

The TRAIL OF '98

A Northland Romance
by Robert W. Service
ILLUSTRATIONS BY IRWIN MYERS

CHAPTER X—Continued

Jim came in and sat down quietly. The old man had been very silent late. Back in Dawson there was a man whom he hated with the hate that only death can end, but for the peace of his soul he strove to conquer it.

"I've been a-thinkin' out a scheme," said Jim suddenly, "an' I'm a-goin' to put all of that twenty-five thousand of mine back into the ground. I can't quit this main business."

"What's your scheme, Jim?"

"It's jest this: I'm goin' to install a hydraulic plant on my Ophir creek claim. I'm goin' to begin a new era in Klondike mainin'."

"How are you going to do it?"

"Well, I've written out for piping an' a motor, an' next spring I hope I'll have the plant in workin' order. The stuff's on the way now. Hullo! Come in!"

The visitors were Mervin and Hewson on their way to Dawson. These two men had been successful beyond their dreams. They were offensively prosperous; they reeked of success.

As I went on with my packing I paid but little heed to their talk. What mattered it to me now, this babble of dumps and dust, of claims and clean-ups? I was going to thrust it all behind me, blot it clean out of my memory, begin my life anew.

Then all at once I pricked up my ears. They were talking of the town, of the men and women who were making it famous (or rather infamous), when suddenly they spoke the name of Locosto.

"He's gone off," Mervin was saying; "gone off on a big stampede. He got pretty thick with some of the Past River Indians, and found they knew of a ledge of high-grade, free-milling quartz somewhere out there in the Land Back of Beyond. So he's off with an Indian and one companion, that little Irish satellite of his, Pat Doogan. They'll be away all winter."

"What's become of that girl of his?" asked Hewson, "the last one he's been living with? You remember she came in on the boat with us. Poor little kid! That was a good little girl before he got after her."

Hewson growled like a wrathful bear, but Mervin smiled his cynical smile.

"Oh, you mean the Madonna," he said; "why she's gone on the dance halls."

They continued to talk of other things, but I did not hear them any more. I was in a trance, and I only aroused when they rose to go.

"Better say good-by to the kid here," said the Prodigal, "he's going to the old country tomorrow."

"No, I'm not," I answered sullenly; "I'm just going as far as Dawson."

He stared and expostulated, but my mind was made up. I would fight, fight to the last.

Berna on the dance halls—words cannot convey all that this simple phrase meant to me. For two months I had been living in a dull apathy of pain, but this news galvanized me into immediate action.

For although there were many degrees of dance-hall depravity, at the best it meant a brand of ineffaceable shame. She had lived with Locosto, had been recognized as his mistress—that was bad enough; but the other—to be at the mercy of all, to be classed with the harpies that preyed on the Man with the Poke, the vampires of the gold camp. Berna—Oh, it was unspeakable! The thought maddened me.

Bidding good-by to the big cabin, with my two partners looking ruefully after me, I struck off down Bonanza. All I thought of was Dawson and Berna.

I would make Berna marry me. I cared nothing for what had happened to her. I might be a pariah, an out-cast for the rest of my days; at least I would save her, shield her, cherish her. The thought uplifted me, exalted me. What did it matter if physically they had wronged her? Was not the pure, virgin soul of her beyond their reach?

I was just in time to see the last boat go out.

As I strolled the streets I saw many a familiar face. I went into the Parisian restaurant, and there was Madam, harder looking and more vulturous, a creature of rapacity and sordid lust. I marched up to her and asked abruptly:

"Where's Berna?"

had befallen me. Life could do no more to harm me. I had everything to gain and nothing to lose. I cared for no man. I despised them, and, to back me in my bitterness, I had twenty-five thousand dollars in the bank.

I was still weak from my illness and my long march had wearied me, so I went into a saloon and called for drinks. I felt the raw whisky burn my throat. I tingled from head to foot with a strange, pleasing warmth.

Where was that bitter feeling now? As I drank it all seemed to pass away. Magical change! What a fool I was! What was there to make such a fuss about? It was all a farce anyway.

What would it matter a hundred years from now? Again I drank.

How wonderfully strong I felt! I smashed my clenched fist against the bar. My knuckles were bruised and bleeding, but I felt no pain. I ached to fight some one. Then all at once came the thought of Berna. It came with tragical suddenness, with poignant force. Intensely it smote me as never before.

I was drunk, deplorably drunk, and I was bound for the Tivoli.

To the right as I entered the place was a palatial bar set off with burnished brass, beveled mirrors and glittering, vari-colored pyramids of costly liquors. Up to the bar men were belligerent, and the bartenders in white jackets were mixing drinks with masterly dexterity. To the left I had a view of the gambling room, a glimpse of green tables, of spinning balls, of cool men, with shades over their eyes, impassively dealing. There were huge wheels of fortune, keno tables, crap outfits, faro layouts, and, above all, the dainty, fascinating roulette. Everything was in full swing. In front of me was a double swing-door painted in white and gold, and, pushing through this, for the first time I found myself in a Dawson dance hall.

I sat down on a seat at the very back of the audience. Before me were rows after rows of heads, mostly rough, rugged and unwashed. Their faces were eager, rapt as those of children. They were enjoying, with the deep satisfaction of men who for many a weary month had been breathing the free, unbranded air of the Wild. The sight of a woman was thrillingly sweet; the sound of a song was ravishing.

Looking at many of those toll-grooved faces one could see that there was no harm in their hearts. They were honest, uncouth, simple; they were just like children, the children of the Wild.

A little girl was singing, a little, winsome girl with a sweet childish voice and an innocent face. How terribly out of place she looked in that palace of sin. She sang a simple, old-world song full of homely pathos and gentle feeling. As she sang she looked down on those furrowed faces, and I saw that many eyes were dimmed with tears.

As the last echo died away the audience rose as one man, and shower of nuggets pelted on the stage. Here was something that touched their hearts, stirred in them strange memories of tenderness, brought before them half-forgotten scenes of fireside happiness.

The curtain fell. Men were clearing the floor for the dance, so I went downstairs, pressed my way to the door, and stood there staring and swaying, but whether with wine or

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weakness I knew not. In the vociferous and flamboyant street I could hear the raucous voices of the spiclers, the jiggling tunes of the orchestras, the click of ivory balls, the popping of corks, the hoarse, animal laughter of men, the shrill, insane giggles of women.

And as I stood there wretchedly a timid little hand touched my arm.

It seemed as if my every word was like a stab to her. The sweet face was tragically wretched.

"Oh no," she answered, "it can never be. You think it can, but it can't. You could not forget. I could not forget. We would both be thinking; always, always torturing each other. Our home would be a haunted one, a place of ghosts. Never again can there be joy between you and me. It's too late, too late!"

She was choking back the sobs now, but still the tears did not come.

"How you have changed!" "Yes, Berna, I have been ill. But you, you too have changed."

"Yes," she said very slowly. "I have been—dead."

There was no faltering in her voice, never a throb of pathos. It was like the voice of one who has arisen from the grave.

"Come upstairs where we can talk," said she. So we sat down in one of the boxes, while a great freezing shadow seemed to fall and wrap us around. We were like two pale ghosts meeting in the misty gulfs beyond the grave.

"And why did you not come?" she asked.

"I would have sold my soul to come. I was ill, desperately ill, night to death. I was in the hospital. For two weeks I was delirious, raving of you, trying to get to you, making myself a hundred times worse because of you. But what could I do? I was out of my mind, weak as a child, fighting for my life. That was why I did not come."

When I began to speak she started. As I went on she drew a quick, choking breath. Then she listened ever so

"Thank God for that! And now you must say good-by. I would spoil your life. You know how proud I am, how sensitive. I would not give you such as I. Once I would have given myself to you gladly, but now—please go away. Leave me, please."

"Leave you—to what?" "To death, ruin—I don't know what. If I'm strong enough I will die. If I am weak I will sink in the mire."

"Berna, will you marry me?" "No! No! No!"

"Berna, I will never leave you. Here I tell you frankly, plainly, I don't know whether or not you still love me—you haven't said a word to show it—but I know I love you, and I will love you as long as life lasts. I will never leave you. Listen to me, dear: let us go away, far, far away. You will forget, I will forget. Come with me, O my love! Have pity on me, Berna, have pity. Marry me. Be my wife."

She merely shook her head, sitting there cold as a stone.

"Then," I said, "if you call yourself dishonored, I, too, become dishonored. We will run together, you and I. Oh, I would rather sink with you, dear, than rise with the angels. You have chosen—well, I, too, have chosen. You will see me steep myself in shame, then when I am a hundred shades blacker than you can ever hope to be, my angel, you will stoop and pity me. We'll go down together, dear. Hand in hand hellward we'll go down, we'll go down."

She was looking at me in a frightened way. A madness seemed to have gotten into me.

"Berna, you're on the dance halls. You're at the mercy of the vilest wretch that's got an ounce of gold in his filthy poke. They can buy you any they buy white flesh everywhere on earth. Berna, I can buy you. Come, dance with me, drink with me. We'll live, live. We'll eat, drink and be merry. On with the dance! Oh, for the joy of life! Since you'll not be my love you'll be my light-of-love. Come, Berna, come!"

I paused. With head lying on the cushioned edge of the box she was crying.

"Will you come?" I asked again. She did not move.

"Then," said I, "there are others, and I have money, lots of it. I can buy them. I am going down into the vortex. Look on and watch me."

I left her crying.

It is with shame I write the following pages. Would I could blot them out of my life. To this day there must be many who remember my meteoric career in the firmament of fast life. It did not last long, but in less than a week I managed to squander a small fortune.

I drink and I drink. It seems to me I am always drinking. Rarely do I eat. I am one of half a dozen spectacular "live ones." All the camp is talking of us, but it seems to me I lead the bunch in the race to ruin. I wonder what Berna thinks of it all. Was there ever such a sensitive creature? Where did she get that obstinate pride?

Remonstrantly the Prodigal speaks to town.

"Are you crazy?" he cries. "don't mind you making an ass of yourself, but lushing around all that coin the way you're doing—it's wicked. It makes me sick. Come home at once."

"I won't," I say. "What if I am crazy? Isn't it my money? When the money's gone I'll quit. I'm having the time of my life. Don't come spoiling it with your objections. He goes away shaking his head.

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JILTED, WASTES WEALTH, DIES IN POORHOUSE

For 25 Years Once Cultured Gentleman Lives Like a Bum.

New York.—"Love is like a dangerous germ. It is incurable. My romance has brought this horrible curse upon me. I am just a bum. If you go bankrupt in love's heart, there is absolutely no relief in store for the nonsuited. A lost love will always be dead."

These sentences occurred in a letter from Joseph W. Hall, member of a wealthy English upper-class family, who for 25 years lived the life of a vagrant in American streets. He wrote to Daniel W. Blumenthal, lawyer, of 233 Broadway. He wrote to Mr. Blumenthal on an average of twice a month for 25 years, but did not see him in all that time. Mr. Blumenthal sent him money.

Recently Mr. Blumenthal received this telegram:

"Joseph W. Hall died at county home, Gettysburg. As the body will be in your charge, if not claimed in 24 hours, it will be shipped to the state anatomical board, Philadelphia. Please wire at once what we should do."

Was Cultured Englishman.

Mr. Blumenthal cabled to a firm of solicitors in Worcester, England, and received a reply:

"I'll pay Hall's burial expenses. Regret death."

Twenty-five or thirty years ago Mr. Hall, a cultured gentleman in his forties who had graduated with honors from a university, came to New York with \$35,000 he had inherited.

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ATWATER KENT RADIO

HERE IT IS... from the LEADER OF RADIO

New Screen-Grid, Electro-Dynamic BATTERY SET

of course it's an Atwater Kent!

YOU families who haven't electricity—who use batteries to run your radio—how you will relish the news that Atwater Kent has ready for you a completely new battery set with all the very latest improved improvements.

It, too, is Screen-Grid. It, too, is Electro-Dynamic. It, too, has the power to leap across the map and bring in those far-off stations. It, too, has the depth and richness of tone, heretofore thought possible only in house-current sets.

It comes from the same 32-acre factory built by the good-will of \$2,500,000 owners of Atwater Kent Radio. It's made with the same painstaking care that keeps an

ON THE AIR—Atwater Kent Radio Hour, Sunday Evenings, 9:15 (Eastern Daylight Time). WJAZ network of N. B. C. Atwater Kent Mid-Week Program, Thursday Evenings, 10:00 (Eastern Daylight Time). WJZ network of N. B. C.

IN CABINETS

The best American cabinet makers—famous for sound design and sincere workmanship—are cooperating to meet the demand for Atwater Kent Screen-Grid Radio in fine cabinets like these.

Why Lawyers Suddenly Lost Interest in Case

Peter Guthrie Jones, the Baltimore historian, was talking about the scandal over American divorces that has broken out in Paris.

"It seems," he said, "that French lawyers and court officials were taking bribes to push these divorces through. Who laid bare the scandals? American lawyers. Because they were horrified at the sinfulness of this bribe-taking? No. It was because these cheap Paris divorces save divorcing Americans a lot of money at our American lawyers' expense."

"For American lawyers are expensive. That is their main characteristic. A chap stood up in an American court one day to answer a very serious embezzlement charge.

"How is it," the judge said to him, "that you have no lawyer to defend you?"

"The chap answered: "Your honor, as soon as they found out I hadn't stolen the money none of them would touch the case."

Spain-Africa Bridge Planned

Spain and Africa may be connected by a gigantic bridge across the strait of Gibraltar. If the plans submitted to the department of public works in Madrid by a Spanish engineer are accepted. He would support the structure on submerged but firmly anchored floats, and equilibrium would be maintained by opposing forces, one tending to bring the floats to the surface, and the other working to draw them to the bottom by cables. To prevent damage by the weather, parts of the bridge would be covered.

The goodness of our intentions never excuses the badness of our actions.

A little flattery now and then will often put the hardest men.

Cat Escapes From Eagle in Fight in Mid-Air

Rock Springs, Utah.—Aroused from peaceful slumber to find himself aloft in the talons of an eagle, a common house cat put up such a fight in mid-air that the eagle was forced to relinquish its hold. The cat dropping 100 feet to the ground, was uninjured except for numerous wounds inflicted by the talons.

Trapper, Moose Both Killed in Death Battle

Kemmerer, Wyo.—Evidence of a battle to the death between a man and a moose was found by a searching party seeking Alde Sanford, sixty-five-year-old Fall River trapper, whose horse returned riderless to its stall. The party found the moose in the forest of Fall River basin with a bullet hole through its heart and its throat cut. Nearby was Sanford's body brutally bruised. His skull was crushed.

Emotional Star

"Then she couldn't get a theater!" "No, her acting was in tents."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Remember, "mony a mickle mak's a muckle"; and further, beware of little expenses; a small leak will sink a ship.—Franklin.

For Best Results in Home Dyeing

You can always give richer, deeper, more brilliant colors to faded or out-of-style dresses, hose, coats, draperies, etc., with Diamond Dye. And the colors stay in through wear and washing!

Here's the reason. Diamond Dyes contain the highest quality aniline money can buy. And it's the aniline that counts! They are the very life of dyes.

Plenty of pure aniline make Diamond Dyes easy to use. They go on evenly without spotting or streaking. Try them next time and see why authorities recommend them; why millions of women will use no other dyes.

You get Diamond Dyes for the same price as ordinary dyes; 15c. at any drug store.

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For \$2 we will send you a sample of an imported fertilizing seed that will make you independent of using expensive fertilizing. This is something new in America. Full particulars sent with sample orders.

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AGENTS—I invite every man and woman now identified with direct selling to get in touch with me at once for participation in the greatest household novelty ever introduced.

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\$1,000 Saving! Without traveling troubles, iodine Bromine Saline baths recover health, rejuvenate beauty, charming figure, reduce excess weight. 2 1/2 lbs., \$1.25. Association 158 E. 26th St., New York.