(Continued from last week)

back again in a moment. Finally he took up his burden of blanket and food, then said to her:

"Well, are you ready, little one?" "Yes, Meade," she answered simply. "And you are sure you won't regret

"Not while you love me." He kissed her again before they stepped out on the river trail that wound along the bank.

Two hours later they paused where the foaming waters of Black Bear creek rioted down across a graveled bar and into the silent, sweeping river, standing at the entrance to a wooded, grass grown valley, with rolling hills and domes displayed at its head, while back of them lay the town, six miles away, its low, squat buildings tiny and toylike, but distinctly silhouetted against the evening sky.

"Is it not time to rest?" said the soldier laughingly, yet with a look of yearning in his misty eyes as he took the girlish figure in his arms. But she only smiled up at him and, releasing his hold, led the way into the forest.

CHAPTER V.

A STORY IS BEGUN. It's fonny t'ing how two brown eye Was changin' everyt'ing-De cloud she's no more on de sky. An' winter's jus' lak spring. Dey mak' my pack so very light; De trail she's not so long-I'd walk it t'orty mile tonight For hear her sing wan song. But now I'm busy mak' fartung For marry on dat girl, An' if she's tole me yass, dat's soon,

Bombeur! Im own de worr! OLEON DORET sang gayly as the trader came toward him through the open grove of birch, for he was happy this afternoon, and, being much of a dreamer, this fresh enterprise awoke in him a boyish pleasure. Had not this discovery of "No Creek" Lee's been providentially arranged for his own especial benefit? A fool could see that this was a mark of celestial approbation, and none but a fool would question the wisdom of the gods. Had he not watched Necia grow from a slip of thirteen and spoken never a word of his love? Had he not served and guarded her with all the gentle chivalry of an olden knight? Of course! And here was his reward, a gift of wealth to crown his service, all for her.

"Whew," said Gale, slipping out of his pack straps, "the skeeters is bad!" "You bet your gum boots," said Poleon. "Dey're mos' so t'ick as de sum-



Poleon Doret sang gayly as the trader came toward him.

mer day kill Johnnie Platt on de Porcupine." Both men wore gauntleted gloves of caribou skin and head harnesses of mosquito netting stretched over globelike frames of thin steel bands, which they slipped on over their

bats. "Let's see. It was you that found him, wasn't it?" said Gale.

"Sure t'ing! I'm comin' down for grub in my canoe w'en I see dis feller en de bank walkin' lak he's in beeg borry. 'Ba gar,' I say, 'dere's man goin' so fast he'll meet hese'f comin' home!' Den he turn roun' an' go tearin' back, wavin' hees arms lak he's callin' me, till he fall down. W'en I paddle close up I don' know 'im no more dan stranger, an' me an' Johnnie Platt is trap togeder wan winter. Wat you t'ink of dat?"

"I saw a fellow killed that way at Holy Cross," interpolated the trader.

"'Hello!" I say. 'W'at's de matter?" An' den I see somet'ing 'bout 'im dat look familiar. Hees face she's all swell' up an' bleedin' lak raw meat." The Frenchman curled his upper lip back from his teeth and shook his head at the remembrance.

"Jesu, dat's 'orrible sight! Dem fly

is drive 'im crazee. Hees nose an' ears is look lak holes in beeg red sponge, an' hees eye are close up tight." "He died before you got him in,

didn't be?" "Yes. He was good man too."

"I guess you been purty glad for havin Necia home again, eh?" ventured Poleon after awhile, unable to avoid any longer the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Yes. I'm glad she's through with her schooling." "She's gettin' purty beeg gal now."

"That's right." "By an' by she's goin' marry on

some feller-w'at?" "I suppose so. She ain't the kind to

stay single." "Ha! Dat's right too. Mebbe you don' care if she does get marry, eh?" "Not if she gets a man that will treat her right"

"Waal, waal! Dere's no trouble 'bout dat," exclaimed Doret fervently. "No man w'at's livin' could treat her bad. She's too good an' too purty for have bad husban'."

"She is, is she?" Gale turned on him with a strange glare in his eyes. "Them's the kind that get the he devils. There's something about a good girl that attracts a bad man, particularly if she's pretty, and it goes double too. The good men get the hellions. A fellow can't get so tough but what he can catch a good woman, and a decent man usually draws a critter that looks like a sled and acts like a timber wolf."

"Necia wouldn't marry on no bad man," said Doret positively.

Neither man had ever spoken thus openly to the other about Necia before, and, although their language was mufrect, each knew- the others thought. But there was no time for further talk now, for the others were close upon them. As they came into view Gale exclaimed:

"Well, if Lee hasn't brought Runnion along!" "Humph!" grunted Doret.

t'ink much of dat feller." The three new arrivals dropped

down upon the moss to rest, for the up trail was heavy. Lee was the first to speak. "Did you get away without bein'

seen?" he asked. "Sure," answered Gale. "Poleon has been here two hours."

"That's good. I don't want nobody

taggin' along." Runnion volunteered nothing except naths at the mosquitoes and at his pack straps, which were new and cut him already. As no explanation of his

presence was offered, neither the tracer nor Doret made any comment then, but it came out later, when the old miner dropped far enough behind the others to render conversation possible. "You decided to take in another one,

eh?" Gale asked Lee. "It wasn't exactly my doin's," replied the miner. "Stark asked me to let Runnion come 'long, bein' as he had grub staked him, and he seemed so set on it that I ackeressed. You see, it's the first chance I ever had to pay him back for a favor he done me in the Cassiar country. There's plenty of land to go around."

It was Lee's affair, thought the trader, and he might tell whom he liked, so he said no more, but fell to studying the back of the man next in front, who nappened to be Stark, observing every move and trick of him and during the frequent pauses making a point of listening and watching him guard-

edly. All through the afternoon the five men wound up the valley, following one another's footsteps, emerging from somber thickets of fir to flounder across wide pastures of "nigger heads" that wabbled and wriggled and bowed beneath their feet until, at cost of much effort and profanity, they gained the firmer footing of the forest. At one point Stark, hot and irritable, remarked:

"There must be a shorter cut than this, Lee?"

"I reckon there is," the miner replied, "but I've always had a pack to carry, so I chose level ground rather than climb the divides."

"S'pose dose people at camp hear 'bout dis strike an' beat us in?" suggested Poleon.

"It wouldn't be easy going for them after they got there," Stark said sourly. "I for one wouldn't stand for it."

"Nor I," agreed Runnion. "I don't see how you'd help yourself," the trader remarked. "One man's got as good a right as another." "I guess I'd help myself, all right;" Stark laughed significantly, as did

Runnion, who added: "Lee is entitled to put in anybody he wants on his own discovery, and if anybody tries to get ahead of us there's liable to be trouble."

"I reckon if I don't know no short cut nobody else does," Lee remarked, whereupon Doret spoke up reassur-

ingly: "Dere's no use gettin' scare' lak dat, biccause nobody knows w'ere Lee's creek she's locate' but John an' me, an' dere's nobody w'at knows he mak' de strike but us four."

"That's right," said Gale. "The only other way across is by Black Bear creek, and there ain't a half dozen men ever been up to the head of that stream, much less over the divide, so I don't allow there's any use to fret ourselves."

They went on their way, traveling leisurely until late evening, when they camped at the mouth of the valley up which the miner's cabin lay. Camp had been made early at Gale's suggestion instead of pushing on a few miles farther, as Lee had intended, and now, when the cool evening fell and the draft quickened, it became possible to lay off gloves and headgear, so they sat about the fire, talking, smokingand rubbing their tired feet.

It is at such hours and in the smoke of such fires that men hark backward and bring forth the sacred, time worn memories they have treasured to turn them over fondly by the glow of dying

embers. "No Creek" Lee, the one eyed miner who had made this lucky strike, told in simple words of his long and solitary quest, when ill luck had risen with him at the dawn and misfortune



"Well, if Lee hasn't brought Runnion alona!"

had stalked beside him as he drifted and drank from camp to camp, while the gloom of a settled pessimism soured him, and men began to shun him because of the evil that seemed to follow in his steps.

"I've been rainbow chasin' forty years," he said, "and never caught nothin' but cramps and epidemics and inflammations. I'm the only miner in Alaska that never made a discovery of gold and never had a creek named after him."

"Is that how you got your namer" asked Runnion.

"It is. I never was no good to myself nor nobody else. I just occupied space."

Finally Gale arose, remarking sleepily that it was time to turn in if they wished to get any rest before the mos quitoes got bad again, then sauntered away from the fire and spread his blanket. The rest followed and made down their beds, then, drawing on gloves and hat nets and rellier themselves up in their coverings, fell to snoring-all except the trader, who lay for hours on his back staring up at the stars, as if trying to solve some riddle that baffled him.

They awoke early and in half an hour had eaten, remade their packs and were ready to resume their march. As they were about to start Gale said:

"I reckon we'd better settle right now who has the choice of locations when we get up yonder. I've been on stampedes where it saved a heap of bard feeling."

"I'm agreeable," said Stark. "Then there won't be any misunderstanding." The others, being likewise old at the game, acquiesced. They knew that in such cases grave trouble has often occurred when two men have cast eyes on the same claim and have felt the miner's causeless "hunch" that gold lies here or there or that the ground one of them covets is wanted by the

other. "I'll hold the straws," said Lee, "and every feller will have an even break." Turning his back on the others, he cut

four splinters of varying lengths, and, arranging them so that the ends peeped evenly from his big hand, he held them out.

"The longest one has the first choice, and so on," he said, presenting them to Gale, who promptly drew the longest of the four. He turned to Doret, but the Frenchman waved him courteously to Stark, and when both he and Runnion had made their choice Lee handed him the remaining one, which was next in length to that of the trader. Stark and Runnion qualified in the order they drew, the latter cursing his evil luck.

"Never min', ole man," laughed Poleon; "de las' shot she's de sure wan." They took up their burdens again and filed toward the narrow valley.

> CHAPTER VI. THE BURRELL CODE.

TOT until his dying day will Burrell lose the memory of that march with Necia through the untrodden valley, and yet its incidents were never clear cut nor distinct when he looked back upon them, but blended into one dreamlike procession, as if he wandered through some calenture where every image was delightfully distorted and each act deliciously unreal, yet all the sweeter from its fleeting unreality. They talked and laughed and sang with a rush of spirits as untamed as the waters in the course they followed. They wandered hand in hand into a land of illusions, where there was nothing real but love and nothing tangible but joy.

They held to the bed of the stream, for its volume was low and enabled them to ford it from bar to bar.

They had become so intimate by now as to fall into a whimsical mode of speech, and Necia reverted to a childish habit in her talk that brought many a smile to the youth's face. It had been her fancy as a little girl to speak in adjectives, ignoring many of her nouns, and its quaintness had so amused her father that on rare occasions, when the humor was on him, he also took it up. She now addressed herself to Burrell in the same manner. "I think we are very smarts to come

so far," she said. "You travel like a deer," he declared admiringly. "Why, you have tired me down." Removing his pack, he stretched his arms and shook out the ache in his shoulders.

He built a fire, then fetched a bucket of water from a rill that trickled down among the rocks near by. He made as if to prepare their meal, but she would have none of it.

"Bigs should never cook," she declared. "That work belongs to littles," then forced him to vacate her domain and turn himself to the manlier duties of chopping wood and boughs.

First, however, she showed him how to place two green foot logs upon which the teapot and the frying pan would sit without upsetting and how long she wished the sticks of cooking wood. Then she banished him, as it were, and he built a wickiup of spruce tops, under the shelter of which be piled thick, fragrant billows of "Yukon feathers."

He filled his chest deeply and leaned on his ax, for he found himself shaking as if under the spell of some great expectancy.

"Your supper is getting cold," she called to him.

He took a seat beside her on a pile of boughs where the smoke was least troublesome. He had chosen a spot that was sheltered by a lichen covered ledge, and this low wall behind, with the wickiup joining it, formed an inclosure that lent them a certain air of privacy. They ate ravenously and drank deep cupfuls of the unflavored tea. By the time they were finished the night had fallen, and the air was just cool enough to make the fire agreeable. Burrell heaped on more wood and stretched out beside her.

"This day has been so wonderful," said the girl, "that I shall never go to sleep. I can't bear to end it."

"But you must be weary, little maid," he said gently. "I am."

"Wait. Let me see." She stretched her limbs and moved slightly to try her muscles. "Yes, I am very tired, but not the kind of tired that makes you want to go to bed. I want to talk, talk, talk, and not about ourselves either, but about sensibles. Tell me about your people-your sister."

He had expected her to ask this, for the subject seemed to have an inexhaustible charm for her. She would sit rapt and motionless as long as he cared to talk of his sister, in her wide, medicative eyes the shadow of a great unvoiced longing. He told her of his father, the crotchety old soldier whose absurd sense of duty and whose elaborate southern courtesy had become a byword in the south. He told her household tales that were prized like pieces of the Burrell plate, beautiful heirlooms of sentiment that mark the

ing which there was much to recount of the Meades, from the admiral who fought as a boy in the bay of Tripoli down to the cousin who was at Annapolis, the while his listener hung upon his words hungrily, her mind so quick in pursuit of his that it spurred him unconsciously, her great, dark eyes har closed in silent laughter or wide with wonder, and in them always the warmth of the leaping firelight, blended with the trust of a newborn virginal love.

Then he began to laugh silently. "What is it?" she said curiously. "Oh, nothing! I was just wondering

what my straitlaced ancestors would say if they could see me now." "What do you mean?" the girl asked

in open eyed wonderment. "I don't care," he went on, unheeding her question. "They did worse things in their time, from what I hear." He leaned forward to draw her to

him. "Worse things! But we are doing nothing bad," said Necia, holding him off. "There's no wrong in loving."

"Of course not." he assured her. "I am proud of it," she declared. "It is the finest thing, the greatest thing, that has ever come into my life. Why, I simply can't hold it. I want to sing it to the stars and cry it out to the whole world. Don't you?"

"I hardly think we'd better advertise," he said dryly.

"Why not?" "Well, I shouldn't care to publish the tale of this excursion of ours. Would

"I don't see any reason against it. I have often taken trips with Poleon and been gone with him for days and days at a time."

"But you were not a woman then," he said softly.

"No, not until today, that's true. Dear, dear, how I did grow all of a sudden! And yet I'm just the same as was yesterday, and I'll always be the same, just a wild little. Please don't ever let me be a big tame. I don't want to be commonplace and ordinary. I want to be natural-and

good." "You couldn't be like other women," he declared, and there was more tenderness than hunger in his tone now as she looked up at him trustingly from the shelter of his arms. "It would spoil you to grow up."

"It is so good to be alive and to love you like this!" she continued dreamily, staring into the fire. "I seem to have come out of a gloomy house into the glory of a warm spring day, for my eyes are blinded, and I can't see half the beautifuls I want to, there are so many about me."

"Those are my arms," interjected the soldier lightly in an effort to ward off her growing seriousness.

"I've never been afraid of anything. and yet I feet so safe inside them. Isn't it queer?" The young man became conscious of

a vague discomfort and realized dimly that for hours now he had been smothering with words and caresses a something that had striven with him to be beard, a something that instead of dying grew stronger the more utterly this innocent maid yielded to him. It was as if he had ridden impulse with rough spurs in a fierce desire to distance certain voices and in the first mad gallop had lost them, but now far back heard them calling again more strongly every moment. A man's honor if old may travel feebly, but its pursuit is persistent. It was the talk about his people that had raised this uneasiness and indecision, he thought. Why had be ever started it?

"The marvelous part of it all," continued the girl, "is that it will never end. I know I shall love you always. Do you suppose I am really different from other girls?"

"Everything is different tonight-the whole world," be declared impatiently. "I've had a big handicap," she said, "but you must help me to overcome it. I want to be like your sister."

He rose and piled more wood upon the fire. What possessed the girl? It was as if she knew each cunning joint of his armor, as if she had realized her peril and had set about the awakening of his conscience deliberately and with a cautious wisdom beyond her years. Well, she had done it, and he swore to himself. Then he melted at the sight of her, crouched there against the shadows, following his every movement with her soul in her eyes, the tenderest trace or a smne upon ner

When she beheld him gazing at her she tilted her head sideways daintily,

like a little bird. "Oh, my! What a fierce you are all

Her smile flashed up as if illumined by the leaping blaze, and he crossed quickly, kneeling beside her.

He piled up a great sweet scented couch of springy boughs and fashioned

her a pillow out of a bundle of a ones, around which he wrapped khaki coat; then he removed he laced boots and, taking her the one in the palm of either hand be his head over them and kissed with a sense of her gracious and his own unworthiness. He a one of the big gray blankets one and tucked her in, while she sine delightful languor, looking up at all the time. "I'll sit here beside you for any

he said. "I want to smoke a bit." At times a great desire to feel in his arms, to have her on his he surged over him, for he had lively apart from women, and the some the night seemed to mock him was a strong man, and in his ran the blood of wnyward for who were wont to possess that a they conquered in the lists of mingled with which was the him spirited southern women who w occasion loved not wisely, accord Kentucky rumor, but only to Nevertheless they were hoper and women, if oversentiments had transmitted to him a berba chivalry and a high sense of home courage. Her love had placed a rier between them greater and insurmountable than her blood

He gently withdrew his fines her grasp and, seeing the other the wickiup, covered himself without disturbing her and fells It was early dawn when Neis to him. "I dreamed you had gone aun!

said, shivering violently and im close. "Oh, it was a terrible and ing"-"I was too tired to dream," less

"So I had to come and see ! were really here."

He quickly rekindled the far they made a hasty breakfast h the warmth of the rising sun be etrated the cold air they had do the ridge and obtained a wa view of broken country, the alight with the morning rays to leys misty and mystical.

"I wish Stark was not one di party," be said once. "He mi understand our being together

"But when he learns that we each other that will explain thing."

"I am not so sure. He doesn't you as Lee and Poleon and put ther do. I think we had been nothing at all about-you and any one."

They clung to the divide for hours, then descended into the a stream, which they followed joined a larger one a couple d below, and there, sheltered in the of whispering firs, they found eabin nestling in a narrow, in

"There's no one here," gleefully. "We've beat them hi beat them in!"

They had been walking rapid dawn, and, although Burrells showed 2 o'clock, she refuse for lunch, declaring that the might arrive at any moment, they went to the lower end Creek" Lee's location, where blazed a smooth spot on the stream side of a tree and work on at Necia's dictation. When finished she signed her name.



witnessed it, then paced of where he squared a sprace Lower center end stake of NECLA GALE she marked: discovery.

"Now you stake the mine," she said. "It's just si maybe better. Nobody can he shook his head. "I'm not going to stake

"You must!" she sparkle dying from ber e said you would, or I never so brought vou."

Continued next