, et cetera. This was all mixed in with talk of other things he knew I found fascinating: Vienna, Florence, Istanbul, the River Danube, the bitter winds of the Orkneys, never once being clumsy.*

*What a long half hour it was! It was as if, during the most bizarre of festivals, the two of us were in a dancing contest with a large, ridiculously-costumed dancing bear lumbering unsteadily between us – one whose annoying, tasseled hat constantly caused him to blink, blow and snort – and we had to dance elegantly, nevertheless, while maintaining constant contact with each other, but without either acknowledging him, or letting him dance alone. At this, we would have been champions.*

*As much as I wanted to protect Garrett, I have not only my own skin to worry about, but those of Fanny, Byron, Roderick, Haldron, and the crews, all of whom were*

*depending on me to some degree for their livelihood. So had he asked me outright, I fear I may well have broken down from the stress of the moment and confessed. I will never know. In the end, Max may have been too clever by half.*

*It took me eons to get to sleep. Luckily, everyone can carry on well enough without me, so my tardiness this morning did not delay progress. Prior to my arrival, however, they had to fetch their own tools, so when I did show up, they complained that they were glad to see me because they were tired of thinking for themselves. How I love them all.*

---

Tuesday, August 10

Went to the Spa yesterday. I brought BadFoot with me and got him a wash. He didn't much like it, but he smells great. I got to looking at the Samurai sword again. \$16,000, she said. For anyone else it would be \$24,000. That seems like a lot, I said. How many others have you seen, Lefty? I told her I'd bring her the gold tomorrow. Fair enough, she said, but there's another fellow looking at it. If he walks in I'll have to give it to him.

Right off I went to A.C.C., took out 1,000 oz. and brought it to her, and I still have over \$120,000 worth. I asked her if she'd look after BadFoot until I got back. He'll be here, she said, and ruffled up the back of his ears.

Billy the Horse was at Pete's Place, with his hair, thick as a mane. He sweats and smells like one and walks around with a fist full of cigars. Nice suit, I said to him. One a day, he said. I throws them away once I wears them, and he pointed to the sweat already showing under his arms. I patted him on his big paunch. It's round like a horse's, too. He



has toothpicks for legs and no arse at all. Tailor's workin' 'round the clock, he said, as he stuck a cigar in my mouth and walked off laughing.

I was \$50 short on the night, after whiskeys. That's more like it, Cyclone, Pete said.

It's late afternoon on Tuesday now, and I'm a little groggy. Got home around 6 AM or thereabouts. Going to clean up, have a meal, and head over to Pete's.

I picked up BadFoot and my sword on the way back. BadFoot doesn't care that I lost. It would have swung around if I'd stayed at it. I'll fix that tomorrow.

---

Tuesday, August 10, 1897

*Three whole floors! Well, except for the roof on the Third, of course. The finishing crew is working its way up behind the framers. The stairs are in to the third floor and the interiors are coming along well. We even have doors! The windows, I fear, have to wait until we can get at our stockpile still in the warehouse. What a day it will be when we can hang the chandelier!*

---

Wednesday, August 11

On my way to the spa I had to duck around a corner to avoid Katie Sutherland. BadFoot was happy to see Molly, but he wouldn't go near the back where he got washed on Monday. I got spruced up, I have my lucky stick pin on, and I've had a good roasted chicken and potato dinner. Cyclone is back!

---

Wednesday, August 11, 1897

*We dug out from our warehouse cache what they needed to get the kitchen functioning, and now it's up and running! It looks rustic, as expected. There is a lot more to*

*do, such as finishing the root cellar and storage area at the back, but at least Byron will be able to cook out of it. Finally, a promise of privacy in my cabin!*

---

Thursday, August 12

Slept late. I didn't get in until 4 AM. I took a bit of a beating, though only a little more than my winnings from last week, so I'm still fine.

It'll be Friday 13 at midnight. Unlucky day means I'll copper all my bets. When they lose, I win. Off to A.C.C. to get stocked up.

---

Thursday, August 12, 1897

*The interior crew has finished all the framing for the windows and doors on the Second Floor. They started working on the Third Floor this morning. The roof should be finished by tomorrow. The weather is holding, thank goodness.*

---

Friday, August 13

I lost my shirt last night, I am ashamed to say. Doubled up on every turn. My losses went from \$50 to \$100 to \$200 and on up to over \$12,000 by early morning. Everyone was chanting, Cyclone! Cyclone! Just one turn and I'd get it all back, I thought. I kept looking at Pete, expecting him to cut his Banker off at any moment, but he just kept nodding for him to carry on. The bugger knew something, I reckon. I asked him to let me sign a chit, telling him how much I had still in A.C.C. He said, Listen, Lefty. I like you. Sign a chit for \$25,000, but if you lose that I'm sending you home. I laughed at him. Lose that? Pete, who are you talking to, here? I asked. I'm a rich man. Give me thirty. Alright, he said, but thirty thousand more is all I'll let you lose.

I had lost it by 3 PM. The crowd grew quiet, so I waved my arms, and chanted Cyclone! Cyclone! to get them going. Pete bought me a couple of whiskeys and sent me home. Molly's was dark when I went to pick up BadFoot, so I went back to the Klondike.

I sat down and did some reckoning. I lost a total of about \$43,000, but I have tons left, I figure. A little shy of \$100,000. I'm still rich. I might have lost it all except for Pete. Felt better after that. Easy come; easy go, as they say. But I think I'd better stick to mining.

I got back to the cabin late, and walked past the spot where the creek trickles into the ground on Max's claim. Max's boys have been digging. The idiots should wait for the winter and sink a proper shaft, I figure. The hole is down twenty feet. The trickling creek forms a steady waterfall an arm thick. I climbed down to take a look and got soaked. What I could see I found strange – they've been drifting parallel to the claim boundary with no cribbing, just like Lefty and no windlass to haul the dirt up to the surface. A little creek headed into the drift but there's no sign of it damming up, so maybe it has worked its way through to our drift somehow, as Charlie suggested.

I fed BadFoot and hung the sword.

---

Friday, August 13, 1897

*Just as we were celebrating the finishing of the roof, Inspector Charles Constantine from the North West Mounted Police showed up at the hotel site, in his customary trim scarlet serge, cord breeches and pill box. I joked about the amount of gold braid around his collar. He assured me, with an indulgent smile, it was not a reference to the Yukon posting. He was looking handsome with his moustache and rather pointed face, the latter seeming to match his purpose. He asked if he might have a quiet word.*

*He wanted to know how well we were supplied. It is food he is most concerned about. He, Thomas Fawcett, the Gold Commissioner, and the other Canadian officials are fearful that, with stampedeers arriving from the passes and the imminent influx from down river, there may not be sufficient food for the winter. The river is usually only open from early June to late September, and they have no way of predicting what supplies will be able to get through before the river freezes over. It's the only way of getting bulk supplies in here, of course. I called Roderick and Byron over and the three of us managed to assure him that we were in fine shape, certainly as far as the staff was concerned, and that we would likely be able to keep the restaurant running for most of the winter, even if the meals slowly diminish in variety. He seemed pleased to hear that, but went away with a preoccupied look, nevertheless.*

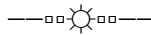
*I cannot believe our luck. The skies opened only after we finished the roof! Dawson was a mud hole by evening, the wandering crowds in the streets being sucked up beyond their ankles, but the hotel is dry, thank heaven.*

*Fanny tells me Garrett's luck has turned for the worse. My stomach tightened on the news.*

## Chapter 18 A Tragic Error

The following is an excerpt from a letter written on 11<sup>th</sup> August, 1897 by Inspector Charles Constantine, North-West Mounted Police, based at Dawson, Yukon Territory to Commissioner, Lawrence W. Herchmer in Ottawa:

The outlook for grub is not assuring for the number of people here, about 4,000 crazy or lazy men, chiefly American miners and toughs from the Coast towns. Wages are \$20 a day for skilled workmen. This naturally makes my men discontented at 50¢ a day. Their work is very heavy and laborious, wearing on the body and clothing. Money, whisky, whores, and gamblers plentiful. I cannot understand why a court is not established here. I wanted Mrs. Constantine to go out this fall, but she would not hear of it, saying her place is with me.



On Friday, August 13, 1897, the following letter arrived for Willis McKenzie written by his son, Garrett, on July 21, 1897:

*R.R. 3, Georgeville, Que., Dominion of Canada*

*Dearest Father,*

*All is well here. Believe this no matter what you hear from any other source, including the Police, Government officials or anyone else acting on their behalf.*

*I cannot, I regret, explain everything. I am working very hard at the moment to finish the spring clean-up which my erstwhile partner left undone. He died accidentally, and left me with nothing, having kept the ownership of our property in his name only. As it happens, we look very much alike and are often mistaken one for the other. Because of those two facts, I took the risk of identifying his body lying in our mine workings as belonging to me. It was foolish and impulsive of me, I fully admit. My thought at the time was that I would thereby be able to change the ownership of our claim to what it should have been, collect my just rewards, provide Lefty's family with their proper share, and rectify the ruse later.*

*This was not the best idea I have ever had. Certain complications have already arisen, and, inadvertently, I may have drawn Vivian in. But I cannot turn back now, unfortunately. I have confidence that I will be able to keep her from harm, and keep the legal ramifications to a minimum.*

*Again, please ignore any notices you receive, and forgive my rash behaviour.*

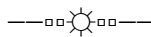
*Keep in good health. Try not to worry too much about me, and look for me coming up the walk a rich – a very rich – man.*

*Give my love to Ted.*

*I remain your loving Son,*

*Garrett.*

*PS. Please hide this letter.*



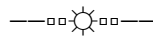
Western Union Telegraph Co.

**Sent to:** EDWARD ROSS MCKENZIE c/o Western Union Telegraph, Seattle,  
Wash.

**Dated:** August 13, 1897.

**From:** Willis Robert McKenzie, R.R. #3, Georgeville, Que.

TRAGIC ERROR STOP GARRETT ALIVE AND WELL STOP COME HOME  
IMMEDIATELY STOP LOVE FATHER



On Friday, August 13, 1897, the following letter was mailed, in Seattle, Washington,  
addressed to Willis McKenzie, written by his son, Ted:

*R.R. 3, Georgeville, Que.,*

*Dominion of Canada*

*August 13, 1897.*

*Dearest Father,*

*Having arrived here Wednesday, I am now mired in Seattle and triply despondent. Not only am I on an errand I would not assign to the lowliest creature, that of dealing with my beloved younger brother's death, I have just taken my first train ride across a magnificent landscape which, for my grief, I could not enjoy. And, now, as a final insult, I find myself in a sea of madness here in Seattle, unable to launch myself on the real sea which I can smell as I write, even from here. There is no hotel space to be had. I sleep in a tent of a stranger who has taken sympathy for me. I mumbled a few words about beloved Garrett in response to his queries, and he immediately insisted I share his canvas. I*

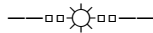
*eat after standing in line for an hour, being forced to listen from all sides to the fanciful ravings of men who have left everything in a rush to “shovel as much Klondike gold into a barrow as will fit and wheel it south.”*

*I have been spending all my time at the docks so far, trying to arrange passage without surrendering our whole life savings. It is impossible to compete for space with lunatics muscling each other aside to gain passage to their mountains of gold. Tomorrow I will set out to find the telegraph office, as promised.*

*I miss you terribly. Not a minute goes by that I don't grieve, and regret that we cannot be together to comfort one another.*

*As always, I remain, Your loving Son,*

*Ted*



At Dawson, on the following day, Thursday, August 14, 1897, Maximilian Acton-Jones, received his long-awaited response from Pinkerton's Detective Agency. It was delivered in an envelope marked PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL.

Pinkerton's National Detective Agency  
“We Never Sleep”

199-201 Fifth Avenue,  
Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.  
July 20, 1897  
Dr. Maximilian Acton-Jones,  
Dawson, North West Territories,  
Dominion of Canada.



Re: Investigations of: Leland Oliver Hillup, &  
Francis Garrett McKenzie.

Dear Dr. Acton-Jones,

As you know, Anthony Giles Ainsworth, having your power of attorney, commissioned our services on your behalf and in your absence. Enclosed is a carbon copy of our contract. We hope it meets with your satisfaction. Mr. Ainsworth, begged us to proceed with all possible haste, which you will note we have done.

He set our task to investigate the characters and backgrounds, firstly, and most importantly, of a Mr. Leland Oliver Hillup of the Omaha, Nebraska, currently residing in Dawson, Yukon Territory, Dominion of Canada, and, secondly, a Mr. Francis Garrett McKenzie, of the Georgeville, Quebec, Canada area, also currently residing in Dawson.

Re Mr. Leland Hillup: We are pleased to be able to enclose two police reports which just came to light concerning Mr. Hillup, obtained through the Nebraska Sheriff's Office. We have forwarded carbon copies immediately to alert you as to the nature of the man with whom you may be dealing. We warn you that neither of these cases has yet reached court. In truth, until we informed them, the Sheriff's Office had no idea of Mr. Hillup's whereabouts. As a result of our information, the Sheriff's office is at

this time talking to State and National officials regarding the possible arrest and extradition of Mr. Hillup and will likely already have sent copies of his outstanding warrants, of which there are more than those merely relating to the two enclosed reports, to the Canadian law enforcement agencies in Dawson. Our estimation is that this report will precede any notification of the Canadian Police Force in Dawson by several weeks at least. Once the Canadian officials are apprised of the nature and gravity of Mr. Hillup's outstanding charges, we are confident they will be only too happy to see the last of him and to give him up to American Justice. Keeping this in mind, the enclosed should be treated with the utmost caution in order to avoid alerting Mr. Hillup and thereby compounding the difficulties the Sheriff's Office faces, not to mention the unpleasantness of personal risk and/or lawsuits for defamation should they fall into the wrong hands. We are continuing our work and will keep you advised as new facts come to light. A complete report will follow.

We have not been successful in obtaining any photographic images of Mr. Hillup, either current or otherwise, although this has not been for lack of trying. His wife of some years, Beatrice Lily (James) Hillup, of Fremont, Nebraska, has been generally uncooperative, and his father,

Uriah Seth Hillup, of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, is currently the subject of an assault charge Pinkerton's has filed against him due to injuries suffered by one of our detectives at his hands. As a result, we regret to say we can provide few additional details regarding Mr. Leland Hillup's appearance. Beatrice Hillup did say, however, that he does have one scar just below his left eyebrow, although it is described as tiny. She reports that his left eye tends to wander independently, occasionally. She said that both are barely noticeable. Although she was not aware of his nickname, when informed, she said that neither would likely be its source. She did not elaborate further. We suggest you watch for physical characteristics which differentiate one side of his body from the other, in the hope it might lead you to a distinctive and useful characteristic.

Re Mr. Uriah Seth Hillup: During our conversations with the Nebraska Sheriff's office certain other information regarding Mr. Hillup, the father, has come to our attention. By passing it all on to you we intend to both provide you with a more accurate picture of the skills which the subject, Mr. Leland Hillup, may have acquired at the feet of his father, and to alert you of possible risks should Mr. Uriah Hillup decide to follow his son north. The father,

Mr. Uriah Seth Hillup, also known as Dr. Willie Hill, Uriah Tyler, Seth Arnold, Arnold Williams, "Masher" Hillup, and "Wild Seth" Hogarth, is now also at large, also with several warrants outstanding beyond the one concerning our detective. As with the son, the father has a strong proclivity to benefit himself by way of fraud and confidence schemes, generally clever ones, and often involving various kinds of forgery. Both father and son have a history of violence, frequently directed to family members. The most serious acts have occurred between father and son and have resulted in severe injuries. However, the recent gratuitous attack on our detective does indicate the father has no compunction in extending his violent attentions to those beyond his family. To this date, as the father has not served any penal time, his record is clean. Seeing this and being new to our employ, our detective made the erroneous assumption the father would be more helpful than hurtful, and went to see him alone. Our injured detective, once he recovered his ability to talk, related to me directly that, prior to turning on him, Mr. Uriah Hillup displayed his talents as an accomplished confidence man and gained more information about the son's whereabouts from our detective than our man was advised to reveal. Thereafter the father threw our detective bodily from his house causing several

lacerations to face and body, not to mention a worrisome head wound. As our man lay injured, he heard the father pronounce, in an angry tone, "...strangle the little bugger." And before he fell unconscious, our detective also believes he heard "... damned hoarder..." and "... all to himself, the rat..."

You may not know that the newspapers all across the United States have picked up the story of the so-called "Gold Ships" which recently landed in Seattle and San Francisco with a reported "ton of gold" on each. "The Klondike" has, in just a few days and with the help of near hysterical news coverage, entered into the minds of all Americans capable of reading, and most of those who cannot. Madness has gripped the land. Syndicates are born overnight into which folk, otherwise considered normal and cautious, are pouring their savings, hoping those who go north on their behalf will bring back fortunes for them. We suspect these hordes will have landed on your doorstep by the time this report reaches you. It is in this context that we speculate, for good reason, that when the father heard our detective mention "the Klondike", he likely did not need help in determining where the Klondike was or what business his son might be conducting there, or, indeed, in jumping to conclusions about his son's current state of wealth.

When, two days after the altercation with our detective, policemen and another of our detectives went to serve Mr. Uriah Hillup with documents regarding the assault, Mr. Hillup could not be located. When they inquired as to where they might find Mr. Hillup the responses were varied but telling. "Hell" was the most common, indicating the nature of regard in which Mr. Hillup's neighbors hold him. "In jail, if the Sheriff has finally done his job," was another. However the most worrisome, from your point of view, coming from Beatrice, wife of the son, Mr. Leland Hillup, was "On the trail of his varmint spawn. And if there is a God, when father finds son, and they will light each other on fire!" or something close to that. Our detective reported that she had what he called a "messianic tone" and that her eyes were rolled up toward heaven as she spoke.

In any event, this forces the conclusion that the father may well be on his way to the Klondike as we speak. As a consequence we strongly advise you to underestimate neither the father's nor the son's capacity for violence.

The physical descriptions of the son, Mr. Leland Hillup, which you provided us at the outset are quite similar to descriptions we have received of the father. The latter, however, is between fifty and fifty five, and is said to be of a more robust stature.

Re: Mr. McKenzie: We have yet to find anything untoward regarding the behaviour of the second subject, Mr. Francis Garrett McKenzie. On the contrary, the inquiries we have made with the Georgeville, Quebec police and private citizens in that district have indicated that Mr. McKenzie may indeed be a man of high integrity and substantial character. He seems to have come from a respectable background. His father is Dr. Willis Robert McKenzie, volunteer in the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment, Vermont Volunteer Cavalry from 1861 to 1865, studied at Vermont Agricultural College and when on to teach there from 1871 to 1886, whereupon he retired to Georgeville. Aside from Mr. McKenzie's mother's tragic suicide, there is nothing which seems to color his past.

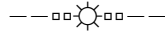
As I am sure you understand, these speculations and hypotheses cannot be considered as established facts. We have full confidence that you understand their sole intent is to protect you. We therefore trust you receive this information under the strictest confidence and will treat it with the utmost care and caution.

I remain your humble servant,

(signed)

Superintendent Gordon W. O'Neil

Crime Reports attached.

*DODGE COUNTY NEBRASKA SHERIFF'S OFFICE*

CRIME REPORT

April 14, 1888

Re: - Leland Oliver Hillup

Alleged False Pretences

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Re the above, I beg to report that while at Fremont on April 10th I received complaint from Mr. W. M. Sxxxx of Nickerson that Leland Hillup formerly of Nickerson, Fremont and Omaha, had obtained \$1,100.00 from him by False Pretences. Mr. Ridley, of the firm of Locke and Ridley, Attorneys of Omaha, is in possession of the documents which show that Mr. Sxxxx purchased from Mr. Hillup South East Quarter of Section 25 Township 15 North Range 9 East, Dodge County Nebraska, and it has just become known to Mr. Sxxxx that Mr. Hillup did not own same. Notified Mr. Sxxxx that the S. W.  $\frac{1}{4}$  belonged to Hillup, but that the S. E.  $\frac{1}{4}$  did not, and as no title had been granted, that he had no right to dispose of same. Mr. Sxxxx has also received a notice from Omaha stating that cancellation proceedings had been started against the S. E.  $\frac{1}{4}$ . Notices have been posted re the cancellation of S. E. and Mr. Ridley advised Sxxxx to lay information charging Hillup with obtaining the sum of \$1,100 by False Pretences. Warrant for the apprehension of Leland Hillup is now held at Division Headquarters, and from information received, I have reason to believe



that Hillup has moved to Lincoln, Nebraska and is being sought there by Lincoln Sheriff's Office. Hillup is between 20 and 25 years old, of medium height, and is married to Beatrice Lily Hillup, of Fremont, Nebraska. Mr. Ridley, Attorney, of Omaha will prosecute at the preliminary hearing as soon as Hillup can be located. Case will be called at Omaha.

Robert R. Scott, Detective,  
Unit 18 - - Omaha

*DODGE COUNTY NEBRASKA SHERIFF'S OFFICE*

CRIME REPORT

June 23, 1889

Re: - Leland Oliver Hillup

Fraud

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Re the above, I beg to report that while at Norfolk on June 20th I received complaint from Mr. H. L. Cxxxx of Norfolk that Leland Hillup formerly of Lincoln, Nickerson, Fremont, and Omaha, had obtained \$1250.00 from him by Fraud, contrary to the Law. Mr. Quentin, of the firm of Quentin, George and Wilson, Attorneys of Omaha, is in possession of the documents which show that Mr. Cxxxx purchased five (5) horses from Mr. Hillup for a price of \$250 each, totalling \$1250. Mr. Cxxxx stated to me that on or about June 1, Mr. Cxxxx approached Mr. Hillup with the purpose of purchasing horses which Mr. Hillup had let be known to the community he was prepared to

sell. Mr. Hillup then invited Mr. Cxxxx to inspect the horses on the farm where Mr. Hillup was employed as a hand. Mr. Cxxxx inspected the horses and, being satisfied, questioned Mr. Hillup re the ownership. Mr. Hillup assured the complainant that he owned the horses and presented documentation to support this. They concluded the sale, and when Mr. Hillup delivered the said 5 horses to Mr. Cxxxx's farm in Norfolk, the latter paid Mr. Hillup the agreed price of \$1250. On June 15, Mr. Fxxxx, also of Norfolk, and the owner of the farm where Mr. Hillup had been employed at the time of the sale, approached the complainant to inform him that four of the said 5 horses delivered by Mr. Hillup to Mr. Cxxxx belonged rightfully to him, Mr. Fxxxx. Mr. Fxxxx told Mr. Cxxxx that Mr. Hillup did own one horse which had been boarded on Mr. Cxxxx's farm, and that said horse may have been among those sold to him. When Mr. Cxxxx produced the ownership papers for Mr. Fxxxx's inspection, Mr. Fxxxx pointed out the one set of ownership papers which seemed to be genuine to him, and the four sets of ownership papers which seemed to him to have been forged and falsified. Mr. Cxxxx agreed with Mr. Fxxxx's assessment of the authenticity of the papers. Mr. Quentin advised Mr. Cxxxx to lay information charging Mr. Hillup with obtaining the sum of \$1,000 by Fraud. Warrant for the apprehension of Leland Hillup is now held at Division Headquarters. I have reason to believe that Hillup has moved away from Lincoln, Nebraska, whereabouts unknown. Hillup is between 20 and 25 years old, of medium height, and is married to Beatrice Lily (James) Hillup, of Fremont, Nebraska. Mr. Quentin, Attorney, of

Omaha will prosecute at the preliminary hearing if Mr. Hillup can be located.

Robert R. Scott, Detective,

Unit 18 - - Omaha

## Chapter 19 Hell and Heaven

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Saturday, August 14

Oh Lord, I beg you, send me to Hell! You have recently dispatched there, among the mass of unfortunates, one who deserves his fate, one whom I desperately wish to see again as I have with him unfinished business to conduct.

But why do You not answer? You think I do not qualify? Just give me one chance! I'll prove it to You soon enough!

To plead my case, I appoint you, Devil, as my counsel, and I will pay you any price: gold – what little I have left – diamonds, Eternal Damnation – it matters naught to me. Take it all!

As my advocate, You may embellish, invent, deceive, or lie. Say and do anything You wish. I give You free reign. And as my thoughts are already murderous, You know there is no chance I would censor You, even if I had the power.

Oh, do not say that either of You has been surprised by my request. We are all well aware that the Devil's agent, the minion He sent to ensnare me, the one on whom I so desperately want to get my hands, was at this very place not long ago. Need I remind You? He was the Devil's prize pupil, my nemesis, my partner, and I would have thought, Evil One, his incompetence and failure would give You ample cause for redress.

But be cautious, Esteemed Counsel, for during my judgement, the Lord will argue that mine is a theoretical cruelty only, limited to my imagination, and He may well offer to send Jesus or some other mindful disciple to intervene, to assuage my guilt, to forgive

me my sins even before I have committed them. I need not warn you that this disciple will be as crafty and skilled in his ways as Your agent was in Yours, and will therefore be very dangerous.

Having read this, Lord, do You still deny me my rightful place? Well, then, go ahead. Send me Your disciple. To relieve Your doubt, I would happily dispatch him, too.

And you, Devil, when I join Your fold, Your Flaming Kingdom, I assure You there will be no relenting, no softening on my part, as I will as promised postpone doing to my dead partner that which I dearly wish: namely to suspend him by hooks driven deeply into his eye sockets, with his neck bent hideously back, his hands grasping the hooks in desperation, his feet unable to secure purchase as they scramble wildly in midair, his screams piercing the spines of the gathering hordes until even the most heartless among them begs me to stop. Although I greatly look forward to this, I will be patient. As agreed, I will save that specific torture for the climax. I will only rack him first.

The instrument of this first of our pleasures will be as those pictured in lithographs, where agony is apportioned slowly, with squealing cables and one cog locking in at a time, and long moments aside perhaps for tea and scones and small-talk. Perhaps I'll have occasion to ask after his wife, Beatrice, or his daughter, Lelandia. And occasionally I'll slap his jowls and say, Fess up varmint! But not too often, or too hard, I assure you, as I have no desire to hear him confess. Torment to equal mine, not absolution, is my goal here. His screams will likely drown me out in any event. I fully intend to solicit such a response.

Yes, first we will want to hear the failure of stretched ligaments, muffled by his blanket of taut skin, straining and snapping so quietly I may have to smother his screams, his

bucking head with both hands and put my ear close to hear them pop. Only then should I move on to the hooking, the bludgeoning of bones, the disembowelling, and the final ritual extraction of his foul heart. I shall hold it up, and rip at it with my teeth, spitting pieces out to those drooling ghouls of yours, to be fought over and eaten raw. But I'll not partake myself, as the Iroquois would have done (wanting from it the courage there contained), because it was a loathsome and shrivelled organ belonging to a loathsome and shrivelled man, one with no courage except as it served himself.

Only then, after this gruesome sequence, will I have gained the smallest measure of comfort I am due for meting out the most miniscule portion of what he truly deserves.

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Saturday, August 14, 1897

*Today we broke out our shipment at the warehouse. We had a flat-bed cart and a couple of draft horses hauling, but the wheels, from the overnight rain – and thunderstorms – sank into Front Street to the axles. It took us until midnight. More and more Stampederers are showing up. A few pitched in and gave us a hand freeing the cart.*

*I'm dead tired, and going to bed. Between my own sheets. In my own bed. In my own bedroom. And in my own hotel! I will undress slowly. I will throw my clothes about the room. I am done with curtains! I will never undress or dress behind curtains again!*

*Tomorrow morning, before Roderick, Byron and I sit down to work out our plans for the Grand Opening on Wednesday, I have arranged to be the first to soak in the tub. Roderick will arrange for the water. He will ensure I can soak undisturbed and read for at least an hour. Fanny will bring me tea and a bucket of steaming hot water every once in a while. This is why I had them place a window in the Third Floor bathroom, by the head of the tub. Is Heaven being the boss and having your own hotel? Methinks so.*

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Sunday, August 15

I cannot say I am feeling any better today. Yesterday I started ripping apart my cabin again, breaking a chair I had been working on for the longest time, but that made me even angrier. I was just punishing myself, and it's not I who needs punishing. So I wrote what I did instead. I still hate the bugger; I am filled with loathing for him. But at least by writing I won't have to fix up my cabin when I'm done.

Yesterday Max came up to me with Ainsworth, gruff as hell. We have a problem is all he said, and he took me over to the sink-hole-turned-shaft, the one with the waterfall and the ladders leading down. They gave me a lantern, not saying a word, and pointed along their drift. No big deal, I thought. But after a hundred feet I came to a curve which swung sharply toward our claim. The little creek fed by the waterfall ran over my boots, through a channel it had carved toward the cave-in that killed Lefty, and disappeared into our fraction.

Some beefy fellow might just as well have clubbed me in the back of the neck. That bugger partner of mine had followed the pay streak over to Max's side. No wonder he locked himself in. Not one damned ounce of gold from the whole drift was mine. Not so I'd be able to prove it.

Hillup, Max said, it is clear you did this drifting while McKenzie was on his way to pick up the steam engine. Ainsworth can verify when you started it, and I can verify that the poor sod McKenzie was on the boat with me coming in. I was silent.

But I have no particular affinity for the Police, he said. I could tell he was feigning good will. And I like the courts even less, he said. There is a simpler solution. You have

the gold from the drift sitting in Dawson, in a warehouse, is that correct? I just looked at him, although, by then, I wanted to pummel his face, although it was Lefty I really wanted to pummel. Max was just a victim. One of them.

McKenzie has already paid a very high price for this, he continued, so I do not wish to be harsh. I assume you have given the Government its tithe by now, and paid your crew as well. I managed a nod to that. Very well then, he said. Transfer the ownership of that gold to me and we will call it even. But don't forget, Hillup, that if you have it in mind to cheat me again, your deposits are dated by A.C.C. I just looked at him blankly.

How much is it? he asked. A total of 18,091 oz., after paying our workers and the royalties. I have 8,900 oz. here, I said, and pointed toward our end of the drift.

I want to be fair about this, he said. We measured the drift, from the doors to the sink hole. He handed me a piece of paper on which there were a diagram and calculations. Eighty three percent of 18,091 is roughly 15,052 oz. We'll take the gold in the drift now and get the remaining 6,000 oz. when you can get to Dawson. He gave me a slimy smile.

What the hell was I supposed to say? There I was, guilty as sin, without having done a goddamned thing! What was mine, bloody well all of it, is now either Max's or Pete's.

I nodded and walked back up to the cabin for the key and unlocked the palisade doors. Moe and Joe were watching. I had to signal not to interfere.

Then I went to the cabin and disappeared into my Underworld, the evidence of which is above. And although I now no longer harbour the near-insane feelings of revenge such as I recorded, I am the farthest degree possible from forgiveness. Thoughts of his suffering still occur, and I am somewhat ashamed to admit that they give me some comfort. I am, perhaps, not the generous man I once imagined myself to be.



This morning I went straight to A.C.C. I had no desire to walk in with Max. I told them to put aside the 6,000 ounces and give them to Max. How much have I left? I didn't much like the answer. 36½ ounces. Thirty six ounces?! Apparently so, the fellow said.

I ran into the "It's-only-gold" gold miner, as chance would have it, but I had no desire to be cheered up, so I came back here and shut myself in again. I may have joined Nevada had I a pistol at the time. Only thoughts of Vee and my family saved me.

---

Sunday, August 15, 1897

*The window of my bathroom looks toward the east, the hills behind Dawson. As I soaked, I could see some new Stampeders crawling about the bush back there, accessing and making caches, looking for firewood or wood for their new cabins, or pitching tents where they could find spots. You can see determination in their actions, even at distance. Optimism. Hope. Conviction. Dreams. Those, and Delusions.*

*Like the Klondike Hotel we put a banner right across Third Avenue, advertizing the Owl's Head Inn, the Waldorf Astoria of the North. In smaller letters it said: A Gold Miner deserves the Finest at a Price only Gold Miners can afford.*

*Roderick took some convincing about our slogan. I reminded him of the miner who bought two drinks and two cigars, then drank a toast to himself and smoked both cigars – one for the poor sod he was, and one for the new, rich man he had become. I reminded him how fellows have offer new arrivals five dollars for an onion. This is a mad house, I said to him, and I'm taking a cue from Molly. Those who have too much want everyone to know how little it means to them.*

*We hung the chandelier this afternoon! As expected, it made deliriously happy.*

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Monday, August 16

When I didn't come out to help with the trench this morning, Moe knocked at my door. I gave him a cup of coffee and told him all about it. Forget about it, he said. "Do da clean-up." Homespun advice. Works every time. Between Max and Faro, I've lost much of the gold, but not everything, after all. Max's gold was never mine, I must admit. And the Faro thing was just stupidity. I can change that now, provided I get off my arse, as Moe told me to do, and get to work.

It's not the nugget which is the elixir. It's not its colour. It is its plenty, and the ease of its recovery. And happily there's still plenty about.

---

Monday, August 16, 1897

*The Owl's Head Inn is habitable! Well, barely so. All the doors are hung, and the windows – with screens! – are in place. We still have some wallpapering to do on the upper floors, but the plaster has set well on the Ground Floor. We've fashioned some tables and chairs which will do for the moment. They have a distinctive 'bush' look to them, with flat spruce lumber for the functioning surfaces (complete with the grooves from the 40" saw), and sturdy legs and backs axe-hewn from spruce poles. We'll tell our customers that we did this only to ensure they did not feel too much out of place, and we'll cushion the chairs and drape the tables so as they won't suffer the spruce gum, as it is a horror to remove. Alcohol does the trick, but most up here don't waste alcohol on spruce gum. I love the look of the dining room, even with only about three quarters of the tables and chairs done. The freshly cut wood smell is as intoxicating as ever.*

*I think the use of “Inn” was perfect, as that is precisely what it looks like. A crystal, candle-lit chandelier imbedded in a rustic setting.*

*Our glasses and china made the trip tolerably well in their beds of shavings – with breakage, but less than ten percent. Not one shot glass was broken, sturdy beggars.*

*I cannot wait until the opening on Wednesday. Byron has a list of hors d’oeuvres he will lay out. He has used crackers of various kinds, preserved meats and cheeses, garnished with Yukon’s edible wild plants. Very clever. We even have a few bottles of red wine and champagne we will dedicate to it. We have decided that, given my current financial state, we should provide these treats for only an hour or so, and then declare the Inn and bar officially open. I’ll joke about how we are fully expecting to make back on the evening what we spent on the afternoon, and I’ll wager some miner will immediately start us on our way by buying everyone a drink. We have already hung the sign: Booker’s Thumb above the bar, and Booker will be here in person for the inauguration! He promises to be the first toaster with his thumb in his glass, of course. After that, the men will line up to prove their mettle. By ten o’clock we’ll be carrying out the first, making way for the next. As I plan not to see it through until 5 AM when it will likely peter out, I have designed some ear plugs for the occasion – bee’s wax wrapped in cotton batting. I have yet to figure out what to do about the smell of smoke and whisky and sweat.*

---

Tuesday, August 17

Fortune is fickle. That comes from Shakespeare, I’m sure. Or was that fortune is a fool? No: I am fortune’s fool. Romeo. When he killed Tibot. Tibolt? Tybolt? Whatever the case, fortune is fickle.

I bought some fancy scales from Molly a while back. I had thought they were too deluxe to use – blind Justice holding the balance. Justice is strong for such a fine, curvaceous lady. Nice breasts. European, obviously. I weighed out what is coming from the trench: 226 ounces. 192 or thereabouts, after royalties and wages. 228 oz. total, here and in A.C.C. It all belongs to Beatrice, rightfully. My Faro madness and Max's blood money meant I dipped heavily into Lefty's half without knowing it. I still need 1,311 oz. to go to get her back up to where she should be.

Moe and Joe are coming in with me tomorrow for a break. BadFoot, too. I've heard about Vee's Grand Opening. I'm hoping to get a room in the Owl's Head Inn. Surely she cannot refuse Lefty as he is just another paying customer, after all.

---

Tuesday, August 17, 1897

*Our timing was perfect. This place is about to change rapidly. The Bella, Portus B. Weare, and Alice have all spilled their cargoes, adding to the thousand or so which have made it over the passes so far. The passengers have eyes wild with excitement, but the eyes of the pathetic looking animals they brought with them are dead. Horses have ribs cages showing; the asses and donkeys are not fit even for the slaughterhouse; the dogs are losing fur and are covered in excrement. Their passage has left them worth more dead than alive. Although one cow made the journey – ostensibly to provide milk – she was immediately brought off to a make-shift abattoir up the hill somewhere. I saw several lambs heading that way a few days ago, too, poor things.*

*The Stampeders themselves seemed well-enough equipped, although I saw several things on the docks which indicated that some, at least, had every intention of capturing miners' gold rather than nature's. There were several cases for stringed instruments, one*

*big enough for a cello, some highly painted, colorful, wooden carousel horses which can only be meant for a parlor, and a lady in crinoline and lace, as highly painted as the horses. She was guarding two large steamer trunks no doubt full of all the equipment and supplies needed to tease and squeeze that body of hers into desirable curves. Beside her was a beautifully finished, satin cherry upright Baldwin piano under packing blankets.*

*The framing crews are already off building cabins, while the finishing crew is working almost round the clock on the interior of the Inn.*

*Several weeks ago I commissioned a destitute carpenter to complete the deep cornice which protrudes from the Ground Floor ceiling level out over our entrance. It now has repeating cornice brackets bracing it to the horizontal beam running the full width of the façade. Under the beam is a broad arch with spindles joining them. Along the arch, he has carved, in something as close to Old English Script as he could, the name: Owl's Head Inn. He used spruce, of course, as it would be foolish to use anything else, but he found a deep red stain for which he charged me double what he paid, I am certain. My artisan will echo the entrance design in the gable above the Third Floor, and suspend the Baker family crest there. I'll design it. It will suggest how we Bakers fought in the War of the Roses, how we had a plantations in Alabama which burned to the ground in the Civil War. Why not? Everyone one else here re-invents themselves.*

*For a Latin motto, having discarded things like Fortitude and Perseverance, in the end I chose "Face the Wind". If I remember my conjugations, it is Ob Ventum Eundum, which is most appropriate for a woman making her way up here.*

*Tomorrow is the big day! I'll take a long bath in the morning as I'll need to be refreshed and ready.*

## Chapter 20 The Disarming Katie Sutherland

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Wednesday, August 18

I ran into Max on the way over to the hotel. No hard feelings, he says. No hard feelings indeed! I didn't say that, though; I just shook his hand and said, Of course not. He seemed surprised. He kept looking at me, and then he said, You've changed, Lefty, as he walked away. I found God, I said, and he looked back, surprised.

Vee's Owl's Head Inn looks magnificent. I got here early enough this afternoon to book Room 34, the biggest and best in the house and right across the hall from Vee's. May as well be optimistic, I told myself. \$12.50 is a very fair price. \$5.00 for meals. Fanny was working the front desk when I arrived. I'm sure she knows. Perhaps that's why she had the slightest of smiles when she booked me No. 34. I can't imagine Vee giving it to me had she been on the desk. She is probably running around making everything perfect for this afternoon.

Later

It's very late. The Grand Opening was a great do. Oysters and caviar, meats and cheeses, and champagne. And some green things I picked off. I had my share of whiskey. I had to laugh about Booker's Thumb, and I was one of the many who lined up to "drink the joint." Vee avoided me. Then once, as I turned around, she ran into me and spilled my drink on my shirt and suit. She apologised and I excused myself to go and change.

I had my shirt off when there was a quiet knock on my door, and, Lord help me, there she stood. It is a short walk from hell to heaven, I said. In my case, just across the hall.

She left a little while ago. I decided I didn't want to join the rest downstairs and get my back slapped by half-drunk miners. Who wants to spoil the mood?

---

Wednesday, August 18, 1897

*It's midnight. The "Grand Opening" was grand, indeed. Cost a few quid, as Max would say. It turned out the painted lady at the docks is the owner of the Baldwin upright. She insisted that she sings all the popular ditties, and gave me a quick audition. Moosehide Elsie, she calls herself which is intended to be ironic, I believe. Although she is no raving beauty, she is far from being a moose either. I doubt down south she would make much of a splash, but the fellows just want a good time. I can hear her singing from my bedroom, which is a good thing. Her loud singing voice draws in the customers. At about 10 PM, when Byron had finished his dinner service, we cleared away the tables to make room, and fueled by Moosehide Elsie a dance broke out, and some 'dance hall girls' just seemed to materialize. I struck the standard bargain with the girls where they get a cut of every drink, but I didn't take them on permanently.*

*Earlier today I saw Max talking to a young women who plies her trade from one of the "bakeries", I am certain. When he saw me, he ducked into the shadows, clearly embarrassed at having been seen talking to her. What strange behavior for a man of taste and breeding. Life is full of surprises.*

*Roderick tells me we were up well over \$4000 by the time I came upstairs. If this is any sign, the Inn will do very nicely, indeed.*

*Just had a quick bath, which was a little on the cool side, but didn't want to fire up my stove tonight, given that the days, and nights, are still very warm. I needed it because I 'ran into' an old friend in trouble. Our tryst was delightful, and passionate, and mutually satisfying.*

*I'm going to slip downstairs again for a while to make sure the boys don't get out of hand. A few of them got rowdy earlier, while they were having their turns with the Thumb – it is a great way to get the boys to drink, although in truth that is never hard to do. In any event, I had to stand up on the bar and give them the rules of the house. I told them that anything goes by way of discussion in Booker's Thumb, but that I would not tolerate cruel, abusive, or coarse behavior or the language that accompanies it.*

*"This is not Harry Ash's place," I said and got a laugh. "Nor is it run by him." I curtsied for another. Then I asked my newest employee, Tiny Tim McTavish, to join us, and he stepped out of the shadows. He has mixed Indian and Scottish blood, is well over six feet tall, weighs at least 260 pounds, has hands and jowls like slabs of beef, wears bear-grease in his black hair, and sports a pair of special boots. They have engraved steel-capped toes. If you look at them very carefully – he shows them off with pride – each cap has a tiny man bent over the point, being impaled by it, it seems. Gruesome and sparkling, and to the point. Like this country. He wears one of several shirts whose sleeves have been ripped off to display his upper arm and shoulder muscles. When asked, he makes them quiver like a horse's flank to animate his tattooed, buxom women. This seems to fascinate many men. Women skipped the tattoos and marveled at the muscles.*

*Tim's a surprisingly gentle fellow, which is ironic. When he smiles, he can be genuinely charming. His missing teeth engender only sympathy in me, being as I am a*



*lover of corn on the cob. His value lies in the fact that when his face is at rest, he has a magnificent scowl which he cannot help, of course. One guesses that is from the Scottish side. He has brokered it into a living, having worked for a short time in Skagway until the corruption got too much for him. He said that, as small as Skagway was, it was still about the most lawless place on earth, with shootings and murders practically every day. He fled over the Chilcoot, and ended up here. Whatever the case, he gets the fellows imagining what power resides in that splendid and imposing body of his, which is all I need him to do.*

*Tomorrow or the next day I'll sit down with everyone, see how we've done, and determine how we should go from here. The reins feel good in these delicate hands. I like being able to control things with a soft touch, like my mighty and noble Cordillera. And now my Tiny Tim.*

*It is much later now. Perhaps 4 AM on Thursday. I am so angry I cannot sleep! I can barely write! An hour or so ago I was coming back upstairs to go to bed and I encountered that slut to whom Max had been talking on the street. She was on her way out, just closing the door to Garrett's room! The moment she saw me, her face went white and she raced downstairs without a word. I could not believe it! Shame!*

*They say Charles Darwin claims we are all animals. I agree! We rut and move on. Well, I wash my hands of you, rutter!*

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Thursday, August 19

I have tried my best. Truly, I'm not a bad man. But it never seems to be enough.

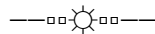
I cannot remember much of last night after Vee's and my midnight encounter, which was heavenly. I remember lying in bed wondering whether she'd come back up and when. Beyond that it gets fuzzy. I vaguely remember her climbing into bed with me later – it's only a fog in a dream. I felt her body snuggle up to me, and felt her hand reach over and taking me, and me going hard.

Then she let out a little noise, scrambled out of bed. She was dressing quickly and, partly awake, I asked her where she was going but got no reply. So I got out of bed and all I saw was the back of her dress disappearing out the door. That seemed odd – I didn't know she had dresses up here – and her perfume seemed odd, too, but who am I to understand?

I went to the door and to my shock she was standing right there, in the hallway, looking my way, but wearing pants, not wearing a dress at all. I couldn't grasp what was going on, but I could tell she was furious.

She didn't respond to me. She just went into her room and slammed the door. I knocked gently several times, but all I got: "Go away! I never want to see you again!"

Hell to Heaven. And back again. I have no idea what to think, or do. I packed up and came back here. Heaven help me, because hell won't, I know. Charlie might. And BadFoot. Good old BadFoot.



It was more than twenty years until I, Charlie Haas – who now interjects myself into this tale once again – saw Katie Sutherland again. I found her in Victoria, British Columbia, going by the name of Mrs. Hope Farrillo, having married Lester Farrillo.

Lester knew of her past, of course. He met her in Dawson in 1898 while making a small fortune there, and took her away from her macque and that life of sorrow – so there was no need for me to hide that I had been looking to talk to Katie Sutherland. Their two boys, however, and their circle of friends, had no idea, so I was careful in that respect. Lester's past was colorful as well, I am led to believe, and nothing to lord over hers. So they each have too much to lose to dredge up the subject any longer in a truthful way.

In her parlour there was a photograph of her in Dawson standing with Lester and the King of the Klondike himself, Big Alex McDonald. "To a keen negotiator," Alex had written in his blocky, awkward hand. That, so far as I could tell, was the foundation of myth they fabricated for their family and Victoria's straight-laced society.

Gin and tonic at hand, we settled into her creaking, wicker rocking chairs among the hanging flower pots on their porch overlooking Ross Bay, the cemetery where, she said, holding hands and with a profound serenity, they had bought their side-by-side plots. The steel-blue calm of the Strait of Juan de Fuca swept away south toward the distant Olympic Mountains with their snowy tips washed in the pinks of the sunset. Their closed front door was on one side of us and the Farrillo white picket fence on the other, so we sat in isolation and turned our minds to that pivotal night in Dawson.

Strangely, the moment we started talking about it, her Cockney accent reappeared in a mild form, as if we had been transported in more than memory. Katie was back.

“Like yesterday, I remembers it,” she said. “The wev-a was stinking ’ot. Max came to me, at me Bakery, see. It was funny because when ’e came in, ’e pulled back the curtain on me big front window. It were usual for it to be the other way ’round. When there was no man with me, I sat by the window and left me curtain open so the customers could see I was alone, like... open for business. And when one came in, I would pull it shut, you see? But Max wanted to make sure everyone knew ’e wasn’t there for that, if you know what I mean.

“’E knew Lefty and me was sweethearts, as much as a gal could be who works out of a crib, wif’ men coming and going all the time, like, and me macque watchin’ over me. Lefty was special, ’e was. Cor Blimey, ’e was good lookin’. Lester was not unsightly, mind you. It’s just that Lefty was, well, the kind of fella what would make your knees wobble, if you know what I mean. (She laughed quietly.) So Max asked if I’d seen Lefty much lately and I said ’e hadn’t been around for a couple o’ weeks. I knew ’e wasn’t seein’ any of the uvers. So I just figured ’e was gone an’ lost. You got used to that in our line. Couldn’t let yourself fall for a fella too hard ’cause it could never last, you see. Lester was different. ’E never wanted nofing. ’E just gave me flowers and smiled at me. Made me feel like I had somefing more than what’s between me legs, like. (And she laughed.) And ’e helped me wif me macque, too. Lester and a Constable who fancied me sent the little bugger packin’ on a Blue Ticket. I went to see ’im off, see. ’E was swearin’ somefing fierce, I tell you, standin’ at the railing of the wheeler. Later I heard ’e got beat up in a bar in Fortymile after jumpin’ ship, and then jumpin’ the wrong guy. Took him three weeks of groanin’ to die. Too easy a deaf, for my likin’. (And she spit into her purple azaleas.)

“Oh, hello, Mildred. Pardon me. Just a mosquito. Flew into my mouth. A fine evening, isn’t it? Yes, Charlie Haas, a friend from the old days. Charlie, this is Mrs. Mildred Watson. Her husband is one of our representatives in the Provincial Assembly. Charlie’s an author. He’s writing about the Gold Rush.”

“A history, Mr. Haas?”

“Oh, goodness, no,” I said. “It’s nothing that serious. It’s just a page-turner. You know. Wild times. Fortunes made and lost in a blink. Bit of romance stirred in. Just a made-up story. Never grew up, I guess. Why, thank you, Mrs. Watson. You, too.”

“Now, where was I?” Katie said, waving at Mrs. Watson. “Oh, yes. So, Max told me that Lefty was over at the Inn. ’E wants me to sneak into Lefty’s room and surprise ’im, and tells me to bring a bit of bacon for ’is dog, which I found a bit strange ’cause ’e never had a dog before and never seemed to like ’em much. ’E paid me to give him a treat, ’cause it was ’is birf-day, see? Well, I’d have done it for nofing, and wif Lefty, I gotta admit, I usually did. It was just as much of a treat for me as it was for ’im. (And she laughed.)

“I waited until business dropped off a bit, cleaned up and went over. Like three or four in the mornin’. Finds ’is room, and sneaks in, quiet like. I gives ’is dog the bit of bacon, takes off most of me clothes and slips under the sheet, real slow, so as not to wake ’im. He’d been wif a woman, like, not long before. I could smell ’er in the room and on him. Not that it mattered to me. I had no hold on ’im. I was just ’appy to get what I could, see? So I reached across and...

“Forgive me, guv, but I’m goin’ to have to talk about things which I wouldn’t ordinarily, to a gentleman like yourself, at least. I reaches across his back, careful not to touch

him, down into the front of his long-johns and goes straight for 'is... well 'is Hampton... 'is Hampton wick. You know, 'is *wick*... (And she laughed.)

“So I takes a hold of it, all gentle like, 'cause I wanted it to wake before 'e. And up it comes. All magic like they do. A wick to a woodie. (She laughed.) Funny how you gets tired... real tired... of some guvs and their wicks... the way they smell, the way they grunt, the way they pump and roll their eyes back. But not wif uvers. I guess you wouldn't know, would you? (She laughed.) Well, I never got tired of Lefty, or 'is wick. He was special, 'e was so handsome, like. And because 'e would always clean up before. Not like some of 'em. And his wick was special, too, not 'cause it was big... Sorry, luv... not 'cause it was big – it was just a nice size for 'im, and for me, too (She laughed) – but because it had a bit of a 'ook to it, to the left, like. We could do it in special ways, if you know what I mean.”

Here she held up her open right hand, first keeping it stiff, then relaxing it so its natural curve was evident, clearly reproducing the leftward hook of Lefty's manhood. Then she laughed while making a 'V' with the fingers of each hand, coupling them at their crotches, moving them into different positions.

“That's how 'e got 'is name, see? From the brofels in Circle City. 'Lefty.' Yes, guv, I knew Lefty. And I knew 'is wick right well. Wicks were me business,” she said with a broad smile.

“So up it comes, and woodie, like, and I ran me hand up it, and 'e starts to stir, and sayes somfing about 'Vee'. But, Cor Blimey, it wasn't Lefty's at all! It was straight like an arrow. This weren't Lefty's wick. Bloody 'ell if this weren't Lefty!

“Now you’d think havin’ as many men as me over the years it wasn’t goin’ to shock. What’s one more among hundreds? And I was on a job, like. But I was lookin’ forward to me Lefty at the end of me day. Not some Andy Miner just in from the diggins whose face I couldn’t see in the dark and could ’av sores for all I knew, and who’d just had ano’ver woman who could have had sores, too, but in other places – sorry guv. And this wasn’t ’im. So I leapt out of bed, grabbed me clothes and ran out, just as ’e was wakin’ up.

“Then who do you think I runs into, right there in the ’all, but Miss Prissy Pants ’erself, lookin’ like she was goin’ to claw me eyes out. Now I’ve ’ad me experience with women, too, and they ain’t never ’appy to see mean. (She laughed.) And I don’t blame ’em, truth be told. I figure I’m so much better at the business than they are, if you know what I mean. So I just high-tails it down the stairs.

“Max was waitin by the Inn door. All I says was, ‘It wasn’t ’im! That weren’t Lefty!’ So Max checked to make sure I got the right room, and I did. So ’e takes out a poke and shoves it in me hand. But I it back. Then ’e takes me shoulders, and shakes ’em like this, see, to get me to look at ’im, an’ ’e says, ‘You do not want to tell anyone of this,’ in a gravely sort of way. Then he says it again. Now, I don’t scare easy, I don’t. But ’ow ’e looked at me gave me the shivers, and I swear, until right this minute, I ain’t never told ano’ver soul.”

I smiled, finished my tea, and thanked her. There was little else to say, so she got my coat and walked me to the gate. And there, when Mrs. Hope Farrillo bade me goodbye in her rather newly-found, prim way, I realized the world would likely never again see the disarming Katie Sutherland.



On August 19, 1897, the following letter was mailed, in Seattle, Washington, addressed to Willis McKenzie, written by his son, Ted:

*R.R. 3, Georgeville, Que., Dominion of Canada*

*August 19, 1897.*

*Dearest Father,*

*Finally I have secured passage out of the hell that is Seattle, though I may be going from the frying pan into the fire. My vessel used to haul coal and has been pressed into service. It will not have been cleaned, I am certain.*

*I regret that, although I found three of the four telegraph offices, there were so many folks clamouring for word from home that I saw greater profit in trying to secure passage than standing in the long lines in front Western Union, Sunset, or Pacific. I paid three fellows to line up for me, but I fear I may never see any of them again. There is little chance you wired me, in any event.*

*We sail tomorrow. I have the last of my kit to get together. If I'm not sufficiently supplied, they tell me I won't be able to get into Canada. It seems odd, given that I will be there for a few short days only, but I cannot risk being turned back.*

*I pray all is well with you. As well as can be expected.*

*As always, I remain,*

*Your loving Son,*

*Ted*



## Chapter 21 Fate Shines Brightly

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Friday, August 20

Moe and Joe are not back yet. I'm down to permafrost in the cut as we follow the trench in the bedrock back into the hill. Fired up the steamer, and worked all day mucking and pumping. Several miners were impressed at how well the steamer is doing.

Max came by to look into the cut, too. But just stood at the top and smiled and said, Good day... Lefty. Can't figure him out. Or Vee, for that matter.

I'm sticking to mining. Water always flows downhill; black sand is always magnetic; gold is always valuable. With people, I can't tell where they are going, who they are, what they are supposed to be, who will help me figure out any of that. Except for Vee and Charlie, and Willoughby, and Molly, most are not worth the shit that comes out of them. Me? Shit for brains; actions to match.

Decent dinner. BadFoot and me. Both hairy, smelly, and bloody simple-minded. Well, not you, BadFoot.

---

Friday, August 20, 1897

*This is the last word I will say about him. I'm not even going to think about him. I know why I loved him. I just don't know why I ever trusted him.*

*Wednesday's Grand Opening netted a few pennies short of \$5,000. I cannot expect that to repeat itself. They were packed in and Elsie had them singing and drinking. I've offered her a contract as I cannot afford to have her going anywhere else.*

*It's clear my guests grew up in a different world than I did, for Elsie sang A Bird in a Gilded Cage and everyone in the room joined in the chorus. I had never heard it before. I mouthed it as if I knew it, and by the end of the evening I did. They had her play it several times. It brought a tear to my eye. It goes:*

*"She's only a bird in a gilded cage,*

*A beautiful sight to see.*

*You may think she's happy and free from care,*

*She's not, though she seems to be.*

*'Tis sad when you think of her wasted life*

*For youth cannot mate with age;*

*And her beauty was sold for an old man's gold,*

*She's a bird in a gilded cage."*

---

Saturday, August 21

Moe and Joe are back, and we put in a good day. Sun was up early, down late. BadFoot sniffed and pissed. Max wandered about looking at claim posts. I yelled at him to go to hell! Bugs followed me into the outhouse and bit my privates. I had bacon and beans, and passed wind. Life on the creek. Romantic and gay.

---

Saturday, August 21, 1897

*I sold my first cabin today, at a decent price, too. \$950. I lay out only for labor and some building supplies such as nail, hinges, and screen wire, of course. The wood*

*costs me little to cut, haul, and mill. The boys are getting very fast at it. It's just a rectangular box, after all.*

*Elsie haggled and got a fair wage. Most musicians earn around \$100 a week and actresses around half again as much. She made the point that she was more than a mere musician, that she was an entertainer in the vein of an actress, and she got them drinking, which is where the money is. So she asked for \$150 a week, and I gave it to her.*

*The dance hall girls will make the standard fare, as there is much competition among them: they charge a chip a dance (which costs the men a dollar each) and 25% of whatever they get their men to buy between dances. Whiskey, gin, beer, and champagne. We sold 30 bottles of champagne on opening night for a quick profit – \$30 apiece. We sell beer at 50¢ a pint, gin and whiskey \$1 a drink. They are the steady profit.*

*Tomorrow is Sunday and I like the idea of shutting the bar down for a day.*

*Alcohol and religion are strangely similar commodities. We fall back to each. But, despite their occasional pious mumblings, alcohol – not gold or God – is the miners' religion. That and us, the fairer sex. Rutters and sots. Thankfully not all.*

*These musings make me wonder what my goal is. A few weeks ago the answer would have been immediate. Garrett, a fulfilling married life, a challenge in the business world. The first is gone, the second is doubtful. I have the third. Is that enough?*

---

Sunday, August 22

Slept in. Moe and Joe headed off to Dawson for the day. I wandered up to the dam with BadFoot after breakfast, with him sniffing about, claiming his territory. I wish it were that easy for me. He hung back a bit to piss on our claim posts. I gave him a whistle,

but he just looked up at me and went back to sniffing a post, as if he'd not already claimed it a thousand times. Suddenly I noticed that it was not our post. Damned me if Max hadn't got his foreman to jump the Hillup Fraction. Clear as day, a new post, right next to ours, all squared up, proud and proper, saying on one side:

**Post #1.**

**I, Anthony Giles Ainsworth,**

**on August 21, 1897,**

**claim the fraction known as 32A between**

**#32 Above Eldorado and #33 Above Eldorado,**

**for the purposes of Placer Mining.**

Steaming mad, I went down to find Max, who was at breakfast, sitting at a little table in the sunshine just outside his cabin, trying to ignore the bloody bugs. Silver and china service, for Christ's sake! Wipes his mouth with a bloody napkin! He folded it carefully, placed it beside the plate, smiled sarcastically, and asked if there was any trouble. I could barely talk, I was so angry. What the hell is that?! Pointed toward the claim post. He couldn't see the post from there but he knew well enough. Relax, Garrett, he said clearly. You will cause yourself a heart attack. Have some breakfast?

Garrett?! Garrett?! Are you mad? What the hell are you talking about?

There is no point in blustering, McKenzie. I know it was Hillup who died in the drift. The ownership records at the Mining Recorder's office say Hillup owned it all. So, on thinking it over, it occurred to me that since he was killed and hasn't been working his ground as he should, my enterprising foreman, Anthony, had every right to stake the

ground before someone else did. Max, the bugger had the gall to haul out the Regulations and point to number 21, and read it to me like I was a school boy: A claim shall be deemed to be abandoned... and so forth, and so forth.

Damn! I said to myself. I could have throttled him. I was about to poke at the parts where Regulation #21 also says “unworked... by the grantee thereof or by some person on his behalf, and the part that says “... for the space of seventy-two hours, unless sickness or other reasonable cause be shown ...” and say something smart about death being a reasonable cause, but I stopped myself, as I realised both would be admissions that Lefty had died. So I had to stand there and keep my mouth shut. And that was torture, I swear.

We’ll put it to Mr. Fawcett, the new Gold Commissioner, then, shall we? he said. I will register the claim on Monday morning, and drop in to see the Staff Sergeant right after that. And he will ask: Has Mr. Hillup not been working it continuously? And I will have to say: Oh dear, didn’t you know? And so forth, and so forth. Think about it, McKenzie, he said.

So I said, Think of yourself as a sheep and go bugger yourself, Max! Just as Lefty would have said, and walked away. Never said that in my life to anyone. He called after me: Splendid, McKenzie. Peerless wit, you are. At least you were clever enough to mimic Hillup’s foul mouth and manners, but is that your best, really? And he laughed.

Then he called after me. So, shall we dispense with the Gold Commissioner? Listen, I don’t mind if you keep what you’ve cleaned up from that – pointed to the trench area – I’ll just take what you cleaned up from the cut and your part of the drift – pointed toward Lefty’s doors and workings. I’m a reasonable man. Not a greedy one. I don’t want to leave you with nothing for your efforts.

I looked at him to see if he was being straight, which was a mistake. He knew it, too, because he said, Lefty never would have stopped, Garrett, because Lefty would have known I'd never have a chance before the Commissioner. But Garrett would stop because he is desperate for a way out. It's simple, he said, looking straight at me with a poker face, something is more than nothing. Bugger him, I thought, then turned and left.

Good, he called after me. Anthony will register it tomorrow and assume there'll be no argument. I just give those poor clerks an extra tenner to keep them from asking questions. You can finish cleaning up there and be on your way. Incidentally, I'll give you fifty for the steam engine, as it seems to do fine work. By then he couldn't hear me when I said, Go fuck yourself! Even so, I said it to my boots.

---

Sunday, August 22, 1897

*No days off in hotel land, but I did have time for a long bath this morning.*

*I think Fanny has got a first class prospect for Willoughby this time. Willoughby was off early to look. I told him to stop by Max's to ask him to render an opinion.*

*Willoughby liked it: it's high up on Bonanza, and has good production numbers. The owners want to sell and escape before the winter comes. But even so they are asking for more than what Willoughby had put aside, so I told him I'd split it with him. He went to meet them this evening at one of the saloons in town, and he figures they'll take our offer. He says he plans to hire a crew to work it for us. He seems to have settled into the life here at the hotel and mill, and is happily acting alongside Haldron in keeping the crews running smoothly. I think he's figured he's earned his time away from the bush, and I agree with him. All he really wants is to go up to his claim, stick his thumbs in his belt, and act the owner.*

*He heard some strange reports about Max, however. It seems that Max has jumped Garrett's fraction. This could get messy. I hope I don't get drawn in, somehow.*

---

Monday, August 23

I had to let Moe and Joe go. I paid them with some flake gold from our last clean-up and I tried to explain it to them without telling them too much. I told them it was just better this way until things got straightened out, and that I'd look for them then. I think they bought it, but they knew there was something else. It took some effort to talk Maudite out of "Goin' over der an' pushin' 'is goddamned wind pipe up 'is goddamned arse."

I tidied up a bit, went into Dawson, and stayed at the Klondike. Then I went to see Molly, hoping she would know something. She shook her head. I like you, Garrett, but you'd think you'd treat a fine woman like Vee with a little respect. I asked her what I'd done? Tell me, truly, please. I have no idea why she is angry. She won't talk to me. But Molly said it would be better if I left.

I asked her to buy back the sword. Remember, Garrett, she said, my business is to sell high and buy low, but I won't be too hard on you.

If life were a Woolly Mammoth crashing through this northern forest, I would be barely a smear of spruce gum under its foot.

---

Monday, August 23, 1897

*Molly says Garrett's in town and in bad shape because of the Grand Opening thing and Max's move. He says he is desperate. Tough luck.*

---

Tuesday, August 24

I'm back at the Fraction. I was working away this afternoon, leaning over the rocker box, cleaning it out when I heard someone call out. Not a hint of warmth in it, a reprimand in a name. Leland! rang out across the hills. The rest of the world didn't stop, but I did, in my tracks.

I knew who it was before I turned about. First, everyone here knew him only as Lefty. Second, there was a father's tone in his voice. It is beyond me how I can be so quick with some things and so slow with others.

Who the hell are you? he said, when I turned around. There approached a walking, talking Lefty. Older. Bulkier. Carbuncular, with a matching walking stick. And a downturned mouth where cruelty seems to hover. I could see Lefty in his face, though it was embellished with scars, from fights, no doubt. He had eyes and skin that whiskey gives you – with little red lines in both. And the raked skin of a sun-battered Indian.

He pointed his walking stick at BadFoot, who was growling at him like a bear. You keep that animal off me! Had to send BadFoot off to the cabin.

Who asks? I asked. The father of a beggar who ran out on his family, he said. Are you Uriah Hillup? I asked, but he batted away my question like he was batting at the black flies clouding him. Black flies aren't like house flies, you know, I said, being a smart-ass.

The bugger pulled back his coat to show me his leather holster, bleached and smooth in patches from the wearing, and dark in others from age. He flipped it up to show me his old colt with a cylinder looking too well-used for my liking.



McKenzie, I said quickly, quickly getting back to his original question. Francis Garrett McKenzie. You think I care for your name, varmint? Where the hell is my son? That pistol is making me uncomfortable, I said. Oh, that so? he said. Well I hear tell that bullets don't make you feel any better. Just keep the gun out of it, I said, and I'll tell you everything. He looked at me for a long minute, then finally he let his coat flap fall.

I told him to sit down, but he didn't. So I told him how Lefty died in the accident and how I found him, and waited for a sign, some emotion, but there was none. I didn't tell him about Lefty's face, though, as I figured it wouldn't help. But it was like talking to a horse whose focus is bothered by flies. Anything going on in there, Mr. Hillup? Knock, knock on his forehead. I didn't do it, of course. Just felt like it.

He started to throw his head about like a horse, too, getting impatient. I figured he only wanted to hear about the gold. So I told him everything, sticking to the simple facts as closely as I could. The partnership. Fractions. Ownership. Drifting off claim. Max. The trench. The amounts of gold at A.C.C. Everything. I brought out this journal to show him my gold deposits and how I was planning to split it between Beatrice and me. Told him everything except for me taking money out and losing at Faro. I figured that wouldn't help me either. When it came to money, he listened intently.

He told you about Beatrice? he asked, finally, when I was done. No, sir, I said. I read his letters. He nodded, thinking. You'd do that for your old partner, for his wife? he asked. Even though he buggered you? Yes, sir, I said, as I reckon it's the proper thing. You figure he'd have done that for you? No, sir, I don't. Damned right he wouldn't! Then I asked if he would like me to take him to the grave? Why? There's plenty of bush up

here for me to shit on and with far less trouble, he said, looking around. Though there aren't many trees left hereabouts. No privacy. Does his grave have more trees? he asked.

I had no idea what to say. I'd never heard that coming out of a father. I thought of defending Lefty, but I couldn't say anything nice about the rotter, either. And, as well, the man had a Colt, and I got the feeling he might use it whatever I said, so in the end, I just stood looking at a weathered, ugly box of a man.

There's something else, Mr. Hillup. Oh, yeah, he said. Yes, I have been lying to the authorities. Ha! I figured you for a straight shooter, there, McKenzie. So I added, I didn't exactly plan to. I sort of fell into it. You see ...

Let me guess, he said, laughing as he might have at the sad humour of a stumbling animal. You told the police it was McKenzie died in the drift. My face gave me away because then he laughed harder, showing his mouthful of greenish teeth. And you did it 'cause you figured you wouldn't get your hands on the gold otherwise? He moved so close to me I could smell his foul breath. It makes sense, he said, looking at you, hearing what he did to you.

You reckon me a coarse man, he said. Lord knows I look like one. My clothes haven't changed for a month. And I figure I ain't been a week ever without pissing up in some saloon somewhere, passing out as often as not. But I ain't no mean son of a bitch. To me the little bugger died long ago. Truth is, I reckoned someone would have killed him by now. Hell, I might have thanked him for doing it. I did my best by him, but he was twisted at birth, I reckon, more than I ever was. I pulled hard to straighten him out, but a snake is a snake. It always coils up again. You tell me you never wanted to throttle

him. You got me there, I had to admit. There you go, he said. Now show me where he died.

So I took him into the drift, but I didn't have a lantern. It was dark, with puddles everywhere, and with earth smells so strong my lungs tightened. Silent, but for drops plunking and the echoes of it, like some musical cave. The big rock that killed him was still there, under our long shadows. Even the depressions were still there, where his toes dug in – tiny pools now - and a black stain in the drag marks where I dragged his face. Even in the dark Uriah knew it was congealed blood, I figure, so I didn't say anything. I just wanted to show him and get the hell out. I pointed up to the hole the rock fell from. Yeah, he said, that would do it. He poked about in the drift with his walking stick, making little rocks fall out at the touch. Unstable as hell, he said, but strange that it would drop just then. Biggest boulder in the roof, he said, looking up at the cavity it left, and him right under it. Perfect timing, eh? Depending on your point of view, I said. He had the steamer going, I said by way of explanation, to soften up the permafrost. He looked around at walls and roof. Not surprising, he said, as I see it. Too goddamned greedy to shore up his diggins, he said, and looked at me. Greed is the father of stupidity, he said, surprisingly. Bloody hell. Philosophers everywhere, I thought. Behind drunks and ugly faces, even. I almost said, If that's so, you must be Greed Himself, but his eyes were just two little white and red spots in the gloom, locked on me and I decided to get the hell out.

Walking back up, he said, so, the fraction is in his name? He turned back to business as easily, and as dispassionately, as a cat takes a right angle. Yes, sir. Only his? he asked. Yes, sir, and all the gold, too. But, there's a problem, I told him. There's a bit of a mess. Our neighbour there – and I pointed at Max sitting at his little table, legs crossed under

his serviette like a dandy, having tea and freshly baked biscuits – his name is Max. He reckons we had no right to this ground. He figures it came off his claim. But it was his cock-up that created the fraction in the first place. He found out that I was not Lefty, somehow, so, a couple of days ago, he jumped our claim. You admitted you were not Lefty? he asked. You look so much alike you nearly fooled even me, from the back. Looked, I said, looked. Yeah, looked, he said. I never admitted it, I said, but he knows, somehow or other.

We walked over to look at the posts. He got the right to do that? he asked. I don't think so, I said, but it may end up with Fawcett, the Gold Commissioner. No miners' meeting? he asked. In Canada it goes before the Commissioner, I said.

Too bad, he said. I've never been to a meeting that I couldn't swing. Can you get to this Fawcett fellow? What do you mean? I mean, can you slip him a few dollars? You got dollars up here? he asked, with a serious face. Not pesos or something? I ignored that, and said, You can do that with the clerks, if you know who to talk to. But, Fawcett? I continued. He's new here, and so far he seems pretty straight. The problem is that he has hundreds of cases to deal with, and never leaves his office because fellows crowd around him shouting at him like he was Pilate or something.

And then he said, You got to figure out how he found out you're not Lefty. You got a copy of the Regulations? Yes, sir, I answered. Did Leland leave a will anywhere? No, sir. Any talk of one? No, sir. I can show you his letters. Would you like to take them and his effects with you? I was keeping them to bring to Beatrice. Just give me the letters, he said, and you can shove his effects up the arse of that Max fellow. Good morning to you, sir, he shouted to Max and waved and Max shouted back and waved, too.

Did he say anything nice about me? he asked and laughed. I could see he knew what the answer would be. Sorry about the gun, he said, suddenly, smiling at me in a way I couldn't really understand, and he left with the letters.

Uriah Hillup. Watched him walk, caning his way down the creek. Squat, a battered package. Toes out. Wide stride to leave room for the belly. The walk of a man who didn't much care about others' opinions and didn't do their bidding.

He just found out his son was dead. He smiled, laughed, said thank you, and left. Things about Lefty started making sense.

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Tuesday, August 24, 1897

*Owl's Head has been full since the day we opened. Dinner service is going very well. Byron keeps inventing dishes out of a larder that is quite limited, really. It seems he has made a deal with the owner/chef of La Guitarra to take whatever vegetables she has in season that she cannot use herself. There is never enough to make a full serving of them, but what he does is incorporate them in a 'special' for which he charges, and our clientele are only too happy to pay more than their weight in gold.*

*Dawson itself is not so happy. A.C.C. only opens its doors to sell food for an hour a day, and no one knows exactly when that will be. When the word gets out there's a food stampede as hundreds rush to see what they can get. The town keeps growing – I would say 8,000 by now, maybe more, judging from the hundreds of tents and cabins, and boats tied up along the waterfront – and it's as nervous as a squirrel with a lean stash at first frost.*

*Mr. Clarence Grizwald, the manager of the Bank of Commerce, joined us this evening for dinner. He had a frilly thing on his arm that was more puff than*

*circumstance. I told Byron to notify me when their dishes were ready. I served them myself. He tried to hide it, but he looked a little sheepish, which I thought suited him. At the end, as I was helping him find his hat, he told me how pleased he was at my success. I leaned over and whispered to him that if he looked any more sheepish, I would have to get Byron to break out the curry and have him in a Mulligatawny soup. The spices, I explained, would be necessary to give him some substance. Later I chastized myself for having the bad graces to say it to his ear, as it were. Later again, I thought "To hell with him!" and that's how it stands at the moment. No spot for me at the table of the most worthy in this town, I fear. Well, that was the case long ago, when they saw me in pants and rumors spread about Garrett and me. I'm happiest that way.*

---

Wednesday, August 25

I'm still tidying up. Max said he wouldn't trouble me if I cleaned up what we had taken from the trench so far. I went back and forth all day as to whether I should pay attention to him or just mine where I wanted, but in the end I figured I didn't want to muck out gold that Fawcett might end up putting in his hands anyway. I don't seem to have the stomach for this kind of stuff. You'd think it would be street-fighters who'd fare best, who'd not be troubled by troubles. It turns out that it's a 'grand' fellow who fares best, one who has all appearances of having had a wet nurse followed by a succession of nannies and headmasters, with appointments to see his parents every year or two. Maybe that's the trick. Deprivation and headmasters. Who knows? And then there's Uriah.

There's something strongly unsettling about him. But something strangely comforting, too, almost like getting relief from the hot sun by standing in his shadow. Tried all day to understand it. It's to do with power, I reckon. That's the best I could do.

I began to worry, too, about the shortfall because of the \$47,000 or so I lost at Faro and spent on hotels and such. It wouldn't matter if he had not shown up. I'd have taken account of it when I was doing the final split for Beatrice. But now, with him here, it may just look like I was spending Lefty's money a little too freely.

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Wednesday, August 25, 1897

*Well, wonder of wonders! High society came calling today. Four ladies in full dress. They were nice enough – quite fine people, actually. They help out at the hospital and look after the homesick, the just plain sick, and the other men who have fallen by the wayside. A surprising number of men need attention these days. Many mill about in bad spirits, facing the fact that they've come all this way with great expectations – not just of their own, but of their family, friends, and investors – all done for less than nothing.*

*Religion is the answer, the ladies seemed to feel. They wanted me to join their circle and said they were impressed by my 'gumption'. I thanked them very politely but explained I had my hands full with the mill, the cabins, and the hotel (not to mention looking for good property to buy up). They didn't seem to want to take that for an answer, saying I should thank the Almighty for my success, so I pulled a trick I evolved to ward off suitors mother would thrust on me.*

*"Shall I bring the whiskey?" I asked.*

*"Oh, dear," they said, in unison.*

*“We don’t imbibe, my dear,” said their leader, a Mrs. Patterson, kindly – giving me the benefit of the doubt. And they held their ground.*

*So I could see I had to bring in the big gun, so to speak.*

*“I notice you are all married,” I said. “Do you hold socials?”*

*“Why, yes,” said Mrs. Patterson, “Every few weeks, for charity.”*

*“How lovely!” I said, brightly, “Then I shall be happy to join you.” And I thanked them profusely. “My lovers and I are starved for good company.”*

*There was suddenly much clearing of throats, and backing away.*

*“Perhaps if I brought just one at a time,” I called after them, at which point they picked up skirts and skedaddled.*

*Wicked me! I am chuckling still.*

---

Thursday, August 26

Uriah came back. The first thing he did was throw a packet at me. I found his will, he said. I found no will, I said. It was among his letters, he said. Strange, I said.

It was dated in the spring, when I was after him to change the ownership at the Records Office, and named Uriah Seth Hillup, as executor. Lefty’s proceeds from mining to be split, 3/4 Beatrice, 1/4 Uriah. It wasn’t notarised. He acknowledged me, “Garret MacKenzie”, as his “50-50 partner in all ventures.” He couldn’t even get my name right, I said. You complainin’? He was plannin’ to do right by Beatrice and you, he said.

It’s a holographic will, I said, given that it wasn’t signed. You know about wills? he asked, and handed me an unsent letter from Lefty so I could compare scripts. It seems



like his writing, I said. Seems so, he said. An odd stick Leland, I said. He liked to be 'in control'. Did he get that from you? Uriah didn't respond.

What about the Gold Commissioner? I asked him, and he said, I ain't goin' to tell him you are my son. That there's a criminal offence. But if it weren't for me working the fraction, I said, he'd have nothing – you'd have nothing. Uriah made a teacher's face at me and said, I ain't so sure about that. Anyways, you smashed it, you fix it.

Then he sat me down at my table in the cabin and told me, in a father's voice, I had a simple choice to make. Fix what I broke, withdraw the gold from A.C.C. and split it with him like the will says, or he'd go to the police and I'll lose everything. I'll get my gold in the end whatever you do, he said, so it don't matter to me.

But it seemed too generous from what I could see, so I asked him why he didn't just go to the police now, expose me, and get it all?

Look, son, he said, saying son in a way that sent a shiver down my back and sounding strangely forgiving all of a sudden, Leland says you were 50-50 partners. I figure that's okay. It's better for us to get half now without any trouble than fight for three years in court, and still only get half, not counting the lawyers. I'm no saint, but I ain't greedy, or stupid. There's plenty here for all.

He gave me a minute to think, then he said, listen, McKenzie, the bloody Gold Commissioner's not going to say a fellow's ground comes open the moment he dies. It wouldn't be right. It's probably against the law, and if it isn't now, he'll make it so. The whole kit and caboodle would be a mess for him, not just because of this case. You just need to convince him you are Lefty is all. Take that Undertaker's testimony, get your fellow, Constable Mallard, to come along and stand up in front of Fawcett. Who's this

Max fellow goin' to bring? A fuckin' prostitute, for Christ's sake! Like there's some other kind! And he laughed, wildly. It took me a second to get it, then I smiled, I admit.

If you do that, we'll clean everything else up, he said. You'll have to leave the country with me, though. 'Cause if it ever comes to light what you've been doing here, don't matter how you explain it, you'll be up the spout. In one shit-load of trouble. Law folk or government folk will be looking at the problem, looking at his boss who's got some itty bit of regulation stuck up his arse, saying I gotta do something or he'll sack me. Much better to just high-tail it. Once you are outta here, who's goin to care? No one, I reckon.

Leave with you? I asked. He chuckled at that. You like the idea? he said. How many people know about you? Half a dozen, maybe, I said, counting them up. That you know of, he said. How long before someone blackmails you?

I looked at his unsightly face. You going to turn on me? I asked. He laughed like a madman. Gotta admit, McKenzie, you're a right piece of work. Honest and smart and stupid, all at once. If I was goin to turn on you, I'd say, trust me, I ain't goin' to turn on you. And if I weren't goin to turn on you, I'd say that, too. Son, there ain't no point in askin' the bear if he's planin' to eat you for supper. You gotta stand up, look him in the eye, and make damn sure he knows he'll pay a price for tryin'.

On one side I have an uneasy enemy, Max, the tea-sipper who knows who-knows-what about me, and, on the other, an uneasy ally, a man who tells me he's not greedy, but likens himself to a hungry bear. And everyone coveting the same pile of gold.

You've come a long way, Francis Garrett McKenzie. Fate continues to shine brightly upon you.

## Chapter 22 A Runaway Horse

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Thursday, August 26, 1897

*Max found me today. He felt he owed me an explanation about the claim jumping. I told him not, that it was none of my business, but he insisted – politely, of course. Then he told me that he had hired a prostitute called Katie Sutherland who knew Lefty. He charged her to get into Garrett’s bedroom. He said she had come out knowing that it was not Lefty in there.*

*“So, the little slut had her way with him,” I said, but he said that, no, she didn’t.*

*“I don’t believe it,” I said. “I saw her coming out of the room only half-dressed.”*

*“She swears she slipped into bed with him in the dark when he was asleep,” he said, “and only then discovered it was not Lefty.”*

*“She saw him in the dark?”*

*“She says she didn’t exactly see him, but she knew. Trust me. She would know.”*

*“You are telling me that a prostitute ran from the room, half-naked, because she found a ‘strange man’ in the bed? How absurd is that?” I said.*

*“If she were going to lie, she would have said she serviced him in order to keep the advance I paid her. But she returned it. And you cannot think she was trying to save her reputation.”*

*No, she sold that years ago, I thought.*

*He went on to explain that as Lefty was dead, the Hillup Fraction would be open ground, blah, blah, blah, but I wasn’t listening because, by then, all I could think of was: Oh, Lord! Garrett, I’ve been so stubborn, and wrong!*

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Saturday, August 28

I cannot understand this life. How many times will I get slammed down and picked up? One day, I am exiled. The next I'm welcomed back.

Strangest thing, though. Vee came to apologise in a dress (with boots for hiking hidden underneath). All made up, too. Surprised the hell out of me. But BadFoot's whole body was wagging. Follow me, she said, perfunctorily, and went into the cabin. I was going to rib her about the dress, but was too afraid to open my mouth, truth be told.

Max tells me, she said, that Katie Sutherland knew it was not Lefty in that bed. She says she never slept with you. That's true! I said, that's true! I tried to tell you, but you wouldn't listen. Look at me, she said, trying to calm me down. I got a grip on myself. Swear to me, she said, and mean it! I do! I swear she left as soon as she touched me, I said. And then I figured it out, all of a sudden, remembering where she touched me.

She could tell from a touch? she asked, but I couldn't bring myself to explain. Damned me, but she started to walk away. Wait! Wait! I called. How could she tell? she asked. She touched me there, I said, and dipped my eyes, hoping she would figure it out, too. She just stared at me. So I pointed. Men are as different there as they are in their noses, I said. At first she drew a blank, and then her eyes went all over the sky, and her cheeks turned pink. Oh, she said, but in a long, drawn-out singing kind of way. And she smiled. Is that true? she asked. Are you all that different? And she all but forced me to show her.

That was yesterday. Today, walking into town, told myself I'm not going to waste time trying to figure out the twists and turns of things. I landed on a run-away horse, is all, and I just have to do everything I can to keep from being thrown off.

---

Saturday, August 28, 1897

*All the way up to see Garrett I thought about his problems, how he had handled them, and how I had. It kept on occurring to me that I have been rather duplicitous. Here I was giving others a hard time for not seeing things as they are, poking fun at the High Society ladies, and Grizwald. I haven't been looking in the mirror. I helped Garrett in his foolishness in all that business about the ring and such, yet I pretended I didn't. I hid behind the ruse. A pretense of virtue.*

*And Molly. I cannot blame her. She was trying her best to support me while not interfering. She left the moral choice up to me and supported me in it. Well, I'm done with all that. It's brought me nothing. And it has made both Garrett and me unhappy.*

*Whatever Garrett's choice is, I'll try and help if I can. I shall not be impulsive or stupid about it, but I'm not going to risk my happiness for propriety and for the narrow course of the law, either. In point of fact, I would be foolish not to help. I would be risking my chance of happiness with Garrett for what? For nothing substantial, that is for certain. For a life of High Society and Grizwalds. Perish the thought. Let them all join my mother's league, not mine.*

*I went to see Garrett disguised as a lady. He didn't recognize me until I was within a few feet.*

*He led me to understand how Katie knew. A bit embarrassing, but how can a woman know who's only ever seen one man?*

*I stayed and cooked us a nice meal. After and before. Then we talked for a good part of the night. Like travelling through time. We joked about moments from summers ago. I stole looks at his pair of exquisite buttocks – they have the most delicious dimples*

*on the sides, for heaven's sake! Then, ignoring my blushing cheeks and without thinking, I said that I wanted to see his manhood so I could recognize him in other circumstances, if necessary. But neither of us could consummate the act for our fits of laughter from embarrassment.*

*When we calmed down, we took the tentative excursions into the future which we always take, imagining what could be, how we'd look when our stomachs start to give way – me from children, him from the ravages of wealth, gluttony, and sloth.*

*For the most part, it took his mind off his current troubles, though he did tell me all about Uriah and Max. He likened himself to a rider on a run-away horse, but to me he seems more like a puppy struggling in a wildly turbulent river, pumping his legs furiously to keep his nose above water. I just want to reach down and lift him out.*

*We are starting to get our fair share of night these days, at last. The novelty of the midnight sun wears off soon enough, I found. One misses definition in days. It was brisk when I went out sometime after midnight to his little outhouse. I appreciate the fact that he took the trouble to build one – most up here haven't bothered, which makes for careful hiking. The stars were magnificent, but the moon, the moon was breath-taking, being full to bursting and brilliant and clear in this air. Garrett came out eventually, worried about me when I didn't reappear right away in the cabin. Sweet man.*

*We had nice, late breakfast of bacon and sourdough bannock, with raisins, no less! A breakfast I'll always remember, I know. Rough-cut, fat slabs of bacon. And camp coffee to put hair on my chest, he joked. Was just an excuse for him to peak down my front to check. No hair, he said, but what are these? Because of that, it took us a while longer to get around to cleaning up the dishes.*

*We walked separately to town. Garrett is staying at the Klondike, for secrecy's sake, while I am lying in the bath, and already starting to stir a little, thinking about him sneaking into my room later, after midnight.*

*Dawson continues to be mad. If the frantic are not stampeding for food, it is for ground. Yesterday a horde grabbed whatever boats they could – whether it was theirs or not – and headed to Moosehide Cr., three miles north of here on the Yukon. They came back empty-handed, of course. No one could find a hint of pay-dirt, though that didn't stop them from staking up the countryside. They call it a "hollow" rush, but I would call it a rush of the hollow-heads.*

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Sunday, August 29

Crept into Vee's room last night. Waited from about 11 to 2. Beforehand, I was hard and soft, depending on whether my book or she gripped my imagination.

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*Sunday, August 29, 1897*

*Garrett last night. Dinner this evening with both Willoughby and Garrett. We went over the production from W's new claim, which seems healthy, and will, at this rate, pay for its purchase by mid-September. It will be all gravy from then on. We have sold our second cabin in less than a week. Garrett tonight. Again. I do love the man!*

---

Monday, August 30

I paid a friend at the Gold Commissioner's office to look up the schedule for hearings. It turns out Max has influence, because Fawcett already has Max's petition in front of him and had set a date for Friday, Sept 17. The clerk served me notice on the spot.

First I bribe the bugger, then save him a bloody trip to the creeks to serve me. Then he smiles at me and tells me he's going to take the rest of the day off! He has his eye on a small fraction, and has kept it a secret from everyone, he says. It's not proper, I know, but it's hard to blame the rotter.

No sign of Uriah.

Going downstairs to have a couple of drinks and chew the fat with the boys. Vee will be by again later. Heaven is not up there. It's just down the street.

---

Monday, August 30, 1897

*It is tough to keep my mind on business these days. I get naughty thoughts which behave like unruly boys: rude and ribald. Sometimes hilariously salacious and wicked. They appear at the strangest moments, too. In one, I caught sight of a group of women church-goers in their Sunday finest, and Pan suddenly materialized and exposed himself to them. In another, a young, healthy-looking carpenter working on the third story of a nearby building, the young man turned into Garrett about to dive from a rocky cliff, his body muscular – and bare. In the latest – just this afternoon – a man's beige toque and face merged to look like the head of – well – the pinnacle of pleasure, let us say. I'm now finding it harder and harder not to laugh. How embarrassing. I'm turning mad with lust.*

*It must seem to others as if I suffer from spates of random blushing. Molly notices, certainly, as does Fanny. I appreciate that neither makes anything of it, however. Haldron is clueless, thank God. Roderick never looks at me anyway – his head is always down, barreling ahead. Byron takes second looks, sometimes – from his smile, I guess he is aware. Willoughby, I suspect, is just holding his tongue.*



---

Tuesday, August 31

Vee was unusually rapacious last night.

I came back to the Fraction today. She is staying in town. I can't run afoul of the 72 hour thing. It's good to have a breather anyway, as neither of us seem to be able to think of anything else when we are together – not clearly, at any rate. Not that my record is great when it comes to thinking clearly.

---

*Tuesday, August 31, 1897*

*Garrett went back up. I don't think he knew I had it in me, poor fellow. I certainly didn't know. But what am I saying? He can't seem to wipe the smile off his face.*

*In between the smiles, however, I can tell something is troubling him. He told me not to bother. Now it is starting to trouble me, too, though I have no idea what it is.*

*On a lighter note, Molly and Fanny and I had dinner, and we talked about men the whole time. We laughed for a whole variety of reasons. Sometimes at their expense. We had a long list of follies with which to work.*

---

Wednesday, September 1

I made sure Max saw me at the trench today. He waved back, but I could see he was puzzled. That's good. He'll remember. I had a bite and came back to town with BadFoot.

It was tough to get a room. Hundreds mill about Dawson, wondering whether to stay or flee, chasing every rumour that drifts by, no matter how bizarre or improbable.

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Wednesday, September 1, 1897

*There are very few young boys up here, as it is not the place for them, so I was surprised when one found me this afternoon with a note from Garrett. He is back in town, and coming over after midnight, and I am in the bath, dreaming and freshening up.*

---

Thursday, September 2

Had a long conversation with Vee last night, after midnight, trying to figure out what to do. She knows all about Uriah. She thinks the shortfall is a problem, too, saying if Uriah sees it before I say anything, there is a danger he won't believe my intentions were to split the income fairly.

Both of us are nervous about him. He is both convincing and unsettling. The apple never falls far from the tree, they say, and that tells you as much about the tree as the apple, I figure. Lefty is Uriah's son.

Vee made an offer to cover the shortfall, just until I can pay her back. I thanked her, saying if I get into trouble for impersonating Lefty, she could not escape a charge of collusion. She said it was foolish of her to think that Mallard wouldn't know she'd been helping all along. I wondered if she had the ready cash, in any event. She said she didn't, but that it would be easy to get the bank to give her a small mortgage against the Owl's Head. I got really nervous about that, and told her that I'd have to think about it, as I couldn't see how I could accept, given the risk.

I told her I might just gamble it away again, but we both knew with her back in my life, I wouldn't be straying far.

Now I am the cautious one, and she's being reckless.

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Thursday, September 2, 1897

*I went to the bank today to see Grizwald. I still have Max's interest-free \$10,000, and am well on the way to paying off the first \$15,000 of my loan with him, but I thought it would be safer to take out a mortgage on the hotel and pay off Max. I don't want to worry about him getting 1/8 of the hotel. The Owl's Head is running well and my businesses have proven and steady incomes, so my negotiations should be easy.*

*I had my accounts in order, and I was ready to take advantage of Grizwald's embarrassment. He seemed as sheepish today as he did when he had dinner at the Owl's Head, so I had things settled in no time. I have secured a mortgage and a line of credit of \$50,000 against the hotel. I'll pay off Max today by drawing down \$10,000 of it and I have set \$20,000 aside in my mind to cover Garrett's indiscretions if he chooses.*

*Grizwald was pleasant enough about it. As we concluded our business, he said, "Perhaps I have been wrong about you, Miss. Baker."*

*"And I you, Mr. Grizwald. We should do more business together."*

*"You are turning out to be one of the more shrewd business people we have. I would be foolish not to."*

*As I was walking out, I spotted a photograph of him and a comely woman on the wall by his door. Their pose suggested a high degree of familiarity. "Your sister?" I guessed. "My wife," he said. When I turned to look at him, having been surprised by his response, Mr. Grizwald, The Sheepish, had returned. Though I remembered his frilly dinner companion, I decided it would be better to make no further comment. I am not one to talk under the circumstances.*

---

Friday, September 3

Some days sneak up on you, like a predator. Vee waited for our midnight tryst to spring an idea on me. She said her fellows had just finished a cabin, and that she planned to move out of the hotel. She told me about the small cabin only three lots away that she was going to turn over to me, and only three days from being finished. I can't wait.

I'm at the fraction now. The clean-up is going well on what remains of the trench dump. BadFoot's happy to be back. He wandered off to see Charlie and reappeared only a couple of hours later. He feels free up here, I reckon, compared to being caught in the forest of legs milling about the streets of Dawson.

On our way up, we ran into hundreds of anxious stampedeers – we had to wait for an hour for the scow at the crossing. They were headed for the benches on Big Skookum Gulch. Some Cheechakoes hit paydirt and triggered a rush. Most on the scow were filled with a bravado and good humour, laughing and joking about their soon-to-found riches, while the eyes of a few revealed something else. My guess is that their whole lives were coming down to this, that they knew Madame Claudette Roulette was about to spin the wheel, and they were terrified that the wheel might actually be a revolver cylinder, and that she might not be French, but Russian.

---

Friday, September 3, 1897

*I got a start this morning as I was working in my office in the Inn and a rap came on my door. There stood a man who I knew, from Garrett's description of his overall bearing, his squatness, his scars, and his walking stick, had to be Uriah Hillup.*

*“Pardon, Miss Baker,” he said. “I’m Uriah Hillup. Leland was my boy.” His rough appearance made his polite manner surprising.*

*“You must be mistaken,” I said. “You talk of him as if he were dead.”*

*“No point in carrying on, Miss. McKenzie’s already spilled the beans.”*

*I looked at him for a second, and realized indeed there was no point. “It is a conditioned reaction, I am sorry. I am not used to this cloak and dagger sort of thing. And you are an unusual man, if you pardon me for saying so. Neither of us have had dealings with... how can I say it...?”*

*“My kind, Miss. I know. You’re from a fine family, I reckon. I’m from the rough side, where you’d beat on a fellow as soon as ask his name and business. But we’re not all a bad lot, Miss Baker. We are just normal folk livin’ in a world that don’t give a ... that don’t care for us. And to boot, I reckon a lady like you ain’t comfortable wandering off the straight and narrow. I understand all that. Listen, it’s just that McKenzie and I made plans to clean this mess up and now he’s actin’ mighty skittish, like a ground hog fearin’ coyotes. I figure he’s anxious about me. But I’m just as worried about him. So I asked around on the creeks a bit.”*

*“He is anxious,” I said, “but if I may ask bluntly, how did you know about me? Does everyone on the creeks know about us?”*

*“I wouldn’t know about that, Miss. But Acton-Tea, or whatever his name is... he does. I got to say he bears some bitterness for you. He said if I wanted to know about McKenzie, I should ask his girl.”*

*“Firstly, I’m not his girl, as you put it. And secondly, you are wrong,” I said, “if you think Garrett is a double dealer. He has always intended to do the right thing. He is*

*principled, to a fault. He fell into this whole ruse unwittingly, certain when everyone saw he was not taking anything from anyone, it would all blow over with a laugh and a sigh."*

*"Well, here's the puzzle, Miss. I've been down to A.C.C. I identified myself and told them Leland wanted me to make sure of the latest numbers. It took a bit of jawin', and a couple of bribes, but the fellow brought out the books in the end. It seems McKenzie has takin' out large sums of my son's money. His wife's and my money."*

*"We have both been afraid of this," I said, "but not for the reason you might first suspect. We feared you might conclude that he was spending Lefty's money freely. But he always believed he was spending from his own half. It was a foolish spree at the Faro tables. He has not done it since, as you can see by looking at the withdrawals. The problem is not the Faro, or the withdrawals, but that the gold turned out to be mostly Max's. And that was your son's fault, not Garrett's. So, taking out what turned out to be Lefty's money was inadvertent, if you see what I mean." But Uriah seemed puzzled, so I said, "He didn't mean to spend Lefty's money."*

*"Oh, I get it, Miss," he said. "I'm not schooled, but I know a thing or two." Then his face softened. "But I wouldn't fret. Let's just reckon it when we wind this thing up."*

*"That's generous of you, Mr. Hillup," I said, with some relief.*

*"Call me Uriah, Miss, please."*

*"Alright, Uriah. But both Garrett and I don't want there to be any undermining of trust between the two of you. Just the other day I offered to cover the shortfall, hoping to avoid your suspicions, hoping to avoid this very conversation."*

*"There ain't no need, Miss."*

*"It costs me nothing, really," I said. "And I gain the assurance that Garrett will be taken as the honest man he is. Call it a strong vote of confidence."*

*"If you wish, Miss Baker. I don't think it's needed. We are fixin' to leave the country together. He's still mining and he'll likely be able to cover it soon enough. But if it makes you feel better, I'm not against it, neither. It's straight and I'm grateful."*

*We exchanged a few more, pleasant words and he left.*

*Some of the most poisonous snakes and lizards, I am told, dress themselves in striking, pretty colors to warn off predators. Uriah seems the reverse. Despite his menacing exterior, he seems quite harmless and pleasant.*

---

Saturday, September 4

Looks like only 450 ounces so far, in jars and such in the cabin. My last chance to amass my fortune. It looks meagre, compared to what I imagined.

---

Saturday, September 4, 1897

*No sign of Garrett. He must be moiling.*

---

Sunday, September 5

BadFoot crawled into my bunk with me last night, for the first time ever. It's not cold and he's not sick. I wonder what he senses. It was comforting, up to a point. Sorry BadFoot, I love you but your spot's there, by the stove. You haven't bathed in weeks.

---

Sunday, September 5, 1897

*Garrett's cabin is ready. I'm fresh and waiting, but I'm drifting off.*

---

Monday, September 6

We got to town about noon and went to see Vee right away. We have a system. I just walk in to the Owl's Head, ask if there are any rooms to be had – the town's so full there never are, especially at the Inn. I wait until she sees me, and walk out again. We meet at the Emporium, in the spa.

She told me my new cabin is ready, so I moved in right away. She was kind enough to have it furnished – sparsely, but comfortably. A fine new bed. We put BadFoot in the kitchen. Love her so. BadFoot does, too.

She told me all about her encounter with Uriah. She said she has been making plans to go out for the winter, too, now that she knew I'd be leaving. She's already talked to Haldron and Roderick about looking after her affairs here.

In the afternoon she went to the bank to get a banker's draft for Uriah for \$25,000, the full amount of the shortfall. We'll do the accounting when I bring in the results of my final clean-up. I felt badly that I have not been able to cover the shortfall. I tried to convince her that Uriah would be fine with leaving it as it is until I bring my gold in, but she said she already told him it would be covered. Going back on her word would just create suspicions. I had to agree. Uriah will now have no reason to doubt us.

---

Monday, September 6, 1897

*Can one initiate a cabin? Christening comes to mind, but that particular religion would frown on our methods. Can one re-initiate a cabin? Whatever the case, we did.*



*For the first time we talked of where we would like to go when we go out. Paris was on top of our lists. Vienna is high on mine. The Italian Riviera on his. I battered his head when he told me why – with a down pillow.*

*These days are halcyon. I am flush. I am exultant.*

---

Tuesday, September 7

Before I returned to the Fraction this morning, I dropped into see J. S. Green, the undertaker, and Constable Mallard. I told them both about the hearing before Fawcett on Thursday, and both said they would appear if they could.

I fired up the steamer again for a while to coax what I could from the trench, but it didn't do much good. The permafrost is pretty well gone from there anyway, and it's a mush of mud and boulders. One thumb-nail sized nugget and a few flakes.

---

Tuesday, September 7, 1897

*I talked with Haldron about switching the mill's production from screens to candles, as the few black flies about now are those with little white socks, and they don't measure up to their fierce summer cousins, in numbers, size, or effect. Haldron will close in the workshop area. He says he'll be able to handle the candle making himself, and even at that it will just be an hour or two a day job at most. He plans to build furniture with a skeleton crew.*

*I have bought the rights to several claims and will be able to use the rest of the men over the winter. It will be much better for them in any event, as they can be on a lay system, if they choose, and thereby share the profits. We've come a long way since the days of the 'skirt'.*

---

Wednesday, September 8

I reviewed my case today, getting ready for Fawcett. I'm in decent shape.

---

Wednesday, September 8, 1897

*Tomorrow Garrett's going before Fawcett unrepresented, which I told him was unwise. He paid no heed, of course, being who he is. It is interesting how you can love the whole of someone, yet not be able to stomach parts – like the stubborn and impulsive parts. At least he made me forget all about that when he came over to my cabin.*

*We talked again of Europe. He wants to go to the Highlands to trace his roots. I think that would be charming.*

---

Thursday, September 9

I admit I was nervous, not knowing what to expect before Fawcett, and never having been to any sort of court before. Uriah saw me heading to the Government compound and drew me aside. Listen, he said, Mallard is going to stick to his identification. It's Max that's got the provin' to do. Just don't say a word more than you gotta, see? Not a word. He poked me in the chest with a finger so hard it hurt. Keep your head about that, he said, and then poked me in the forehead so that I had to rub it after, too. You have experience with this kind of thing? I asked him, knowing that he must have. A little, he said. I reckon, more than a little, I thought, being Lefty's father.

The room was all spruce logs and planks, and had a big oak table at the front for Fawcett and his secretary. Behind Fawcett hung a Red Ensign, and a picture of Queen Victoria. A burley NWMP constable dressed in his scarlet and blue was there to help.

Max and Ainsworth sat at one table, me at another. There was no sign of Mallard, or Green, but as we were settling down, Moe showed up at the door and signalled to me that he wanted to join me at the front. After a couple of gestures and exchanges between the constable, Moe and me, the constable let him through.

Fawcett didn't look like he was at home in his job. He had papers and a map of the fraction in front of him. He laid out the problem, and asked for the sides to introduce themselves. Stephan "Maudite" Côté, Moe said. I had forgotten Moe's real name.

I told Fawcett right away that Mallard and Green were not present, as agreed. He looked at me hard, with his pink eyes, and said, I am a very busy man, Mr. Hillup. I understand, sir, but they are my defence. We'll see, shall we? This is not a regular court. And then carried on like I wasn't there.

He established that his map was accurate. Then he asked Ainsworth if Max told him to stake the fraction, which he did, of course. So Fawcett asked Max why he thought the ground was open, and Max went on about Regulation 21 and the seventy two hour thing.

Then Fawcett asked me if it was true that the ground had been abandoned, and I told him that I had working it with a couple of other fellows without a break since it was staked, and Moe backed me up.

Then Max jumped in. Sir, the man before you is not the real Mr. Hillup, he said. The real Lefty Hillup was killed in an accident on the claim, and this is Francis Garrett McKenzie. He has been pretending to be Mr. Hillup since that day.

Fawcett looked at him in a surly way and said, I have three questions for you, sir. The first is: Can you prove this? The second is: How could he accomplish that without

detection? The third is: Why would he bother? And let me tell you, if you cannot satisfy me in answering the first, you will not have a chance to answer the others.

I can prove it, sir. And how is that? A woman who Mr. Hillup befriended can testify that this is not the real Lefty Hillup. Where is this woman? There was a fuss at the back of the room as Katie Sutherland came forward.

Mr. Acton-Jones says that you can prove this man to be someone other than Mr. Leland Hillup, Fawcett said to her. Is this true? Yes, Gov. Lefty come to me bakery more than a few times. Your bakery? Yes, Gov. I do fresh buns daily, and she laughed, at my bakery, see? Fawcett leaned over to the court secretary, who whispered a word or two in his ear. Let me understand this, he said, turning to Katie again. You pleased Lefty Hillup? For money. Yes, sir, sometimes. And that man, 'e ain't Lefty, Guv.

So Fawcett turned to Max, holding up Green's and Mallard's statements. You are putting this woman up against both J. S. Green and Constable Mallard who say McKenzie died in the accident on the fraction? I am getting a headache, Acton-Jones. Yes, sir, Max started to say, I can expl... but Fawcett's hand silenced him.

Listen, Mr. Acton-Jones, I do not much care who this man is. My only concern is whether the Hillup Fraction was open ground at the time you over-staked it. Did you see this man, whoever he is, working the claim with Mr. Côté? Yes, sir. Can you prove that the claim was left unattended, unworked, for a time in excess of seventy two hours? I can prove that Mr. Hillup stopped working on the claim the moment he died, sir, and that Mr. McKenzie, here, has been working it since, posing as Mr. Hillup.

And, from your knowledge, who is this Mr. McKenzie?

He is Mr. Hillup's ex-partner.

His ex-partner? Fawcett squealed. Then he sighed, took a drink of water, rubbed his face and the back of his neck for a minute to calm himself down. Let me get this straight, he said. You say the claim has been worked continuously by Mr. Hillup until he was killed, and since that time the fraction was worked continuously by Mr. Hillup's partner? Yes, sir, Max agreed. Fawcett had to tell Max twice to sit down.

Then he turned to me and said, Sir, I have no interest in sorting out whatever passion play is going on here. My days are already filled with misunderstandings, vindictiveness, and lies between ex-partners and neighbours. So, listen carefully. I am going to ask you a very straightforward question. I am not asking you who you are. I don't bloody well care. I am asking you only if can you prove that the fraction in question has been mined continuously on Mr. Hillup's behalf.

Sir, I said, as you can see from the Record Book, the ownership of the fraction has not changed. All the gold from the Fraction, before and since the accident, has been deposited in A.C.C. under Hillup's name. I have the slips right here.

Thank you, Fawcett said, taking a look at the slips. That will be all. And he left.

Is it over? we had to ask the court secretary. Yes, he said, it is over. Mr. Fawcett will let you know his decision in a week or so.

That was not an experience to repeat. Except for looking at a Max's face. Win or lose, seeing that expression made it all worth it.

---

Thursday, September 9, 1897

*Garrett wouldn't stop talking about the hearing before the Gold Commissioner today. I enjoyed the first bit, but when he started going over details he'd already partly covered, I was forced to cover his mouth, let us say.*

*I'll be happy when the day comes when we don't have to visit one another's cabins, and whoever the visitor is doesn't have to get dressed and go home in the middle of the night to avoid discovery. It is starting to drop to freezing at nights now, and I find it very difficult to rouse myself from a warm bed, get dressed, and scurry home, even if it's only a couple of lots away. Marriage will be our cure.*

---

Friday, September 10

At the fraction today, working. I waved to Max, but he didn't respond. There's not much point in starting a new cut somewhere as I won't be here come winter, and there's not much left in the trench area. So I spent my day panning here and there where I thought I might get a small reward, hoping to find a streak, and basking in the fall sun. In the end I gave up and we went up to see Charlie. BadFoot was happy we did. I told Charlie all about the hearing, and asked him a few things about women. I have no secrets to impart there, he said, and we had a quiet dinner with him. I thought about marriage and what may be in store for me, and thought about not being able to come back up here. Have no idea what I'll do when Vee comes back in the spring. Maybe I can get a pardon.

---

Friday, September 10, 1897

*I had dinner with 'the gang' tonight, so I could get everyone together and see how they were doing. I've been remiss of late on that score. Molly, Willoughby, Haldron, Roderick, Fanny, and me. Byron joined us after he was certain the dinner service was going well. Several bottles of wine later, Willoughby floored us all by breaking out in song. A civil war ballad of sorts, called "Mother is the Battle Over?" It ended:*

*Ah! I see you cannot tell me,*

*Father's one among the slain;  
Although he loved us very dearly,  
He will never come again! He will never come again.*

*I had no idea about the quality of his singing voice. It's a warbly tenor and hypnotic, full of longing and regret, and he had us all in tears, especially Molly, Fanny, and me. And Byron,*

*Elsie was just coming in to start up her numbers and in no time at all she had Willoughby onto his second song, ripping our hearts to shreds again, so she cried: Enough! and got us all on our feet, belting out lyrics to one of her sing-alongs. We all seemed to sound good to ourselves and one-another. We cared not about the rest.*

---

Saturday, September 11

I thought I'd do what I could up here and head into town. I got there late, pitch black, a new moon. Stars are magnificent. How delicious it was to come into the cabin knowing that I could soak in the tub for a bit, and write a few words by candlelight, which I'm doing, and tap on Vee's window, which I'll do shortly.

---

Saturday, September 11, 1897

*I was a little slow getting up this morning. We reserve the best wine and whisky for ourselves, which is probably a mistake. Certainly my head told me so this morning. I wonder if Garrett is coming in tonight.*

*I think Garrett should sell the fraction since he cannot come back up next spring. There are buyers now, hungry for a piece of ground. I can see him talking Uriah into it. Best to just sell and have done with it.*

---

Sunday, September 12

I got up late, and decided to do nothing today but find ways to bring pleasure to Vee. I made her breakfast, and made her happy. Someone knocked on the door around noon, and I had to hide, but it turned out to be Molly. She knew I was here, and figured we'd welcome some warm rolls. She seems to know how the universe turns just by closing her eyes or something. I told her she was scary like a witch, what with her knowing things that way and she laughed asked if I wanted my fortune told.

She had some fancy Tarot cards with her, and laid them out. I thought the whole thing would be a bit of fun and silliness, until she turned the first. The Fool, it was. And reversed. This means you'll have a new start, she said, looking serious, but you'll have problems arising from impatience or impulsiveness. I laughed and told her I didn't believe in such nonsense.

Suddenly there was another knock, and damned me if it wasn't Charlie. BadFoot was all over him. We had my bannock, followed by her rolls and tea. BadFoot gobbled up everything we tossed at him. We talked about travelling and loving and poetry. It was a pleasure to listen to Charlie and Molly, in particular. I've never been so happy, and never have I had friends I value so much.

---

Sunday, September 12, 1897

*I had a lazy day, with Garrett staying over. We are getting too reckless. But neither of us can help it, it seems. We were draped all over each other for much of the morning. I love the feeling of his skin. He mine, it appears.*



*Molly and Charlie came by. What a delightful pair. I nearly died laughing when she gave Garrett a Tarot reading and, on the first card, she had him pinned like a wriggling insect. The coward pretended it was nonsense. I know different.*

---

Monday, September 13

Today I helped Haldron to make the removable walls for the mill. They are composed of panels that inter-finger along the edges and lock into place with pegs. Clever.

It was great to work with wood again. When we do it up on the fraction it's always cribbing, or making sluices, our feet always in the muck. Here we just had sawdust, the ring of the blades, and the smell of spruce. Haldron's a funny fellow. I like him. He's a hard nut, with a soft core.

---

Monday, September 13, 1897

*Garrett helped out at the mill. He wanted to stay for dinner, too, but we both started having second thoughts. It's better to wait for Gold Commissioner's decision. Then Max and everyone else can go to hell. Well, maybe not hell so much as just out of our affairs, so to speak. So, I'll just drop over later.*

---

Tuesday, September 14

It was back up to the creek today. BadFoot loves the walk. He looks for anything he can pretend to hunt, whether spruce grouse, red squirrels, ravens, hares, or rodents. He kills me with laughter, and never them. He sneaks up and then leaps like a fox, high and a

quick drop, but he misses by a mile. Ravens are the worst. They torture him by letting him believe. I swear they know exactly what they are doing. They'd laugh if they could.

---

Tuesday, September 14, 1897

*Things are ticking along. The Inn is always full and Elsie's voice is golden. Fanny had another prospect today. It was near Charlie's ground, so he came to look at it with me. I'm going to give them an offer. It's not the offer they wanted, but they'll take it, I know, as they just want to get out and have done with it all.*

---

Wednesday, September 15

It's very hard to find things to do up here when I know I'll be leaving and there are no easy pickings at the moment. I poked around in the drift, and looked at the collapsed ground for the first time – it's just this side of our boundary. Damn me if the cave-in didn't bring part of a streak down with it. I got a couple of lanterns and started panning. The second pan was \$80 if a penny. The third even better. Lefty was suffocated by pay dirt. Poetic justice!

## Chapter 23 SS Derelict

On September 15, 1897, Ted mailed a letter in St. Michael, Alaska.

*R.R. 3, Georgeville, Que., Dominion of Canada*

*September 15, 1897.*

*Dearest Father,*

*I do not attribute the fact that I survived the tortuous journey from Newport to Alaska to anything but luck. I feel at home on a farm and have never feared soil or being soiled. I am not a man of the ocean – at least I certainly was not when I started. Now you may only say I can make do. I am not a particularly good traveller in any event, given my long list of insecurities, the fact that my body is taller and heavier than average, and that most of the rest of my life has done nothing to prepare me. But for luck, and for a determination not to leave you alone on this earth, this trip would have killed me.*

*I remind myself that my pain is of little consequence. It is at my next stop, in Dawson, where Garrett died, and not a minute goes by when I am not aware of that fact. When I hear fellow travellers complain, I say to myself, “At least you are alive to say so.” When I hear them laugh, I ache, saying, ... well, you know.*

*You cannot imagine, I will wager, what the trip from Seattle to St. Michael was like. The ex-coal ship, which we nick-named SS Derelict, despite the inflated cost of passage, fell below every already-low expectation I had of her. As I feared, she had not even been swept of coal dust. Every one of us who had what the captain so generously called a “berth” in the hold, took on a grey, streaky pallor and kept it for the voyage. Apparently they worried the horses packed on board could not survive in the deepest part of the hold,*

*so they crammed us humans down there instead, with the horse's fluids dripping down upon us from above. When we poor wretches were permitted to come on deck – there were too many of us on board for that to happen at one's whim – we were identified not only by the pallor we shared, but by our strong smell of horse, and the streaking of our faces for reasons I need not detail. We became known as either Miners or Streaks, depending on whether we had been subject to the noxious drizzle. If there had been any women or children on board, I can well imagine how they would have clutched one another each time a new wave of us came up, lurching forward, coughing and hacking, phantoms from the underworld. Several of us complained bitterly to the captain, but even that had to wait until we could gain some strength, we were so pitifully sick. As it happens, it did us no good, for the lout was too drunk to care, or even listen. Only one man – a banker from Tucson – traded for his spot on deck with a Nova Scotian coal miner. The banker imagined nothing could be worse than being constantly soaked by cold ocean spray and watching wave after wave of passengers heave their stomach's contents overboard. He was proud of his hefty profit. But the coal miner knew what he was escaping. It was, after all, the very reason he was going to the Klondike. The banker was back in an hour, begging, unsuccessfully, for the coal miner to take twice what he had been paid for the spot.*

*On my thirty sixth birthday, two days before we arrived in St. Michael, two men were swept overboard by a rogue wave, and three Streaks succumbed to the plight, two from heart failure, and one from pneumonia, we think. The carcasses of seven horses followed them into the deep.*

*Forgive me, father. I am being self-indulgent. My pain is no greater than yours. If I had the energy, I would start this letter over. I will spare you the description of St. Michael, this grey, fish-smelling wasteland in which I have been trapped for the past eight days.*

*Whatever the case, here I am, and tomorrow I will board the sternwheeler Weare on my last leg. I feel if there is anything left on this earth that has the power to kill me pre-maturely, Father, it is the moment when I reach Dawson and see my dear brother's grave.*

*I miss you terribly.  
As always, I remain,  
Your loving Son,  
Ted*

---

*Wednesday, September 15, 1897*

*I finished Madame Bovary in the bath. Flaubert was tried for offending public morals. I will start a book club and have Dawson's high society read it.*

*My toes look like shriveled peas. My feet are pea-trees. I quite like how my breasts float, though. My glass of wine is empty and the water is lukewarm. Sigh.*

---

*Thursday, September 16, 1897*

*Garrett and Uriah staggered into the Inn, singing and telling everyone that they had won their case. Uriah couldn't remember where he was staying. Garrett blathered on about how death was a reasonable cause for just about everything, using an index finger and mangling words. Roderick and Willoughby guided them to Garrett's cabin and*

*propped them up against walls, each with a bowl on his lap. I looked in later. Uriah hadn't moved. The bowl was clean. I wasn't about to do anything about it, in any event. I couldn't find Garrett at first. He'd fallen off the window side of his bed, and his face was jammed up against the cabin wall. Pat them on the head and send them home. Say again: What is it about men that we love? (Oh, yes, said I, blushing.)*

---

Friday, September 17

Yesterday I met with Uriah to go over the Gold Commissioner's written decision.

Fawcett dealt with "the matter of identity" first. He accepted Green's and Mallard's statements and threw out the evidence from the "woman of the night."

The identity of the man represented Leland Hillup's side mattered little to him, he said, as Mr. Ainsworth's had the obligation to establish that the ground he staked had remained unworked on working days by the grantee thereof or by some person on his behalf for the space of seventy-two hours. As both sides agreed the ground had been worked without a break of that duration since the time of the fatal accident, he found find that Mr. Acton-Jones and Mr. Ainsworth failed to prove the ground was open for staking. Whether or not Mr. Hillup is who he represents himself to be is a matter for the police to unravel, if they choose, not for the Gold Commissioner.

As Mr. Acton-Jones claimed repeatedly that the man who died in the fatal accident was Mr. Hillup, the sole owner of the ground in question, I must myself repeat, Fawcett said: This contention matters not at all to the outcome of this case. Nevertheless, for clarity, and so as I may put the final stake in this Dracula's heart, if Mr. Stoker will forgive the allusion to one of this year's most original novels, a break in excess of

seventy-two hours may be forgiven if reasonable cause is shown, and I am satisfied that death is a reasonable cause for ceasing to work one's claim.

End of case! We celebrated. Uriah assured me he just wanted to do the right thing, same as me. I gave him Vee's banker's draft to show him that the shortfall had been covered, and he was pleased about that, saying he never doubted me.

We went to Pete's place for a couple more drinks, and Uriah told me I was the son he wished he had. I smiled, though there is nothing I'd wish for less. Pete came up and offered us a handful each of free Faro chips. I told him hell hadn't frozen over yet. He looked outside and laughed and said, It won't be long now.

That talk got Uriah to ask about next winter. I can hire some fellows to work the fraction. We should just sell the damned thing and have done with it, he said. What with fellows arriving daily aching for a piece of ground, it seemed like a good idea.

Like a dried up pond, Uriah is. Looks like one with his cracked skin, and drinks like one. Later, full of whiskey, I rolled into the Inn and behaved like a fool, as I remember, telling Vee how much I loved her. She had to shush me and get the fellows to steer us home. Never again. Couldn't function at all this morning. Uriah is nowhere in sight. He has a constitution to fit his looks. I'm going back to bed.

---

Friday, September 17, 1897

*No sign of Garrett. Dinner with Byron and Roderick. We went off to test the competition at four different places, sharing samples at each one. I am now totally full. We agreed that the Café's caribou was the treat of the night. Though Mathilde's wild berry pie came a close second. Probably only because the berries are at their prime. Byron came away feeling very smug. Roderick and I both feel he has good cause.*

---

Saturday, September 18

Bathed. Read for a while. Am feeling human. Going over to visit Vee in a bit.

We need to get places on one of the boats. Not much navigation time left.

---

*Saturday, September 18, 1897*

*Now that we've started to talk about leaving, I actually cannot wait until we do.  
We've booked passage on the A.C.C.'s Bella.*

---

Sunday, September 19

Back up at the fraction with BadFoot, working the cave-in. Uriah declined to come.

---

*Sunday, September 19, 1897*

*I spent the day making a list things to do before leaving. I had no idea it would be so long. Roderick came in at one point, looked at it and laughed. Relax, he said, we know what we are doing. You needn't concern yourself. What would I be if I didn't? I asked him. A good boss, he said.*

---

Monday, September 20

Panned 125 ounces or so from the cave-in. Close to 600 oz. total. Better than office work. BadFoot stayed close all day, which was unusual. We went up to Charlie's for dinner, bringing some potatoes and a bit of rabbit. Twenty words between us all evening. Normal for us.



---

Monday, September 20, 1897

*Haldron took me around his newly finished 'candle works' today. These days I treasure that man. I treasure them all, really.*

---

Tuesday, September 21

Twice yesterday's recovery. BadFoot is still under the weather, for some reason. He lies by the doors to the workings, looking at me while I squat by the tub, panning. Every time I rise, he gets up, too, anxious to leave, looking back at me and has to settle down and wait again. Maybe it's the leftover smells in here. Bad pun.

---

Tuesday, September 21, 1897

*Going over the books today. How I hate it. Hate it, hate it, hate it!*

---

Wednesday, September 22

I like the recoveries. It will be a good selling point, if we get any buyers, though there's no word yet.

---

Wednesday, September 22, 1897

*I asked myself this morning why I was working so hard. It's done. I've started the whole thing. Me. My effort. My imagination. Now, with help from friends, it's rolling on its own. So I headed over to the spa. I asked Molly if she was heading out. She explained that she would next summer, after Charlie finishes his clean up from winter workings.*

*Fanny came to me this evening, bringing along three Americans who are interested in buying a claim. She arranged for each of them to meet her at the Inn, separately, in succession. None of them knows of the others. She says she's going to walk up with them all together when the time comes. She figures that will get them primed for bidding.*

---

Thursday, September 23

Vee's sending potential buyers tomorrow, she tells me by note. I'm going to tidy up the fraction a bit. BadFoot senses something. He's back to his energetic self.

---

*Thursday, September 23, 1897*

*I have organized all my packing. What to do? What to do? Everything is going so smoothly. I know. Have a bath and wait for my pea-trees to grow.*

---

*Friday, September 24, 1897*

*Before Fanny headed up to the creeks with the three potential buyers, she introduced them around saying, this is so-and-so from such-and-such; he'll be going with us. Didn't even say that they would be competing against one another. Could see the realization and panic in their eyes, already, worrying, sizing each other up in the event. Fascinating. Should have called her Foxy Fanny.*

---

Saturday, September 25

Back in town. The fraction sold for \$80,000 and I'm bloody happy.

The three fellows, one from Portland, Oregon, two from California, Fresno, and one of the Sans. I decided to put them up at Belinda's in Grand Forks last night, as a treat to grease the wheels. Uriah showed up early and we pushed on up to the fraction.

Gave them the grand tour, pointing out how much of the fraction was still untested – 60% I figure. Waved at Max on the way by, but he didn't wave back. I told them how we had taken out nearly 1,000 ounces total so far just from one small spot at the end of our drift, and showed them the gold in the cabin. We didn't say anything about Max except to say that he'd recovered 15,000 ounces in a drift right next to ours. We brought them to the sink hole to show them how close to our boundary it was.

Then we got them thinking about the future by putting a pan in their hands and getting them washing out a bit of the cave-in. They found nuggets in each pan.

Why sell out now? they asked. Told them I had enough to start a nice business. Time to throw in the towel. Uriah said the same. It can't be that hard, said Portland. You're both in one piece. You betcha, said Uriah. You'll be just fine. And they started to beam.

Things then got wild pretty fast as they tried to out-bid one another. In the end, they struck a deal among themselves, then with us. Then they danced like Lefty and I did, when we got our first tastes of it. Poor sods. I could see they had been infected.

I am greatly relieved it's over. I only have to keep my head down for a week, and I'll be out, clear, rich enough not to complain. Headed back to town, to see Vee.

---

Saturday, September 25, 1897

*Garret came back in great spirits. I was the beneficiary. We talked well into the night. About marriage.*

---

Sunday, September 26

Slept late. Lord, lord. I understand why women are compared to flowers. Pungent and sweet. And so soft. Can't keep my hands off her. My eyes either. How many curves can there be? How many delicious valleys and plains? I get lost among them, wandering about in a focussed ecstasy – then I think about them all day, making myself hard.

She was lying, with her hair draped all over on my chest, and I asked her, out of the blue, if she'd ever thought of children. Her head snapped up at me, and I could see children running around in them, at play. She let out a warm sigh and settled down onto her nest of hair. Then, suddenly, children burst upon me, too, leaping off limestone ledges into deep, blue quarry water, exploding with life and laughter, and we lay there in our separate worlds, connected by the imaginary sound of children.

We'd have to get married, of course, I said. I could feel her smiling right through my ribs, and she started humming in a halting, timid way, an old lullaby I imagine she must have heard my mother sing, as her mother never did.

---

Sunday, September 26, 1897

*I am unspeakably happy. After all of our troubles, we may be leaving here with nothing but joy to look forward to. However, what with the town facing food troubles and a long winter, I do worry about how Roderick and company will fare.*

---

Monday, September 27

Mr. Portland found me at the cabin mid-morning, in a panic. The Bank of Commerce, he said. They are having trouble with my banker's draft. It's on the Ladd &

Tilton Bank of Portland and this Grizwald fellow says it's not on his list! Oh, well, I said, that will get sorted out. They might have to contact the Bank, he said. It will take months.

He found me again at noon, as I was heading up to the fraction to clean out my things. It's all sorted! he said. I didn't ask how. I found myself humming all the way.

---

Monday, September 27, 1897

*I am too damned organized. There's nothing left for me to do but wait! I took Molly out for dinner. She gave me a list of the places she wants to visit someday, and made me promise to send her postcards wherever we go.*

Later

*Captain Hanson, a superintendent with A.C.C., arrived back from his scouting trip to Fort Yukon to see if any steamers were going to make it to Dawson before freeze-up. "Men of Dawson!" he said, gloomily, and sent the town into a frenzy. We closed our restaurant as many rushed about in panic. The worst of the madmen, fuelled by drink, robbed cashes, started fights, and fired off weapons. Staff Sergeant Mallard swung by to check on us. He warned us the Mounted Police have had to turn their backs as they have not the manpower to deal with a thousand angry and desperate fools whose mantle of civilization is clearly whisker thin. I corrected him, calling it whiskey thin, and he agreed.*

*We are holed up in the Owl's Head, guarding our hotel and supplies.*

---

Tuesday, September 28

Cleaning up for new owners. A fellow standing on the side of the hill said he heard a steam whistle. Eldorado's valley runs straight up from Dawson, more or less, so maybe...

I had dinner with Charlie to say goodbye. I'll head down tomorrow to meet up with Misters Portland, Fresno and one of the Sans to finish the sale. Then we'll cash in our gold at the A.C.C. with Uriah. We have 1,100 ounces to split (what we've cleaned up plus the little bit left in A.C.C.), plus the \$80,000 from the sale, totalling about \$97,600. \$24,600 of that Uriah gets off the top to cover the shortfall, and we split the remaining \$73,000.

\$36,500 is my share. I won't be filthy rich. Just moderately well off. I will certainly be able to afford a good house and will have enough to get a sound start in business. Asbestos is what I intend to look into, initially. Asbestos is the future.

---

Tuesday, September 28, 1897

*Exhausted. Getting ready on no sleep.*

---

Wednesday, September 29, 1897

*The Portus B. Weare landed last night, whistle blowing. I went down to the waterfront first thing this morning for a few minutes. The ice is pushing out maybe 30' from shore. Madness persists – while some are desperate to arrive, others are desperate to leave. But at least now we know the Bella is on its way, too.*

*On the way back I ran into Staff Sergeant Mallard. He told me that a tall, good looking fellow he did not know arrived on the Weare, asking about a Vivian Belcher and the whereabouts of Garrett McKenzie's gravesite. Mallard says he asked the fellow's name, but was ignored. He said the fellow looked and acted like the living dead. I had a strange sense of foreboding, and went up to the gravesite, on the off-chance he was there.*

*We are back now. Ted is sitting motionless in the other room. His turmoil is greater even than mine. He was at the grave already, with two hired hands, and had started a disinterment. Even from the back and a hundred yards away, he looked like a defeated man. Without thinking I yelled for him to stop. He turned, recognized me immediately. Vivian! I couldn't find you, he said. The police were no help. I told him that I went by Viola Baker here, that the policeman would never have heard of Vivian Belcher.*

*When I told him he was digging up a fellow called Lefty Hillup who had died in the summer of a mining accident, he kept staring at the grave marker. I told him Garrett was alive and well. He could not absorb it. Perhaps he dared not.*

*I will never escape the memory of the look on his face: sudden joy, disbelief, and utter terror, contrary emotions, intertwined, undermining one another. I had to shake him by the shoulders, and say, over and over, Why would I lie to you, Ted? Why would I lie? In the end he was forced to accept it, and when that moment arrived, he collapsed. I asked the hands to fill in the grave again, and paid them. Then I sat with him until he stopped crying, and was ready to walk back here.*

*He has been sitting in there for half an hour and not touched the tea I made him.*

### Later

*I can hear Ted sleeping in the big room. He must have been exhausted, physically and emotionally. I'm lying in bed missing my bath – which is in the big room, too.*

*He welcomed the second cup of tea, and then we must have talked for two hours without a break. He wanted to know everything, and I told him. In the end, after something to eat, and after thinking about Garrett's predicament (which he dubbed Garrett's Idiocy), he made his pronouncement: He cannot leave here without having*

*Uriah go to the police and clearing up the impersonation. Neither of you, he said, nor Willoughby, and now I, can leave with that hanging over our heads. Uriah must be willing to take an oath that he will not lodge any sort of complaint against any of us, either here in Canada, or in the United States. He said he knew Garrett would rather just run for it and hope things turn out. We both know he has always had that streak in him. But we cannot let that happen here. Everyone's future will be clouded, otherwise.*

*I think he is right. Tomorrow, first we will confront Garrett, then Uriah.*



## Chapter 24 Make Way for a Fortune in Cash and Certificates!

---

Wednesday, September 29, 1897

When I got to my cabin in town, I found a man looking through my effects. I yelled at him, thinking he was a burglar, and BadFoot went at him. When it was Ted who turned around, I damned near soiled myself. We embraced immediately, hanging onto one another. I stepped back, holding him by the shoulders. Then a kind of dark cloud came over his face, he unleashed a mallet of an uppercut to my jaw, and walked out. I just lay there thinking. I reckoned they didn't get my letter. He had a right. Both kinds.

--□□✱□□--

Notes made by Staff Sergeant Mallard at the Dawson N. W. M. Police post:

Wednesday, September 29, 1897. 12:15 PM.

Man entered post; wanted senior duty officer.

Male, heavy-set, 5' 8", Caucasian, square face, dark brown hair,  
2" scar left cheek, 2" oblique scar chin, several small  
scars forehead, down-turned mouth, gapped & discoloured  
teeth (greenish), walking stick. Appeared distraught;  
confused.

Introduced myself, Staff Sergeant Mallard (M).

Man identified himself as Uriah Seth Hillup (UH), father of  
Leland Hillup (LH), both from Omaha, Nebraska.

UH. I want to report a murder.

M. Asked for explanation.

UH. Elaborated that victim is Garrett McKenzie (GM). Last July.

(See Report; July 20, 1897)

M. Asked for explanation.

UH. (broke down crying) Reported that his son confessed to him.

M. (waited for UH to recover)

UH. Reported that son, LH, said: "I waited until GM was in the drift & followed him ... large rock above his head, sticking out of the roof ... dislodged with a stick... crushed his head... right here (pointed to impact spot victim's skull; exact location of victim's injury; top right skull)... brought down the roof... make it look like accident." UH reported LH then became incomprehensible.

M. When did he confess?

UH. Last night, Eldorado creek.

M. Did he say why he confessed?

UH. Drunk & remorseful. "He was a mess."

M. Did he express a motive?

UH. Reported that his son said: "I wanted it all," and that he broke down again. Kept repeating "I wanted it all."

M. Any reason to believe him?

UH. Produced three outstanding Nevada arrest warrants for LH (attached), and one current Notice of Civil Claim, LH Defendant, (attached). UH found said papers among LH's

effects. "He's a bad apple, sir. A rotten one. And I unleashed him unto the world." (UH broke down crying.)

M. Took time to skim attached reports. Pointed out to UH no violent crimes among them. Fraud mostly. Is LH violent?

UH. Reported that his son beats wife, Beatrice. "He carved these on me." (Pointed to his scars.)

M. Why tell me about confession? Why give him up to the law?

UH. "I got to stop him, sir, 'fore he does more damage."

M. Does your son wear a wedding ring?

UH. (Pause) No.

M. Does name Waterloo ring a bell?

UH. (Pause) (Shook head.) (Incomprehensible, crying.)

M. Where your son now?

UH. (No response. Crying.)

M. (Repeated) Where your son now?

UH. Advised that his son will be at Owl's Head Inn, 2 PM, today, on street, front of Inn, coming back from bank. Three people: LH, UH, Viola Baker. Not armed.

M. Willing to testify in court?

UH. Yes. "I gotta stop him, sir."

M. Instructed him to go ahead as planned; that M will attend outside Owl's Head appointed time. Advised to stay in Dawson for now.

UH. Acknowledged; agreed. (Took M's handkerchief, water.)

M. Thanked UH for co-operation & report.

End of Interview.

Action: Will detain Leland Hillup immediately, for questioning re. (1) murder Garrett McKenzie; (2) outstanding warrants.

---

Later; Wednesday, September 29, 1897

*My hand is still shaking as I write this.*

*Ted and I met with Garrett in his cabin just before noon. He has a badly bruised jaw, which he did not explain. Ted got right to the point about the impersonation, and Garrett agreed. The three of us went looking for Uriah, and explained our position. He agreed, too. I'd want the same, he said. First we cash in, do the split, then Garrett goes to the police. Everyone will get what they need. Except, Uriah said, there is a foul-up – the money from the sale of the fraction is in the bank under Lefty's name, so only "Lefty" can take it out. He wanted to know how many people knew about "Garrett's" death, specifically about the folks at the bank. I told him it went all over town. It was the gruesome nature that had everyone talking. Then he said what we all thinking, that it means we can't transfer the money to "Garrett" and "Lefty" won't be able to touch it once this thing blows open. Garrett suggested "Lefty" just withdraw it in cash, rather than transferring anything to Uriah, say, and we'd account for it when we do the split, and Uriah agreed, as he didn't want to have his name attached to something that might "come back and bite him in the ass." It was settled. We'd cash in everything, then do the split.*

*Ted objected, saying we should go to the police first, but Garrett interceded, saying if we went to the police first the money would be caught in limbo until things got cleared up. So we settled: money first, police second. No one would then care about personation if Uriah didn't. We go together, stick together. We'd cash the banker's draft for the sale that they are holding for "Lefty", Uriah would cash the banker's draft I gave*

*him for the shortfall, Garrett would cash in his gold, and we'd all settle accounts, in cash. Each then would do as they wished with their share. Ted would meet us at the Owl's Head, as he did not want to be party to any of the transactions where Garrett was acting as Lefty.*

*As arranged, at precisely 2 PM, Garrett, Uriah, and I met at A.C.C. Garrett brought the gold from the fraction, and a simple canvas bag in which to carry the cash back to the Owl's Head where we would split it as agreed, in private and with security.*

*The withdrawal at A.C.C. went smoothly, as did the cashing of the drafts at the bank. On our exit from the bank, Garrett had hold of the sack in his hand, quite casually, even though it contained over \$117,000, mostly in \$1,000 gold certificates. We all looked at the bag, realizing how much of our lives it represented.*

*"You carry it, Vee," Garrett said, but I refused, pointedly. Then he turned to Uriah.*

*Uriah refused, vigorously, but Garrett insisted.*

*It is but a few blocks of dirt street and boardwalk from A.C.C. to the bank and to the Inn. I kept one eye on Uriah – as, I admit, I had some residual doubts about him – and one eye on the crowd. I was flushed and on edge, but how silly! With the arrival of the Weare, the town was bustling, both coming and going. The route was busy with mules struggling through the ruts under curses from shouting men. Cargo everywhere fell off carts. Dawson was preoccupied. Half were leaving for fear of starvation, the other half arriving, with that particular crazed look in their eyes. Even had we carried a large placard saying "Make way for a fortune in cash and certificates!" it would have been ignored as normal. At worst, dismissed as quaint.*

*As we approached the Inn, I saw Staff Sergeant Mallard and a constable, whom I did not recognize, just outside its door, watching us. I did not worry about them, of course, as Mallard was a source of security, not threat. The moment Uriah walked past them (with the money), however, the policemen closed in on Garrett, stopping us. Mallard then addressed Garrett in a stern but quiet voice.*

*“Mr. Hillup,” he said, “I am sorry to inform you that I must detain you for questioning with regard to the death of Garrett McKenzie.”*

*“What on earth?” Garrett said. “What has that to do with me?”*

*“Please come with us,” Mallard said.*

*“Ridiculous!” Garrett said, as he pushed to follow Uriah, but Mallard and the constable both took hold of him, and gently turned him around. “I am sorry, sir, but you must come with us,” and they started to lead him away.*

*When I looked for Uriah, he had disappeared.*

*Ted had been waiting by the front door. He was not aware that Uriah was carrying the cash, and was distracted by what was happening to Garrett. He came forward to try to provide assistance, but turned back when Garrett yelled at him – rather desperately – to stay with Uriah. I started to follow Garrett as the NWMP guided him firmly toward the Government compound, but he yelled for me to follow Uriah, too.*

*Unable to find Uriah in the main room of the Inn, Ted and I went through to the kitchen, where we ran into Byron. He told us Uriah merely marched through saying, “Good afternoon, gentlemen!” and disappeared out the back carrying a couple of sacks. He was nowhere to be seen, and we both began to panic.*

*“Stop!” Ted said. “We must think this through carefully.”*

*As there are only two ways for a sane man to leave Dawson, and both involve the river, we ran to the shore, thinking first to search the Weare. We boarded her quickly, and with a quick word to the captain we started on the upper decks while the captain looked over the manifest. Ted and I knew, of course, that checking the manifest would be fruitless. We had no greater luck, confirming that when we met on the foredeck.*

*A flotilla of makeshift craft drifted past filled with occupants all desperate to escape Dawson. In one of them, two hundred yards or so down-stream, on a river altogether covered with buttons of ice, dwarfed by the hills cutting sharply down to the river, I saw a square back, the owner's hand cupping the top of what seemed a walking stick. He sat in the stern barking at four men who bent their backs at rowing, rocking backward with each of their heavy strokes. As if to salt a wound, fate had him turn his head to check that no one was following, etching his hunched, black profile against the river.*

*We were torn between finding some way to follow him and going to the NWMP post. In the end we decided he would have to board a sternwheeler to reach St. Michael, if he were lucky enough to reach it at all, so someone could hop the Weare – or the Bella, which was only a couple of days behind.*

*That would be a dangerous mission, Ted said, as he looked at the fast-clogging river. Let's find Willoughby and go to see Garrett. We'll put our heads together. Ted, the fine, the rational, the steady. Ted the wise.*

*I am waiting for him to track Willoughby down now.*



Notes made by Staff Sergeant Mallard at the Dawson N. W. M. Police post:

Wednesday, September 29, 1897. 14:25

Entered cell of Leland Oliver Hillup (LH), the accused, with intent of questioning him re. murder of Francis Garrett McKenzie (see Report, Sept. 29, 1897, 12:15 PM Interview, Uriah Seth Hillup, Omaha, Nebraska).

LH Restless. Appeared angry.

M. Do you understand why you are here?

LH. "Because you are an idiot?"

M. Advised LH to calm down. Advised him of charge of murder of Garrett McKenzie (GM), and of outstanding warrants.

LH. Appeared not to understand.

M. Repeated advisements.

LH. "You are accusing me of killing myself? What an imbecile!"

M. Cautioned LH, second time.

LH. "You idiot! I am Francis Garrett McKenzie! How could I murder myself?" (Aggressive tone; threatening behaviour.)

Interview terminated.

--□□✱□□--

Transcript of notes made by Staff Sergeant Mallard (M) at the Dawson N. W. M. Police post. (V) = victim, deceased (see Report; July 20, 1897)

Wednesday, September 29, 1897. 15:05



M re-entered cell of suspect (S), previously identified as Leland Oliver Hillup (LH), at repeated request of same (see Report, Sept. 29, 1897, 14:25.)

S. Appeared restless, distraught, contrite. He apologised. "I was confused." "Uriah, that crap face, took off with all our money!" S explained: Uriah = Uriah Hillup (UH), father of LH. "I'm sorry, Staff Sergeant. I'm very upset. I've had time to figure out what the bugger did."

M. Asked for explanation.

S. "The bastard accused me of murder so he could escape with our money. But I am Garrett McKenzie (GM)."

M. How is that possible?

S. "I lied to you. Lefty Hillup died in the accident on our fraction, not me. I would have lost my gold, otherwise."

M. Asked for explanation.

S. "When (LH) died the ground was in his name."

M. Asked if he realised that Personation is criminal offence.

S. "Don't care. I'll cook how ever you skewer me."

M. Advised this still raises the possibility of murder, since if victim is Leland Hillup, the GM is still a suspect as GM had motive to murder LH.

S. "Who cares? I've lost everything anyway."

M. Asked for explanation.

S. Uriah stole money. "Probably half way to hell by now."

M. Asked for explanation.

S. "All our money, from the gold, from the sale of the fraction.  
Even Vee's money that she lent me."

M. Asked for amplification regarding "Vee".

S. Viola Baker (VB), owner Owl's Head Inn, owner Baker & Sykes  
Lumber, Screen, & Candleworks.

M. Can you prove your identity?

S. "Ask Vee. Ask Ted. Ask my great friend and enemy Maximilian  
Acton-Jones. He knows all about me now."

Identify "Ted".

S. My brother. Edward McKenzie (EM), Georgeville, Quebec.

M. Advised explanation is inadequate. Reminded him that Miss  
Baker helped to identify him as LH, and indicated "Ted" is  
unknown to me. Advised him to contact a lawyer.

S. Wants to talk to Miss Baker, Mr. McKenzie, and Mr. McIver

M. Advised could only arrange for Mr. McIver to talk to him.

End of Interview.

Action: Interview Viola Baker, "Ted" McKenzie, Max Acton-Jones.

---

*Later, Wednesday, September 29, 1897*

*When we went to see Garrett, Mallard intervened. He told us he would interview us separately, that we could not consult or inform each other. He told us under the circumstances we could not see Garrett for a few days.*

*A few seconds into my interview I understood that Garrett had finally come clean. I then assured him that the man being held was Garrett, that he and I were cousins, and that I had known him since childhood, and that, no, there was no mistaking him. I also*

*told him of my reluctant part in the ruse, and he reminded me that my participation, however reluctant, meant that I may be facing criminal charges.*

*As we walked back from the post, the rest started sinking in. "Lefty" sold the fraction to three Americans, and had made arrangements with them to meet at 3 PM at the Owl's Head once all the banking had been done. As I later found out they came early and witnessed the whole messy affair. The sale is now in limbo as you cannot sell what is not yours, but Uriah has the money from the sale, too.*

*What is slowly undermining my mood is that I took out the loan against my precious Inn to help Garrett, and now we are both in trouble. Deep, deep trouble.*

## Chapter 25 One Mess at a Time

This public notice was nailed to buildings all over Dawson:

September 30, 1897.

### NOTICE

Starvation stares everyone in the face. In a few days the river will be closed. The supply of food is not sufficient to meet the needs of all the people now in the district. Those who have not laid in a winter's supply of food and are hoping for outside relief court death, or at least sickness from scurvy and other troubles.

The undersigned, officials of the Canadian Government, having carefully looked over the present distressing situation can see but one way out of the difficulty and that is an immediate move down-river of all those who are now unsupplied to Fort Yukon, where there is a large stock of provisions.

The move must be made now.

C. Constantine,

Inspector Northwestern Mounted Police.

D. W. Davis,

Collector of Customs.

Thomas Fawcett,

Gold Commissioner.

---

Thursday, September 30

The cells on either side of me are full. One is full of drunks – I thank Mallard for not putting me in with them – and the other, as a favour to miners, is full front to back, floor to ceiling with crates, ragged boxes, and gunny sacks filled with gold.

I got no sleep last night. Drunks are miserable people. Even if I hadn't been facing these mountains of troubles, they would have kept me awake. They snore, groan, vomit and beg for female attention (mothers, wives, whores, it seems to matter little).

With me in my cell is the poor sod who tried to kill himself up on the creek, still here, awaiting trial. Eldon Warfield, from a rich Boston family. When he talked, it was only to express his endless shame in a voice seeming to come from some hollow place, buried in the murky depths of his soul. He says he has no escape left, having tried already the way he did. They won't give him bail as they cannot be certain he won't try again. So he sits, all day, looking at the floor, waiting for the judge to come. If I had a gun, I'd give it to him. Or I might even have shot the poor fellow myself if he wanted, and I could work up the courage. Would have been cruel to refuse him. Like the coyote.

Mallard got the box with my journal in it somehow, but refused to give it to me. He said Charlie must get here first – as the little box has his name on it. I am quicksand. I've sucked Charlie into my mess.

I waited all day for any sign of Vee or Ted. I kept asking and getting the same answer. I can't see them yet, but Mallard wouldn't say why. I asked about Uriah, too. The bugger took off down river. I laughed like a maniac when I heard that. A constable had to check on me. I told him the country is about to kill the idiot, and our money will float out to sea and be lost. It was clear he couldn't decide which of his prisoners was more insane.

McIver came to see me and I told him the whole story. He didn't react – just kept taking notes and asking questions. But I could tell what he was thinking: that I might as well have just said I had myself a first class ticket to prison, maybe even the gallows. He said he'd do what he could about the identity thing first, and the rest we'd have time to work on. He told me he had recently received a Notice of Civil Claim regarding the McKenzie fraction, too, but was reluctant to bring it to me just yet. He said it concerned salting and I knew right away what he was talking about.

One mess at a time, McIver said. I feel so much better, I said. Recognising the sarcasm, he apologised and said he'd be back tomorrow. I told him I had no money to pay him, that Uriah had it all, and he said we would worry about that later. I am loosing faith.

Mallard finally came in with Charlie, and gave me my journals back. The Sergeant had a strange look on his face, like I'd just walked on shore, the sole survivor of a war, or something, and said, That's quite a story you have there, McKenzie. You should publish it someday. I laughed, crazily I think, saying to myself that I'd had enough. I just wanted the story to end, and I had ceased to care how.

Being diverted, it took me a long second before I realised what Mallard had called me. McKenzie! I said. You called me McKenzie! Yes, I did, he said. I am convinced. I'm a free man, then? I asked. Well, the murder charge is looking thin, that is certain. I have still some tidying up to do there. But if the murder charge disappears, you realise that personation takes its place. Personation is not dangerous, I said. True, he said. And it may not be your standard personation. There's a standard kind? I asked. Yes, of course, he said, the kind where there's intent to harm or benefit unlawfully, and yours seems to be the opposite of that. What about Uriah? I asked, picturing the thief disappearing over the

horizon. I don't care if the country eats him up, I said, I just want our money. I can't help you there right now, he said, but I'll send a man or two after him when the time comes, if necessary. When is that? I asked, but he left, saying only that he had business to conduct.

I am once again alone in the jail with only poor Eldon, the drunks, and the stacks of gold. I was about to start entries back where I said what an idiot I've been, but I decided I really don't want to relive today any more. So I'll say only this: I set it up so my dear brother, Ted, came all the way up here in the belief I was dead; I live in terror that my father may not know to disregard reports of my death; I allowed Vee to take a loan out against her hotel to cover my indiscretions; I got duped into taking all our cash out and forced it into the hands of the man who stole it all from us; I allowed myself to sell a claim for \$80,000 that does not have my name on the title; I sold a fraction bearing my name, one which now appears to have been salted; and I remain under arrest for murdering myself!

The worst is – if it is possible to put my troubles on a scale – and can barely think about this – I feel so ashamed and so abysmally vile for having dragged others – especially Vee – into it. I cannot imagine ever being able to forgive myself.

---

Thursday, September 30, 1897

*The Bella came in early today. Like the Weare, its arrival nearly caused a riot. The town is dangerously close to starvation. Both sternwheelers brought whisky and hardware, not food and clothing, for heaven's sake! What vacuums people have for heads!*

*The Weare has left. Ted and Willoughby are going after Uriah. They are confident, given the river and weather, he will have to transfer to one of the sternwheelers. Only the Weare and Bella are this far up river.*

*This morning they went to Mallard and asked to have their interviews. Mallard agreed, on condition that I follow them with mine immediately. McIver came along, too.*

*In the end Mallard gathered us together, along with Garrett and McIver, and said he was satisfied he now had the right identities, and that he understood better everyone's participation, including Uriah's. He said he believed, with the exception of Uriah, no one had any criminal intent in the way that it is normally understood. He said he had confirmed that Uriah had certainly taken off and said he believed Uriah had our money. He had put in a request to send a man after him, but could only promise us that someone would be instructed to look for Uriah at the other end, but that since the instructions could only be sent by hand, the odds of catching him were slim. He was of the opinion that the crown would stay the murder charge, as it would be absurd for Uriah to press charges.*

*Mallard told us in general terms about Uriah's fake confession, and about his great displays of emotion, and Lefty's outstanding Nebraska warrants, which Uriah just happened to have in his pocket. (What father does not carry about his son's outstanding warrants?) To cap it off, Uriah produced a Notice of Civil Claim which he apparently found ignored among Lefty's papers, making both Lefty and Garrett (or their estates) defendants in a civil law suit for fraud regarding salting on Garrett's old fraction.*

*Mallard apologized for his unwitting part in the confusion Uriah needed.*



*Throughout our whole exchange, I kept looking at Garrett, but he would not look me in the eye. Not once. He looked only at the floor.*

---

Friday, October 1

I am stir crazy. I don't even feel like writing. Vee is going out on the Bella today, and we haven't said goodbye as I cannot bear to talk to her. The parade of drunks and fools continues here. I remain their overseer until Mallard has his Ts crossed.

---

Friday, October 1, 1897

*I cannot now leave. I have to deal with my loan problem, and I could not go while Garrett is still in jail. I realized this morning that I'm here for the winter, and that I may be very poorly prepared for it, emotionally.*

*Constantine is giving food and cheap passage to anyone who wants to leave on the Bella to go to Fort Yukon, though there may be just as little there. Willoughby and Ted took advantage – although they would have gone anyway – and were on it when it left at 4 PM. Willoughby was handsome in his rebel greys, Ted just handsome. Willoughby had his precious colts strapped on under his great coat. I had a horrible sense of foreboding. They had to peel me first off one, then the other. Willoughby is not frail, but he's not young, either. I told them I didn't care about my money, but they are determined.*

*Molly came along and stood with me. The rafts of ice seemed to grow all around it, even as we watched. We stayed until the tiny Bella slipped below the scar, and took the bend west. As she disappeared, she let out a mournful blast from her distant whistle. I*

*would lay any odds the blast was Willoughby's, in the wheelhouse, saying goodbye. Despite my pride, I broke down and Molly took me home.*

*I promised Willoughby I'd have someone work his ground to keep it from lapsing as the fellow up there now will be moving on, so I will ask Garrett.*

---

Saturday, October 2

Vee came around to see how I was doing. Lord, I had no idea. The Bella's gone and she stayed. She said she broke down when Ted and Willoughby left. I broke down when she left my cell.

---

Saturday, October 2, 1897

*Readjustments today among Roderick and Haldron and me. I had to take back some of the responsibilities and duties I meted out to them.*

*I went around to see Garrett. He stood in a back corner of his cell like a beaten animal. I told him that I had chosen to stay and that I was looking forward to him getting out. He slid to the floor in the corner and buried his head.*

*I'm not going back in there. I cannot stand the sight. I cannot stand the thought.*

---

Sunday, October 3, 1897

*I decided to get out of Dawson for the day yesterday. Molly, Fanny, and I walked up to see a couple of properties. We stayed here at Belinda's for the night. What a welcome relief. She went out with "the Count", but apparently she left standing orders to treat me well. I felt like a queen. What a firecracker of a woman she is! I am staying a second night. I get to use Belinda's bath, by special dispensation.*

*Charlie had dinner with us. Molly and he are smitten. She brings him out. It's in his eyes when he looks at her. Charlie – now there's a man for you.*

---

Monday, October 4

Mallard came into my cell with McIver to tell me I am free. I swore I wouldn't leave Dawson until the fraud business with the Americans is settled. Where could I go?

I asked McIver to explain what my options were. You stink, he said. Go home and take a bath, have a good night's rest and we'll talk tomorrow. I asked him about the three Americans, and the Civil Suit, but again he told me to go home. I must smell very badly.

---

Monday, October 4, 1897

*I got back in afternoon and decided to drop in on Grizwald. I'm having late lunch and steeling myself. I'm wearing my humble face, as I'm going to need it.*

Later

*Grizwald looked smug. I asked him right away if we could come to some agreement about the loan. I explained that some "unexpected issues" had arisen. The weasel let me go through a whole, rather detailed description of the events of the past few days, and only then said, "You have come to the wrong person. You should be talking to Maximilian. We sold him the asset."*

*I was incredulous. He had to explain it to me. When the nastiness happened, it seems Grizwald made some remark to Max about how my loan had suddenly turned risky. So Max bought my loan from the bank, and Grizwald made a tidy, overnight profit.*

*It's all perfectly legal, it seems. So, now, if I don't come to some agreement with Max and I cannot pay the loan back in time, Max can foreclose on the Inn.*

*I spent the last hour at Molly's while she tried to calm me down. She has done a decent enough job, given everything. I am distraught, but at least she has brought me around to the point of realizing that Max knows nothing about the business, all the people working there are my people, it is a business profitable enough to see me through this – and I have my other businesses to help. At worst he will be an annoyance.*

---

Tuesday, October 5

This morning McIver finally showed me the Notice he'd been holding back on.

NOTICE OF CIVIL CLAIM.

Between

Plaintiff(s) Collis Schiller, of San Francisco, California,  
Christian Kristiansen, of Stockholm, Sweden, and Alberto  
Benini, of

Milan, Italy, represented by Harold G. Weitzer,

and

Defendant(s) the estate of Leland Oliver Hillup, recently of  
Dawson, and Francis Garrett McKenzie, of Dawson.

Part 1: STATEMENT OF FACTS. The Plaintiffs charge that:

1. On or about March 30, 1897, the Defendants did sell to the Plaintiffs, for four thousand dollars (\$4,000), the Defendants' right to mine the placer gold deposits on the so-called McKenzie Fraction, located on Eldorado Creek in the

Klondike Mining District in the North West Territory immediately south of and abutting 46 Above Eldorado, along its full southern boundary;

2. On or about March 30, 1897, on said Fraction, one or both Defendant(s) salted, or had agents salt for them, sedimentary deposits at the bottom of a mining exploration pit located on said Fraction, said deposits otherwise known widely to be gold bearing deposits of Eldorado Creek;
3. Said salting was accomplished by placing gold dust and/or gold nuggets, foreign to said deposits, by hand or other means, into said deposits at the bottom of said pit; and
4. Notwithstanding the means, the Defendant(s) salted, or had salted for them, said deposits with the conscious intent of defrauding the Plaintiffs.

Part 2: RELIEF SOUGHT. The Plaintiffs seek:

1. to recover the four thousand dollars (\$4,000) the Plaintiffs paid for the rights to mine the said Fraction;
2. compensatory damages in the amount of ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) for having lost time and the opportunity to bid for other placer gold properties during the time of attempting to prove and mine the said Fraction; and
3. given the malicious conduct of the Defendants, punitive damages in the amount of fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000).

Sixty four thousand dollars?! Seems so, he said. What do you know about it? Not a god damned thing! I could feel my face getting red. Blood must have come from my stomach, it was squeezed so hard.

No one gave me a Notice like this, I said. No one did, eh? he said. That's good. It buys us some time. In any event, they are all just pissing in the wind. How the hell could anyone salt a pit that Schiller melted and mucked out himself? he asked. Ask Lefty, I said. Anyway, it's up to them to prove it, he said.

He went on to say it will take months to sort out. McGuire (the new judge) won't be here for a while, as he's coming in over one of the passes. McIver is pushing to have the discovery process complete as soon as possible, saying that, without Lefty here to testify, things are certain to be smooth. It'll be all circumstantial, he said, unless someone saw Lefty do something. Any chance of that? he asked. How the hell should I know? I had no idea what he was up to. I do remember him joking about it though. He made a big deal about where he slept in the cabin the night Schiller and the fellows stayed over, saying he didn't want anyone thinking he was sneaking out during the night to salt the pit. That's why he said it, McIver said. You can bet your last drink of desert water. He wanted everyone to remember. Expert fraudster, he said. Learned at the feet of a master, I said.

I asked him about the other problem. The business with the three Americans. He said he hasn't seen the charges yet. Asked him what my chances are. Well, he said, that one's pretty straightforward. You sold them something you didn't own.

Bugger them all. I never wanted to hurt anyone. It's the Hillups that should hang.

---

Tuesday, October 5, 1897

*Max wasted no time. He came into the Inn this morning and asked to speak to me privately. I just wanted to assure you that I have no intention of pressing for payment, he said. I know a good business and a good business woman when I see one. I'll relax the terms. Pay whenever your balance book lets you.*

*I told him that was a relief to know, and thanked him. He invited me for lunch, and I accepted. It was pleasant enough, under the circumstances. He doesn't have the allure he used to, however. Allure is like beauty, and in the eyes of the beholder it can fade rapidly.*

---

Tuesday, October 5

I saw Vee today, walking across Front Street. She turned toward me when she got to the other side, but I ducked away.

---

Wednesday, October 6

Told myself: enough! I cleaned up, and decided to face the music. I found Vee at the Inn. She seemed happy to see me. I told her what an idiot I'd been and that I was deeply sorry. She just said it was water under the bridge. I wish I could feel that way, I said.

I told her I'd be happy to work Willoughby's ground for him. I'm getting a few things together and going up to get BadFoot from Charlie's. It's over on Sulphur Creek, so more quick trips into town. I'll go up Bonanza and over the Dome, but I'll drop into see McIver and Mallard first. I don't want the Staff Sergeant thinking I've skipped town.

---

Wednesday, October 6, 1897

*Garrett is on his way up to Willoughby's ground today. That will do us both good.*

*Max asked if I could give him a tour. I joked that it wasn't his hotel yet.*

*I introduced him around to those he didn't know, and brought out the books so he could take a look. He said it made him feel better. He eyed the revenues from some of our best nights. He even whistled at one.*

*He invited me for lunch again. During coffee – a highly prized commodity now – I expressed surprise that he was staying for the winter. He said he had some personal business to deal with, and smiled at me in a rather unsettling way.*

---

Thursday, October 7

Damned long hike to Sulphur. The Dome was bloody cold. Willoughby left his Rebel Flag behind on his cabin wall. It gives the place colour and warmth. I'm worried that he would leave it, though. He takes it with him everywhere.

BadFoot wouldn't leave me alone all day. I promised never to leave him behind again, but I'm not convinced he understood.

---

Thursday, October 7, 1897

*No Garrett (sad). No Max (happy). No Willoughby or Ted (worried). Wrote father (and mother). It's been a while, longer than I remembered. Very long letter, but all about my businesses. Not about Garrett.*



---

Friday, October 8

Nice cabin. Decent ground. More sun on this side of the hills. Won't hurt quite as much when the time comes to counting the minutes of it. Not too long now. Everything freezing up fast.

---

Friday, October 8, 1897

*My 'banker' asked me out to dinner on Sunday. It can't do me any harm, I told him. He laughed and said he was pleased that I was so eager. I'm not eager at all, I should have told him.*

*McIver brought news. The Americans won't press for criminal charges. However, they have filed a civil suit. They want costs and their money back. It seems Mallard explained the whole nasty mess with Uriah. They said they felt badly for Garrett, but they still needed their money back. They didn't even bother naming Uriah in the suit, as it was Garrett who was posing as the man who owned the rights. At least they are not seeking damages, like Schiller and company, McIver said, just their money and court costs; \$82,000. Apparently that is good news, under the circumstances.*

*Their winning is a virtual certainty. Mallard will testify. Garrett's a goner. He might be able to plead for understanding, that he is a victim, too. But in the end, no one will listen as he knew what he was doing wasn't proper.*

*I wrote Garrett a note. A fellow will take it to Charlie, and he'll pass it on.*

---

Saturday, October 9, 1897

*The streets are still filled with wanderers. Everyone seems to have finally come to the realization what their chances are (none) and what is ahead of them (a desperate time). The bar is doing steady business. We are stretching the food.*

---

Sunday, October 10

BadFoot is now my parishioner. I preach to him, but he has decided I don't know a god damned thing. He said if I didn't do better, he'd be looking for some place other than this Church of the Damned for his free food and love. I asked him to find another, and he told me to go to hell. I laughed and said I'm already half way there. He wagged his tail, I thanked him for his support, and gave him some bacon. The bacon was much better than your sermons, he said.

Charlie showed up, and I asked him if he came for a sermon. It's a bit early for cabin fever, he said. Never too early, I said. He brought a letter from Vee, and told me to read it right away, or I'd be preoccupied. It was all legal stuff, as it turns out. He stayed for bacon and beans. I asked him to take my mind off my troubles, and he told me about hunting and fishing in North Dakota. Though it was the third time I've heard those stories, it was just what I needed. BadFoot liked it better than the sermon, too. Charlie spent the night, as it was too cold and dark to walk back in the bush. New moon. Black as hell out there. The candles are dying in here. The Yukon stove puffing away, orange wisps flickering on the floor and walls, dancing to the pace of their snoring.

---

Sunday, October 10, 1897

*Max took me out as promised. We went to the Café and had some wine to start. For the first ten minutes or so, it was alright, then I started noticing little things. It was nothing overt. It was more in things left unsaid, or looks and small laughs. I became very uncomfortable early on and it just became worse.*

*I made the mistake, it seems, of relaxing on arrival – perhaps it was the wine – and he started taking small liberties, just “happening” to brush my hand, looking at my chest, occasionally suggesting something “we” should do. It’s all too obvious now, as I think about it. I should vie with Garrett for the Dullard of Dawson. From the moment it became obvious, I was totally preoccupied with trying to find a graceful exit. I cannot offend the man – not while he holds the loan. I’m afraid I stooped to the worst trick in the book, learned from my mother.*

*I had to make it convincing, so I let signs appear gradually. A sneeze. A request for a handkerchief. A gentle dabbing of the forehead. Noticeable by their increasing frequency. He gave no sign of noticing, so I intensified my act. It took until half-way through our entrée before he asked if I was alright. Of course, one says it’s nothing, which means it’s unmentionable. He had me home in under half an hour.*

*He will not stop, I am convinced, and I cannot be ‘sick’ all the time.*

---

Monday, October 11

Alone, except for BadFoot. I’d be lost without him. What now, Garrett? What can I do for you? Of course I still love you!

---

Monday, October 11, 1897

*I poured out my woes to Molly last night. She said she had only one suggestion and walked me back to the Inn. She stopped across the street from the Inn and told me to look up, which I did, to the sky – a clear blue which is special to this place. Then I let my eyes fall slowly to the Inn, my wonderful Inn, until it was clear what she wanted me to see: Ob Ventum Eundum, “Face the Wind.” She is right. I am made of better stuff than this.*

*Max came back earlier this evening. He is mounting an onslaught. Form up the troops, I told myself. March directly at the enemy. Very British. How romantic.*

*I told him I found him to be a fascinating man, and that I was sorry, but that I had no romantic interest in him. I am sure he was anticipating the first signs of conquest, so my declaration to the contrary was a shock. Many would have expressed disappointment. Many would have listed the advantages of a union. But Max just said, in a perfunctory manner, that he was sorry that his company was not appreciated, and that, regretfully, he would be exercising his option to call in the loan.*

*There are no winds like arctic winds and up here they can whip up in trice.*

---

Tuesday, October 12

First blizzard of the winter. Stoked stove and stayed in. Started Don Quixote again.

---

Tuesday, October 12, 1897

*Max wasted no time. A messenger from his lawyer brought his letter.*

*I took Roderick into my confidence and asked Molly to sit with us to look at possibilities. I told them of Max's desire to own a piece of the Inn, and they felt as I have come to feel: that it would be a horrible mistake to try to work with him. Roderick suggested offering him the mill. I winced at the thought.*

*I called in Haldron and asked him his opinion and one look at his face told me I would find another way. He left looking worried, nevertheless.*

*He reappeared, looking very stern and determined. I feared that all the progress we had made in our relationship had evaporated. But he startled me. He said he would buy the mill from me. However, when I told him what I felt would be a fair price, he said, I do not have that, Miss. I had seen him angry and determined, and many other things, all of which I have come to embrace, in a way, but I pray I never see him dejected again.*

*I called him back immediately, and asked him if a partnership would do: fifty-fifty, with silent partners, and he agreed. I will sell my other properties to cover the difference.*

---

Wednesday, October 13

Beans, bacon, blizzard, and Don Quixote. BadFoot stayed by the stove all day.

---

Thursday, October 14

The weather broke, and I'm back to working a pit. Going to get help hauling the steam engine over the Dome to make it go faster. BadFoot's still moping about. He has me very worried. I kept saying to him that he was not that old! I don't think he is, anyway.

---

Thursday, October 14, 1897

*Fanny found me a couple of bargain hunters for my gold properties in no time.*

*Why she decided to stay the winter is beyond me. I think she thinks of us as family now. Then Molly told me to wake up. Look at what happens to her when Roderick's in the room, she said. Oh. How blind can I be?*

---

Monday, October 18, 1897

*I delivered the money to Max. Haldron is happy; Max not. I am in purgatory.*

---

Tuesday, October 19

Was bloody hard going dragging that thing, even with help. Bitterly cold. And winter barely started. I'm resting my back. Please take me, not my BadFoot.

---

Friday, October 22

Pit going tolerably well. BadFoot not.

---

Saturday, October 23

BadFoot ate some bacon soup. Small mercies. The rest of the world can go to Hell.

---

Saturday, October 23, 1897

*McIver came by with a large envelope for Garrett and told me he had bad news. The three Americans have decided to file a civil suit. They intend to recover the cost of the sale and other costs, but worse, they are going for \$100,000 in punitive damages, too,*

*like the Schiller suit. I could not believe the figure! Why would they do that!? I asked, losing my temper. Because they can, he said.*

*When I calmed myself down, I went straight from anger to gloom. They are negotiating, he said. They don't want to wait from October to next spring to see results. But he has next to no money, I said and he said they knew; it's a lawyer's ploy.*

*Molly came over and we went together as far as Eldorado Creek. I'll ask Charlie to relay the package on to Garrett from here. We talked all the way up. I had come to a decision which I wanted to discuss with her. I told her there was no changing my mind, that I only wanted her to help me figure out what I could do next.*

*Tomorrow I will call my staff together. Then I will visit Max.*

---

*Monday, October 25, 1897*

*Max will buy the Owl's Head. Some of the proceeds will go to the three Americans and they will go away. Their lawyer is very pleased, I'm sure. The rest will go towards Molly's and my ventures. We are to become partners.*

*But now, I fear, Garrett might never be able look at me with pride. I have given away one first love to rescue another. But by that, I may have lost not just one, but both.*

*I am stopping this diary now. I am tired of being trouble's chronicler.*

---

*Friday, October 29*

*Every day the sun dies a little and takes a piece of me.*

## Chapter 26 The Devil Left Little

Vee was true to her word. She never again made diary entries, or wrote in any other.

A month later, on November 28, 1897, she sent the following out along with other mail over the Chilcoot Pass. It arrived on Long Island at Christmas.

*Dear Mother and Father,*

*I barely know where to start. My last letter, as I recall, was in August, after our Grand Opening. As a result of events beyond my control, things have fallen apart since then. I will tell you the whole sordid story when I have gained the necessary detachment.*

*I do not want you to be read headlines about the massive Thanksgiving fire that consumed much of downtown Dawson without having had some news from me. Our buildings are all wood, as you know, and several went up like a bon fire on the beach just a few days ago. There is no insurance in Dawson, so we all suffer the brunt.*

*I am sorry to report that my beauty, the Owl's Head Inn, is no longer. It was close to unbearable, really, hearing and watching it burn, feeling the inferno from a helpless distance, seeing the explosions of sparks as it collapsed on itself, beam by beam. However, it was Maximilian Acton-Jones who lost his business in that fire, not I, as I had already been forced to sell it to him. And although I am not a vindictive woman, I must confess that I enjoyed the irony that it was caused by Belle Mitchell, a dance-hall girl with whom I had a falling out. She has a temper, that one, and will cause more grief, I wager. In any event, it seems she had an argument with Max, too, and threw an oil lamp at him. I now believe in poetic justice.*



*Much to my relief, and that of the staff who came with me, our recently-completed, Baker Inn was spared. She was a misery to construct. We worked in what any New Yorker would consider to be winter weather. But, with the help of canvas tarpaulins and some large stoves, we all put up with it, despite the sometimes bitter cold. Even Garrett, of whom I have seen very little of late, showed up to pitch in from time to time. He has had the most miserable luck and seemed a broken man, so, even though he rarely acknowledges me and never speaks to me (once again for reasons I will not explain now), it was good to see him helping out. To his detriment, he is a very proud man.*

*Speaking of pride, you would have had your share for me, father, for despite being forced by circumstance to sell the Owl's Head to Action-Jones, I did not relinquish that most important ingredient of an Inn – its food. Dawson's food supply is at critically low levels. I knew the health and maybe even the lives of staff would be at serious risk if I did not "arrange" to take the food and some other important supplies with me at the time of the sale. My lawyer was a great help in this matter, for he made sure that while many things were mentioned in the sales contract, never once was the food. So following the signing, when Acton-Jones saw we had moved out our hoard of supplies, and he was unable to find in the contract any reference to the food, I hear his lawyer got a tongue lashing in a style only his acerbic British tongue could deliver, and then the sack.*

*Although the new Inn may not have all the furnishings and accoutrements of the old, it has what every miner seeks: a good meal! And as I've heard them say: "Who cares where it comes out, if it were tasty going in?" (Sorry, mother.)*

*The new Inn has a special facility, a Spa, run by my very good friend and investor, Molly Larson, whose business was also spared the fire, thank Heaven. Molly has supplied*

*our main room, bar, and best rooms with the most unusual and exotic furnishings north of San Francisco, I am sure. The bar we named The Other Booker's Thumb as the man, spurred on I'm sure by some sort of visceral attachment to it, rushed into the Owl's Head in the midst of its conflagration and rescued his cleaved body part. But that's another story.*

*Willoughby, you must know, left here almost two months ago, and I pray that he has already returned safely, although I believe that to be next to impossible. Ted McKenzie the same. They were on the trail of a scoundrel who stole all of Garrett's money and a good measure of mine. Please tell them both I love them dearly if and when, God willing, they make it home.*

*In the past few short months, I have seen enough of the ups and downs of life to be able to withstand any onslaught of either fortune or destitution, I am convinced. However, I am well, and in good spirits, all things considered. I look forward to seeing you again, possibly in the spring.*

*Until we see each other, I remain your ever loving daughter,*

*Vivian*

---

Monday, November 29

Sixty five below. The trees snap. The world itself is cracking. The hoarfrost is 3/8 in. long, which imparts to everything a strange beauty. I just about froze my cheeks when went out for a piss. Not eating much, so I won't have to have a movement today, luckily. BadFoot could not care less about the cold. It's his element.

---

Tuesday, November 30

I found a bundle of food left in my cabin. Vee, I'm sure. Flour for flapjacks. Teas. Cans of fruit. Two little packets of bacon, one labelled for BadFoot. I will dream tonight.

Sparked dew on her lips rivals the radiance of the moon.

Naked and entwined.

---

Friday, December 10

Charlie says word from town is that Joaquin Miller is back from Fort Yukon. Miller, last fall, said: No one will starve in Dawson! What a bloody blowhard. Fellows are still leaving every week to escape over the passes. Good luck to them.

Mable LaRose auctioned herself off in one of the saloons. I would have bid my 3 oz.

---

Wednesday, December 22

The word is the last restaurant has closed in Dawson. I wonder if it was the Baker.

Two bodies were sledged into town yesterday. Typhoid. Over \$2,000 for the dog teams and to dig the graves. The cross costs extra. I can't die. I don't have the money for it.

---

Saturday, December 25

Charlie stayed with us for Christmas. He brought a grouse, and a rabbit. We had some of Vee's tea, and I thought of her, and of Mary. I gave Charlie a miner carved of wood, and he gave me a pair of woollen socks he knit himself, and BadFoot some bacon.

He said there was another stampede, this time to Rosebud Creek, 50 miles up the Yukon. South bank. An old man reported gold at the mining recorder's office, and off they went. By candlelight. Fools. Some didn't return. Might have joined them, myself.

---

Sunday, January 2

Charlie's apricot brandy for New Years! We got a little soaked. Another funeral procession today. Third this week. I hear Father Judge's hospital is full of scurvy and typhoid. How the New Year starts. I'm still holding out for insight.

---

Monday, January 24

Two funerals today.

Was she ever real? Her stormy hair?

---

Thursday, February 10

The salting trial is coming up fourth week Feb. I hiked to Dawson to see McIver at 50 below, and passed another funeral. Grand procession with 30 fellows following.

Mallard told me poor Eldon Warfield, the suicide, had gone ahead and done it. Good for him! I said. He got it right in the end. Mallard just looked at me.

I conferred with McIver. He's optimistic as Lefty is not here to screw things up.

I'm sleeping among the also-dead, in foul air, among beds stacked like cord wood. Byron found me with a parcel of food. No news of Ted or Willoughby. I hate Dawson now, with a passion, and although I took the food, I hate myself for accepting it.

It is a grim paradox: how to bow before my pride.

---

Wednesday, February 16

There was another “hollow” stampede a couple of days ago. Swede Cr. just six miles from town. By moon light, in the middle of the night again. A frenzy started in the saloon. The fellow brandished his poke about, sold his team and sled to the highest bidder, and drank the price away within the hour, no doubt. And now five men are in hospital, badly frozen, two with amputated feet. Three hundred in all, including me, fools looking for hope in a scattering of rumours and lies into which alcohol breaths its carelessness, and which desperation then makes real.

But the Dark One, with his hollow eyes and smile, didn't send us off before taking roll call, he didn't. You there, son, heading out in this bitter cold with your dress shoes on – are you a fool, son? You bet I am, sir! Alright, then sign here, and off you go, and may the worst of luck befall you. Follow those fellas there, the ones scampering out the door. Do they know where they are going, sir? Well, no, son, they don't and that's important, as it is a fool's stampede, after all.

And you, son, he said, brightly, turning to me. How desperate are you? Enough to believe, I said. Good for you, son! he said, and he pinned a badge on me saying “Fool of the Highest Order” and sent me off, newly fallen snow flying behind my sled like dust.

It all came to nothing, of course.

---

Wednesday, February 23

Schiller, the publisher of the Klondike Crier waited all winter for the McKenzie Fraction salting trial, I reckon. He published a special issue, saying public interest

demanded it, but we all know it was because he was one of the buyers who Lefty defrauded, and he wanted everyone to know his side won.

He started by saying, barely a square foot of the courtroom remained unoccupied as our new judge, T. H. McGuire began only his third case with us, and his first civil suit involving mining matters, and went on to describe me as having “the demeanour of a broken man.” I can’t argue with that.

Their witnesses, including Schiller, talked about how Lefty got the buyers to set fires and muck out an exploration pit he’d already started, and how there was only barren muck in the pit their first day of work. But three or four feet deeper there was gold and lots of it. After they had bought the claim they found nothing more in that pit, or in the twelve other ones they sunk right around it. The patch of gold was tiny and rich, sitting well up from bedrock and with no other gold around it. It was like a little, lost, golden cloud, the prosecutor said, the only one in the sky.

Max, “expert, London University geologist”, got his digs in, too, by telling the court that while not impossible, it was highly unlikely such a deposit would form naturally.

The witnesses said that Lefty didn’t go near the pit while they were working, and he made certain he was never out of their sight, even at night. They mentioned how Lefty made a big deal about sleeping furthest from the cabin door so no one would think that he’d slipped out at night to salt the pit. He clearly meant everyone to remember, and they all did. And they also remembered him saying that a fellow would have to be loco to salt a claim and stay around afterward, camping right down the creek.

Then the prosecutor brought out the critical piece of evidence, Lefty’s rod, the one he got made before the sale, the one with a fattened end sharpened to a point, the one the

blacksmith called “unique”, and he asked me if we had used it for staking, which is what Lefty said it was for, and I had to say, no, that we’d done all our staking before he brought it up from Dawson, and that the heavily used appearance, namely the “mushroomed” end, appeared later. Before or after we sold the fraction, he asked me, and I had to say before. A long time before, or just before? Just before, I had to say.

Then the prosecutor advanced his theory about how Lefty salted the pit, and I admit it made a lot of sense. He said Lefty took the rod, heated its fattened red hot, and pounded it into the sediments at the bottom of his pit. Then, into each three-foot-deep hole he poured prepared quantities of gold. As mucking out the bottom of a shaft is messy, all evidence of those holes quickly disappeared, and the gold they “discovered” would have appeared to be virgin. It was a stroke of genius, the prosecutor said.

In his decision, Judge McGuire concluded that either the gold in question appeared naturally, or it was placed there by salting necessarily with use of the rod (and by no other means). Those were the only two explanations for the gold’s existence. Therefore the roll of the rod is pivotal. However, he said, the evidence was circumstantial only, that no one saw Mr. Hillup, or anyone else, use the rod, and that no one saw Mr. Hillup, or anyone else, place any gold.

However, he said, this is a civil trial, and he had to rule on the balance of probabilities. This included the fact that the accused profited from the sale of the fraction. In the end he weighed the likelihood that such an isolated pocket of gold would occur naturally, without human intervention, in just the pit necessary and just within reach of the rod’s maximum depth, and no deeper, at the precise point where it would convince the buyers to proceed with the transaction, against the likelihood that Lefty had bought the rod for

the purpose of salting the pit in this ingenious fashion, keeping in mind that the rod mysteriously appeared heavily used just before the sale, that no one other than the defendants could or did profit from the sale, and no other reasonable explanation for the facts had been placed before the court.

He said, all in all, salting was the most likely explanation, so he found for the Plaintiffs in the amount of \$4,000 in damages, \$5,000 in compensatory damages, and \$36,000 in punitive damages.

No exploration pit ever sunk was deep enough for me to hide in when I heard that. There was nothing to do but drink. I am recovering slowly. I may head back up in a day or two, when I feel like crawling out of this bed, here, at the back of this palatial rat hole.

---

Tuesday, March 8

This is my third day out on this insane venture, and I'm stuck in a blizzard, hunkered down in this little tent in the middle of nowhere, with nothing to do but wait it out.

I have my box with my journals, at least. I started a poem for Vee. Called While My Light Lasts because the light disappears early on me in this little valley. I have hours to lie in the dark, and think, and feed my stove to keep me from freezing to death.

---

Wednesday, March 9

The weather seems to be breaking. Maybe I'll get some ground staked tomorrow.

I'm on a stampede, for God's sake, and I can't see two feet in front of me outside! Except I may actually be alone up here, this far up the creek. Only ten miles north of Eagle and up the creek to the east, the fellow said. I know a couple of fellows who worked this country a while ago, and told me then they lucked into some nice paydirt, so



what the fellow said made sense. Twenty of us started off, but I haven't seen any of the others for days. I borrowed a dog team, four counting BadFoot.

I saw Mary on way past Eagle, and she doesn't hate me, although she should, I reckon. She gave me a little wave. I smiled, signalled that I was going to stake some ground and that I'd see her on the way back, and pushed on. A rush is a rush. She must have found herself a man, because she had an infant with her, all bundled up on her back, so at least that ended well. I look forward to meeting the little bugger, and seeing her.

Working on my poem for Vee.

---

Friday, March 11

How quickly fate's balance shifts. Today, finally, the sun came out. I was struggling up the side of the hill to sink my last claim post and fell through a crusty patch of snow. A broken sapling drove itself up inside my calf before I could spit. It ripped half the tendon, too. Now here I am, bandaged up, crawling around, far from anyone who can help.

It's starting to swell and becoming very sore.

---

Saturday, March 12

Finished the poem with some effort, waiting for manageable spells. Collected the bits. Leg is sore as hell. I will myself to write to keep from screaming.

While My Light Lasts      For my love, Vivian.

My future squandered on my past, while my light lasts, I rage

Inside my debtor's cell, this searing cage of canvas.

I pay dearly for each breath. Daily, the gaily-mottled shadows  
Dance on my prison's walls, mocking me. Nightly stalking me,  
I hear a snuffling vigilance, the circling of expectant footfalls.

Facing death, covenants of rhyme or rhythm have ceased to matter much  
To me. I have forged other bonds, tantamount to chains, which clatter in my wake.  
So, prior to my summons to account, the measured reckoning  
At which some petty magistrate will sluggishly enumerate  
My sad accumulation of pros and cons, the protracted prattle of my blunderings,  
With some distain and distracted by his stomach rumblings and staring at the clock,  
I have the time to consecrate only those things paramount.  
And I have pain enough just thinking.

Though diminished by the hour, my remaining hope is thought.  
I hold out desperately for insight, for deeper understanding,  
Perhaps a vision to sustain me, a scrap of meaning, a glimpse of heaven's light.  
But I am bereft, in spite of my desire, of all thought's subtlety,  
And, sadly, I am left with naught  
But longing.

I long to live again. I long  
For one more chance, in reddening dawn,  
To brush the sparkled dew from her lips,

To seal my cheek against her giving breast, to hear a proudly beating heart attest  
That she is real, despite my reservations;  
I long to wander, hand in hand, in innocence and in her dreams entranced,  
Festooned in daffodils and bluebells, to laugh and spin on coloured carousels  
Like children of the afternoon.  
I long to watch her drift again on springtime breezes,  
While dusting sleepy wildflowers with her frontier grace and charm,  
Drawing forth to sunshine their shapely blossoms with her smile.  
I long to marvel how she rivalled the radiance of the moon  
As its beam frolicked in her eye in jest, to captivate  
And consume me.

I long to know once more that miracle,  
Which, belly to belly, swept us high in sudden flight,  
Winged us circling about the sun, married us to blazing light,  
Blinded us to worry, and sculpted us anew;  
That miracle which freed us, naked and entwined, tumbling  
Like warm and lazy showers to a sultry pool where,  
On depths of azure cool, we drifted by the hour,  
Floating, rippling like water lilies  
On the billowing reflections of summer clouds and chatting aspens,  
Her stormy hair – still – yet swirling. All about us  
Yellow warblers spirited away, with song, each hint of darkness,

Then chased the scattered light among the armoured evergreens  
Shouldered there against the shore to guard us in our secret Eden.  
Basking, blessed, and serene,  
There we lay, unbounded in our happiness.

Despite that, to save myself, I cannot yet unwind my tangled paradox,  
The grim charge obliging me to bow before my pride, and  
My hand extended, my love for her immense but sadly insufficient, I look down,  
Fearing I will first shatter on those unkindly angled rocks I see  
Awaiting me.

---

Thursday, March 17

A constant hammering pain. The skin is tight, like a balloon. Red veins. I have it propped, but my foot may not be getting blood. I'm worried about my thigh now, too. There's a strange smell in here, in this little tent.

Had two weeks of food and gathered – at a high price – a few days' worth of wood. Going to stretching it out. Keep hearing voices of those who I hope are looking for me. Phantom voices? Howls at night.

---

Friday, March 25, I think

Thinking of you, Nevada. I'm in similar shape. But I'm trying to stay alive.

Regular food is gone. Grubbed about and found a bit of skin from the wolf, and part of his paw. Ate them both. Paw very chewy. My stomach revolted, badly. I crawled to the

door. but didn't make it – I soiled myself. What a pathetic creature I am. The pain is very bad in my stomach now, too.

Back from the creek, having cleaned up a bit and crawled back.

I never wanted to hurt anyone. An omniscient God would know that. A compassionate and forgiving God would not make me die for this.

Repent! They chant. For what? I ask. For assuming the guise of a scoundrel to remedy his oversight? For believing the scoundrel's father?

God's mysterious ways. Ha!

Religion is a Fool's Stampede.

---

lost track

Feeling marginally better. Sun through the trees onto my tent. Patterns dancing with the breeze. Few days and I'll be walking again. Maybe. I crawled to the creek and cleaned up. Bloody cold water. Broke the ice with my elbow. I dragged some bits of wood back with me.

The wound in my calf may be healing, but I can't tell, the damned stick made such a ragged mess of it. A good ten inches, straight up the leg inside the muscle.

---

A couple of days later

Damned dogs abandoned me last night when the wolves came. Not BadFoot though. He wouldn't let them at me. He killed one, I shot another. But they came back a few hours later and took BadFoot's body away. I'm glad they, truthfully. It ripped me to look at him – my brave, selfless friend. He was a match for any wolf, maybe even two, but not four. And me too late with my gun. One more weight on me. I cried like a baby. I still do.

A grizzly came by during the night, too, to drag a carcass away. I could hear it, breathing heavily. It will come looking for me when it's finished with them, I know, now that it has the taste. From his prints, he's a big one.

For what it is worth, I'm learning now, I think, out here, on the hillside, death skulking around my door, lifting the flap, checking on me. Snickering in the shadows.

Lefty. That's where it all started, though it seemed innocent enough at the time. The road to hell started with a charming little fork in the road, leading through the meadow. And charming, he was, too. And generous, when it suited him. Fooled me. But he fooled a fool, and there's no challenge there. No kudos for you, Lefty. Nor you, Uriah. Heavyweights like them shouldn't fight in lighter weight classes with the likes of me. It's just not fair.

Up-a-Creek warned me. He dropped hints about Lefty, but I didn't listen. All the signs were there, too: evasiveness; a smile instead of an honest answer; dark, dark moods; devil's talk, late at night when he was whiskeyed up. The way he talked about Jews and Chinks. No better 'n a damn Nigger or Siwash, he'd say of someone, and laugh. Like a maniac, not loud, but low and into his chest. He's probably still laughing in hell, his face ripped up and hanging there in strands, eyeballs missing, flames coming from his sockets.

"A change of troubles," said Charlie's Greek fellow, making it sound like there's just a stiff breeze swinging around easterly to westerly, or something. He didn't say it would change to a hurricane. You have to be careful with these bloody philosophers. They assume you can think.

---

One more day

On the up-swing today. Second day in a row. Got a good fire up, and made some spruce tea. It covers up the smell from my foot.

I found a chunk of frozen flesh in a corner. Less than the size of a fist. Put it in the tin cup and let it stew for what must have been an hour. Can't say it's my favourite, but it felt good going down. Only retched a little at the start. Better than a raw paw, at least. Sun's moved around. Tent's in the shade again and cooling off. Going to lose my foot, I know, but I'll last it out. Someone will find ol' peg leg.

Thinking about Uriah, too. What a master. One could see through Lefty as everything was there to understand him – and avoid him. (Not me, of course. I mean any smart man.) But Uriah played the perfect part. He manoeuvred us into doing what he wanted. Even-tempered. Always considerate. I even started liking the rotter. He counted on that.

Here's the difference between Lefty and Uriah: Lefty was like an actor. Good at the game, maybe, but he needed the applause. Uriah never did. He had patience and control. Lefty may have not fallen far from the tree, but he rolled away.

---

A good fire today. The pain is manageable. Barely.

---

last of the broth   heat disappearing with the sun

pain worse   well into my groin now

blood vessels on my stomach – delicate purple branches

---

30 days, more or less

Crawled out for wood. Will fight this. Easy wood hard to find now.

Lying by the creek, yelled to the world: A CURSE! on all who take fire for granted!

Raven, up the hillside laughing. Gravely. Over and over.

Warm again in here now. Took an hour, another for the pain to subside, before I could keep my mind on this.

Pressed the wound repeatedly, like when I was a kid, when I thought there was only so much pain to be had, and all I had to do was make it hurt enough so it would go away.

---

so hungry not even hungry

shivering

so cold breath freezing at least minus 10 in here

can't feel my leg going for wood

---

last poke by door

funeral five ounces gold enough...

Filthy stuff

raven laughing

---

small fire but fearsome cold barely move sniffing in night again outside



---

bear came in night shot him in head  
by door bleeding mouth  
thought I had one more bullet for me  
couldn't find it cried  
too heavy to push out with one leg  
pain hammering vomited just little blood

write one line then rest

---

hurt loved ones killed BadFoot please forgive  
write 1 line then rest said that  
can't get wood no fire so cold  
shaking call me Coyote shoot me

---

devil left little take it  
beg you not let them see me like this  
I was Francis Garrett McKen zie

--□□✱□□--

However they progress, histories never leave a tidy result. They require lawyers and executors, undertakers and men who come out of the shadows after the events, on cue and on contract. I, Charlie Haas, have my bin and broom. I am here to clean up.

It was the winter of typhoid, scurvy, starvation and death, played out against the tinny sound of pianos, the whirl of the roulette wheel, and the call for another round of whiskey in the face of it. In the hills, hundreds moiled in their warrens, cut off from the struggling sun. In town, the remaining thousands huddled by stoves until opening hour at the saloons, then joined the sad parade winding its way to Front Street, to partake of their only daily ablution: washing down their regrets. Decaying men fought frost-bite, diseases, lice, boredom, and the intolerable sounds and smells of their fellows. They lingered in tiered bunks, dreaming of places anywhere but Dawson.

The spring of 1898 was a perfect time for us to leave. The flood gates had opened and the hordes arrived from Bennett. Thousands of hungry faces wondering what to do next, now that they were all too late. We had secured our various businesses so that they would run without us, and we had had enough of illness and starvation. Haldron, Roderick, and Byron were staying on to oversee things. When the season opened I put Samson and Joseph on Willoughby's claim, on a lay. Viola and Molly were heading to New York, and by then it was well understood that where Molly went, I, Charlie Haas, did too, as I had in mind to write and writers are portable.

None of us had seen Garrett since the beginning of March when he and many others went off on one of the several false rushes over that arduous winter. Madmen, driven by rumor and desperation, would head out, confident of securing a piece of the newest Eldorado. Did someone arrange to have the rumors find their way to Garrett, knowing him

to be desperate? Perhaps I am being unfair. Perhaps men are not capable of such cruelty, even Max.

We sent several parties after Garrett, but none could find him. The last found what we concluded was his empty tent, with no sign of him or BadFoot.

Mary found me in Dawson, on July 9, as we were waiting on the docks, watching for our crates to be loaded. It seems she spent some time looking, asking everyone for “Charlie Hass” – in the way she does – and no one knowing what she was saying except Sam, the bartender at Ladue’s old place. I could not understand her but I saw she had brought me Garrett’s little box, the one with my name prominently engraved on it.

I brought her to Viola. It only took Vee a minute to piece together who she was and what had happened, so she gave Mary a room for the night with a bath, which she loved, and explained to her as best she could that we were all leaving the next day and that our belongings were already being loaded onto the Healy. Viola then went to see the captain, secured Mary, her travelling companions, and their craft a place on board, and convinced him to stop at Eagle to let them off and take on wood.

The next day Vivian – who had decided that she had made her point – gave up Viola Baker, and returned confidently to the fold of the Belchers. So Molly, Vivian, and I said goodbye to Dawson. For them, forever.

When the Healy pulled up in front of Mary’s village, a small group stood on shore, children with women watching over them, mostly, and some men with the fuel.

We disembarked with Mary, passing with care the men taking the splits of wood onboard. As we walked, a young woman approached us carrying a child who was barely nine months old, I guessed, and handed him over to Mary. He had all the marks of the

union between her and Garrett, as handsome as his father, and as gentle and round in the face and dark as she, a strapping mix of their bloods.

She walked us to a small mound surrounded by a low, rough picket fence and marked with a rough wooden cross, and there Eagle's Anglican missionary joined us. He said a few words, which I did not hear. I simply found myself staring at his mound, praying in my own way that he had found some measure of peace. I did not have the courage to look at Vivian.

When the boat whistle broke our impromptu service, walking back to the shore, I asked the missionary to get Mary to tell us what she knew.

Through the missionary, she told us when Garrett passed her village on that Fool's Stampede, she saw him heading out along with many other desperate looking miners. But after ten days or so, when he did not reappear at the village heading back to Dawson to "make his papers", she set out with a small dog team and a cousin to track him down. The weather turned fiercely cold, and a blizzard forced them to turn back. I remembered that blizzard. It lasted a more than a week.

Then, finally, when they could head out again, it took them many days of searching, first having to determine where they had headed, laying camp and doing circles around it, moving slowly up the creeks that way. The blizzard had wiped the landscape clean of tracks, and they saw no fire smoke.

In the end they found his little tent, and him, half out of his skins, as stone-cold as his stove. She said it seemed the last thing he had the strength to do was to crawl to the stove to try to drop the box inside.

"What will you do now?" I asked her, through the missionary.

“Stay here, where I belong,” she said, “and raise little Garrett.” I heard her say Gerit.

As the paddle wheeler muscled its way into the Yukon’s current, I could see my sadness was not half as deep as Vivian’s. As if he were standing there on shore, she lifted her hand to make the smallest wave.

That Willoughby and Ted could proceed no further than Fort Yukon before they were frozen in for the winter of 1897 - 98, at the Arctic Circle, along with all the others, not even a third of the way to St. Michael, and what they did there, teetering on the verge of death, is another story. Suffice it to say they survived and retrieved, somehow and somewhere, the loot Uriah had taken. Uriah was, to my knowledge, never seen again.

Even when vigorously pressed, neither Ted nor Willoughby would ever talk about that winter or those events. They may have vowed not to. I did note, however, that when I visited Willoughby at the Belcher’s on the Island, where he retained his little apartment in the stable to his end, I could see no evidence of his beautiful colts known to have hung over his doorway. He would not explain that either, so I am led deduce a connection.

Together, Willoughby and Ted delivered Beatrice’s rightful portion to her, and returned east to their respective homes. What Beatrice did with it I do not know, although the local police were kind enough to inform me some time later that she had been found sparsely-dressed, frozen on a country road the following winter. Willoughby brought to the Belchers what Vivian had invested to rescue Garrett, and Ted brought the rest to Garrett’s father, who, in turn, gave Mary and little Gerit whatever help they needed. All books were balanced the way Garrett would have wished, even Lefty’s and Uriah’s. Just not BadFoot’s, sadly. Or his own.

And what of Molly, and Vivian, and me? Well, there is no mystery that my wife of these many years has been Molly, and I cannot imagine living my life without her. She tolerates me in my adventures in writing, and I amuse her, I think. I persist in my writing and the pretence that it will some day get published. More famous, dramatic, and romantic voices from the north seem to have had more success, I must admit, like novelist Jack London, and balladeer Robert Service, who, by the way, in 1905, seemed to greatly enjoy Garrett's journal, with its cremation of Nevada Pete, a copy of which I gave him on my last trip to Dawson.

Molly and Vivian started several businesses in New York City, and, not surprisingly, they built on their strengths and became very successful. They formed a partnership and opened what eventually became known as an elite 'boutique' hotel, catering to the very rich, to whom they sold many objet d'art which, mysteriously and suddenly, gained élan and substantially in price the moment they crossed the threshold into one of their shops.

Roderick, Byron, and Haldron all found their way east. The first two joined the women in their hotel business, and Haldron, after a time, started up a furniture business supplying high end clientele, including Vivian and Molly. Roderick and Haldron both settled down, Roderick with Fanny, of course. Haldron found himself a sturdy woman who was capable of standing up to him – which, it seems, is just what he looked for. Byron fell into the company of a group of men, and he seems happier now for it.

And Vivian? Well, she married Ted, in the end, a choice she never regretted, and now there is another little Garrett (as well as an Emmeline, and a Belinda) running about.

The End

## Epilogue (1920)

Now, so long after these events, I think of Garrett. I think of the sediments of the White Channel, with their purity and starkness, lying above the dun tumble of rounded cobbles and sand. I think of how the sediments were worked by ageless and unceasing streams to hide their gifts of lustrous Gold, of that which causes such fuss and trouble for those who seek quick relief from drudgery.

And I see that the color-filled gaiety and leaden heartache, the sudden rush and the endless boredom, the indefatigable, intimate invasions of biting flies and the cruel indifference of the bone-cracking cold, all the urgency and self-importance and self-destruction were soon spent. And I know that long after the cheering and the stomping and the brilliant rainbow of saucy crinolined thighs recede, when Francis Garrett McKenzie is long forgotten, and even this which I now write is readable no longer, its language having withered with the ages, having become extinct, when all these perishables have perished, still that eternal, beautiful, devilish Metal will persist. It will have been kept as proud ingots, for a while, perhaps, fortified by important men somewhere in bunkers constructed of other metals and materials. But, despite their arrogance, these other materials, triflers by comparison, will rust and crumble and be carried away, leaving only the Gold. And in biblical fashion, the ingots will be torn asunder by weather, ground up, and returned finally to a future world as nuggets and flour, to be left among different sediments perhaps as starkly white as the White Channel, detritus of a pathetic history, awaiting the start of another. For these new pay-streaks will, as surely as the sun rises and water flows,

incite other wild and irresistible dreams, for some other inane time when Gold again will be the root of many troubles, other troubles, though sadly all the same.

Then, perhaps, some other historian with pretensions the like of mine will reflect and conclude, just as I have, that civilization, for all its claims and affectations, for all its brag and bluster, amounts to little else but the laboured movement of Gold from one place to another, the passing of it from one owner to another, the gathering up of Nature's most glorious of gifts, to be used as gilding for yet another of Mammon's monuments.

But I am done thinking of these sad things. Our children are banging on my study door. A few years ago, on an afternoon such as this on Long Island, they would have been after me to tell them a story. Perhaps one with pirates. Or perhaps, with them being a little older, a sad one of a miner I once knew. But today they are back from school and college. They are full of the urgencies of youth, and it is my turn to smile, and to become speechless, and to listen, again.

Charles Up-a-Creek Haas