

GOLD BOUND

A STORY OF ALASKAN GOLD COUNTRY

(Continued from last week)
 "Mail within an hour after landing is quick work," remarked Ducane casually.
 "Oh, Nome ain't so slow, friend. That beat you home by two days."
 Ducane's eyes rested on the inscription, scrawled with an indelible pencil: "Hold for Rupert Ducane, Gold Digger Hotel, Nome."
 "Was you expecting some other mail?" he asked.
 "Nothing else, thank you," returned Ducane. "I'd like to be shown my room."
 The proprietor disappeared behind a partition from which came a surprising jingling as of tin. The noise was explained when he emerged with a key attached by several stout links to an oblong sheet of tin. The fragment of a red label attested to the

fact that the latter had been hammered from a can which had once encased somebody's brand of tomatoes.
 "Why the attachment?" asked Ducane, as the proprietor led the way up the uncarpeted stairs.
 "New keys cost six bits each hereabouts. You won't be carrying this one away."
 When Ducane saw the room for which he was to pay four dollars a day, the key seemed somewhat superfluous. The walls of the partitions were scarcely above the reach of a tall man, and were fully two feet short of touching the ceiling. The room itself held a narrow bed, a washstand overhung with a cracked mirror, and a single rocking-chair.
 "My name is Timmons," divulged the proprietor in the doorway, after he had peered into the pitcher and tried the catch on the window. "I'm here to serve you, Mr. Ducane." There was more curiosity than hospitality in this offer.

"There's nothing now, Mr. Timmons." The new guest spoke with finality, as he settled into the chair.
 Perforce proprietor Timmons closed the door, and at once arose the sound of his heavy-soled shoes along the hall. But the next minute he tipped back, and knelt at the door, his eye glued to the keyhole.
 "He's taken it out!" was the message this member silently telegraphed. "He's looking at it!" Then came a pause in the optical report, which could only mean that the man within the room was doing nothing to reward the keyhole scrutiny.
 "Why in blue blazes don't he open it?" thought the proprietor. "Ain't that what letters are for? Sitting there holding it in his two hands, looking at it as if it was going to bite him!"
 A hohailed boot was planted heavily on the first step of the stairs that led up from the office. Before its mate had reached the second step, Timmons had straightened guiltily, and was also headed for the top of the stairs. He passed one of his regular guests with a nod that, although eurt, did not at all express his disappointment over being interrupted at his professional surveillance.
 But at the landing he paused for meditation. "Consarn that lunkhead for coming up just when the stranger was going to open it. I could have told by his face if it had been good news from the Sawtooth. Now I won't know whether to follow him or not. And that blubber-fed Eskimo who brought the note is soaked senseless in hootch over at the Snake Spit! Seems like, Sam Timmons, luck never was going to turn a flip-flop for you, though the country oozes gold for them in the know!"

of but two who knew that he was coming, and might guess that he would put up at the Gold Digger.
 A minute after Timmons had been forced, by the approach of a third person, to cease his spying, Ducane laughed at himself. "You're as bad as an old maid with her first love letter," he muttered. He tore open the envelope. After a single glance at the signature, he read:
 Dear Ducane: Paint Creek claims sluicing richer than ever, but Forster is just as much of a fool as what we told you. He won't bear to ditching Yukona Grey. The girl is in Nome, headed for the States. She'll be gone all winter. With Forster out of the way we can easy make a grand clean-up before she gets back.
 We accept the offer you made on the steamer. Forster leaves here the 15th over Heartbreak Trail. The Circle Ford is the place to get him. If you don't let your foot slip, a third of the clean-up is yours. There's a fortune in it.
 Keating and Jensen.
 Ducane uttered a whistle for the daring of the epistle as he finished its perusal. "They surely are a pretty pair of eutthroats," he mused. "The idea of putting a bid for murder down in black and white, using real names, and leaving it in a hotel mail box! Suppose old curiosity who runs this shebang had taken it into his head to open my billet-doux? A nice warm reception he could have fixed up for me."
 Only one explanation for the temerity of the writers came to him. He had heard that the rigors of northern winters had a peculiar effect upon the tempers and sensibilities of the men who struggled against them for fortune. If chance frowned upon them, there was no length to which some would not go to gain their ends. Evidently the disease carried no germ of caution. Each line of the missive he held in his hands was eloquent testimony that Keating and Jensen were in the last stages of desperation. The one normal suggestion in the note was the fact that they wanted some one else to do their low work for them. A man who took up with them on such a venture must have an exceedingly wide streak of the "don't care" in his make-up.
 For some minutes, Ducane pondered over the letter, reading it again and again, now frowning, then smiling. Finally he jerked his chair around until it faced the bed, upon which he spread a well-thumbed map of the Seward Peninsula. On the voyage from Seattle he had spent many hours studying this map, so that it did not take him long now to get his bearings. He soon had his pencil on the approximate location of Paint Creek, back in the chain of mountains that by geographers is called Kigluak, but which was known to prospectors by the name of Sawtooth. Thence he followed the trail to the Circle Ford, which the conspirators had designated as the most likely place for the passing of Forster.

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CHAPTER II.
 Ducane's deliberation in opening the letter which had awaited his arrival was in no wise due to any suspicion that he had an audience. He had sensed the curiosity of the boniface, but attached no importance to it, forgetting for the moment that he was in a land where the tundra's golden secrets might be disclosed by the overhearing of a chance exclamation or the accurate reading of a changed expression. That the man was sufficiently interested in his letter to have watched at the keyhole never entered his thoughts.
 A glance at the envelope showed the absence of postage stamp, and told him that the letter must have been brought in by messenger. Sundry prints of greasy fingers indicated that this messenger had no predilection for cleanliness, that he probably was a native. He ran over in his mind his acquaintances in the cape section of Alaska, and could think

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IF I knew you and you knew me,
 'Tis seldom we would disagree;
 But never having yet clasped hands,
 Both often fail to understand
 That each intends to do what's right,
 And treat each other "honor bright"
 How little to complain there'd be,
 If I knew you and you knew me.
 WHEN'ERE we ship you by mistake,
 Or in your bill some error make;
 From irritation you'd be free,
 If I knew you and you knew me,
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 "Count that day lost whose low descending sun" sees in our land a man without a gun.
 Mamma, be more careful when you are speaking of your age.
 "Well, now, what did I say?"
 "You said you remembered when eggs were sold at 8 cents a dozen."



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