

To the Man on Trail

The Christmas Bumper Was
Drunk to His Safe Get Away

By JACK LONDON

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"DUMP it in." "But, I say, Kid, isn't that going to be a little too strong? Whisky and alcohol's bad enough, but when it comes to brandy and pepper sauce and—"

"Dump it in. Who's making this punch, anyway?" And Malemute Kid smiled benignly through the clouds of steam. "By the time you've been in this country as long as I have, my son, and lived on rabbit tracks and salmon belly you'll learn that Christmas comes only once per annum. And a Christmas without punch is sinking a hole to bedrock with nary a pay streak."

"Stack up on that for a high eyard," approved Big Jim Belden, who had come down from his claim on Mazy May to spend Christmas and who, as every one knew, had been living the two months past on straight moose meat. "Hain't forgot the hooch we uns made on the Tanana, hev yeh?"

"Well, I guess yes! Boys, it would have done your hearts good to see that whole tribe fighting drunk, and all because of a glorious ferment of sugar and sour dough. That was before your time," Malemute Kid said as he turned to Stanley Prince, a young mining expert who had been in two years. "No white women in the country then, and Mason wanted to get married. Ruth's father was chief of the Tananas and objected, like the rest of the tribe. Stiff? Why, I used my last pound of sugar. Finest work in that line I ever did in my life. You should have seen the chase down the river and across the portage."

"But the squaw?" asked Louis Savoy, the tall French Canadian, becoming interested.

Then Malemute Kid, who was a born raconteur, told the unvarnished tale of the northland Lochinvar. More than one rough adventurer of the north felt his heartstrings draw closer and experienced vague yearnings for the sunnier pastures of the southland, where life promised something more than a barren struggle with cold and death.

"We struck the Yukon just behind the first ice run," he concluded, "and the tribe only a quarter of an hour behind. But that saved us, for the second run broke the jam above and shut them out. When they finally got into Nuklukyeto the whole post was ready for them. And as to the foregathering ask Father Roubeau here. He performed the ceremony."

The Jesuit took the pipe from his lips, but could only express his gratification with patriarchal smiles, while Protestant and Catholic vigorously applauded.

"By gar!" ejaculated Louis Savoy, who seemed overcome by the romance of it. "La petite squaw; mon Mason brav. By gar!"

Then, as the first tin cups of punch

went round, Bettles the Unquenchable sprang to his feet and struck up his favorite drinking song—

"There's Henry Ward Beecher
And Sunday school teachers,
All drink of the sassafras root;
But you bet all the same,
If it had its right name,
It's the juice of the forbidden fruit."

"Oh the juice of the forbidden fruit," roared out the Bacchanalian chorus—

"Oh the juice of the forbidden fruit;
But you bet all the same,
If it had its right name,
It's the juice of the forbidden fruit."

Malemute Kid's frightful concoction did its work. The men of the camps and trails unbent in its genial glow, and jest and song and tales of past adventure went round the board. Aliens from a dozen lands, they toasted each other and all. It was the Englishman, Prince, who pledged "Uncle Sam, the precocious infant of the new world;" the Yankee, Bettles, who drank to "The Queen, God bless her!" and together Savoy and Meyers, the German trader, changed their cups to Alsace and Lorraine.

Then Malemute Kid arose, cup in hand, and glanced at the greased paper window, where the frost stood full three inches thick—"A health to the man on trail this night; may his grub hold out; may his dogs keep their legs; may his matches never miss fire."

Crack! Crack! They heard the familiar music of the dog whip, the whining howl of the Malemites and the crunch of a sled as it drew up to the cabin. Conversation languished while they waited the issue.

"An old timer—cares for his dogs and then himself," whispered Malemute Kid to Prince as they listened to the snapping jaws and the wolfish snarls and yelps of pain which proclaimed to their practiced ears that the stranger was beating back their dogs while he fed his own.

Then came the expected knock, sharp and confident, and the stranger entered. Dazzled by the light, he hesitated a moment at the door, giving to all a chance for scrutiny. He was a striking personage and a most picturesque one in his arctic dress of wool and fur. Standing six foot two or three, with proportionate breadth of shoulders and depth of chest, his smooth shaven face nipped by the cold to a gleaming pink, his long lashes and eyebrows white with ice, and the ear and neck flaps of his great wolfskin cap loosely raised, he seemed, of a verity, the frost king, just stepped in out of the night. Clad outside his mackinaw jacket, a headed belt held two large Colt's revolvers and a hunting knife, while he carried, in addition to the inevitable dog whip, a smokeless rifle of the largest bore and latest pattern. As he came forward, for all his step was firm and elastic, they could see that fatigue bore heavily upon him.

An awkward silence had fallen, but his hearty "What cheer, my lads?" put them quickly at ease, and the next in-

stant Malemute Kid and he had gripped hands. Though they had never met, each had heard of the other, and the recognition was mutual. A sweeping introduction and a mug of punch were forced upon him before he could explain his errand.

"How long since that basket sled with three men and eight dogs passed?" he asked.

"An even two days ahead. Are you after them?"

"Yes; my team. Run them off under my very nose, the cusses. I've gained two days on them already—pick them up on the next run."

"Reckon they'll show spunk?" asked Belden in order to keep up the conversation, for Malemute Kid already had the coffee pot on and was busily frying bacon and moose meat.

The stranger significantly tapped his revolvers.

"When'd yeh leave Dawson?"

"Twelve o'clock."

"Last night?" as a matter of course.

"Today."

A murmur of surprise passed round the circle. And well it might, for it was just midnight, and seventy-five miles of rough river trail was not to be sneered at for a twelve hours' run.

The talk soon became impersonal, however, harking back to the trails of childhood. As the young stranger ate of the rude fare Malemute Kid attentively studied his face. Nor was he long in deciding that it was fair, honest and open and that he liked it. Still youthful, the lines had been firmly traced by toil and hardship. Though genial in conversation and mild when at rest, the blue eyes gave promise of the hard steel glitter which comes when called into action, especially against odds. The heavy jaw and square cut chin demonstrated rugged pertinacity and indomitability. Nor, though the attributes of the lion were there, was there wanting the certain softness, the hint of womanliness, which bespoke the emotional nature.

"So that's how me an' the ol' woman got spliced," said Belden, concluding the exciting tale of his courtship. "Here we be, dad," sez she. 'An' may yeh be d—,' sez he to her, an' then to me: 'Jim, yeh—yeh git outen them good duds o' yours. I want a right peart slice o' that forty acre plowed 'fore dinner.' An' then he turns on her an' sez, 'An' yeh, Sal—yeh sail inter them dishes.' An' then he sort o' sniffled an' kissed her. An' I was that happy—but he seen me an' roars out, 'Yeh, Jim!' An' yeh bet I dusted fer the barn."

"Any kids waiting for you back in the States?" asked the stranger.

"Nope. Sal died 'fore any come. That's why I'm here." Belden abstractedly began to light his pipe, which had failed to go out, and then brightened up with, "How 'bout yourself, stranger—married man?"

For reply he opened his watch, slipped it from the thong which served for a chain and passed it over. Belden pricked up the slush lamp, surveyed the inside of the case critically and, swearing admiringly to himself, handed it over to Louis Savoy. With numerous "By gars!" he finally surrendered it to Prince, and they noticed that his hands trembled and his eyes took on a peculiar softness. And so it passed from horny hand to horny hand—the pasted photograph of a woman, the clinging kind that such men fancy, with a babe at the breast. Those who had not yet seen the wonder were keen with curiosity; those who had become silent and retrospective. They could face the pinch of famine, the grip of scurvy or the quick death by field or flood, but the pictured semblance of a stranger woman and child made women and children of them all.

"Never have seen the youngster yet. He's a boy, she says, and two years old," said the stranger as he received the treasure back. A lingering moment he gazed upon it, then snapped the case and turned away, but not quick enough to hide the restrained rush of tears.

Malemute Kid led him to a bunk and bade him turn in.

"Call me at 4, sharp. Don't fail me," were his last words, and a moment later he was breathing in the heaviness of exhausted sleep.

"By love, he's a plucky chap!" commented Prince. "Three hours' sleep after seventy-five miles with the dogs, and then the trail again! Who is he, Kid?"

"Jack Westondale. Been in going on three years, with nothing but the name of working like a horse, and any amount of bad luck to his credit. I never knew him, but Sitka Charley told me about him."

"It seems hard that a man with a sweet young wife like his should be putting in his years in this God forsaken hole, where every year counts two on the outside."

"The trouble with him is clean grit and stubbornness. He's cleaved up twice with a stake, but lost it both times."

Here the conversation was broken off by an uproar from Bettles, for the effect had begun to wear away. And soon the bleak years of monotonous grub and deadening toil were being forgotten in rough merriment. Malemute Kid alone seemed unable to lose himself and cast many an anxious look at his watch. Once he put on his mittens and beaver skin cap and, leaving the cabin, fell to rummaging about in the cache.

(Concluded Friday)

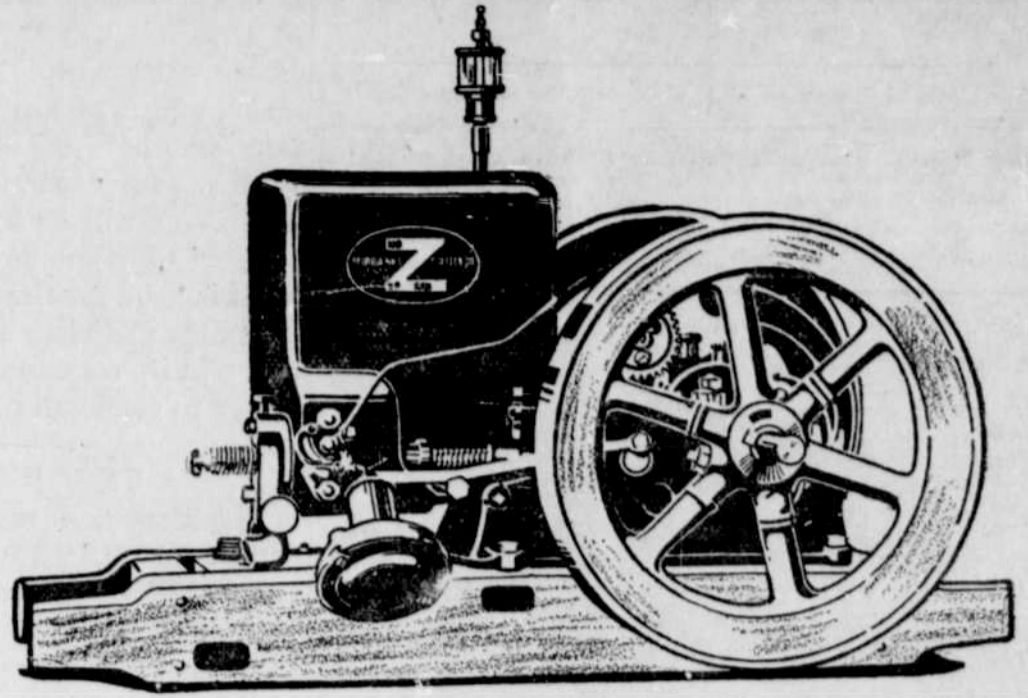
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Verd Hill

And wait to be

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There's a million precedents

For being a father.

Numberless men have been such

With more or less success.

Adam was the first one

And running down thru time

There's Jacob

Julius Caesar

Woodrow Wilson

Jess Willard

And many others whose names

We don't recall at this moment.

Napoleon

Washington

Pope Benedict

The official records show

Were childless

No doubt much to their regret.

Women can never be fathers

Or at least none of them

Have ever been

Which may save man

From eventual extinction

In this feminine period

When the female of the species

Is rushing in

Where angels fear to tread.

Man may be classed

As a non-essential

But he can't be abolished

Or smothered at birth

For the reason above stated.

K. C. Eldridge

Has a large house

With a lot of rooms in it

And he likes immensely

To invite in

A bunch of friends

And show 'em a good time.

The other evening

He did so

With great success

And do you know

At one time in the morning

After the 5½ course supper

Had been served

And when the tobacco smoke

Got so thick

You could skate on it

All the 25 present

Took fifteen minutes relaxation

And fought the Huns

And everybody was within

Fifteen miles of Berlin

And about ready to end the war

When Mrs. K. C.

Came in

And said it was time

To go home

And the kaiser escaped

In the barrage of tobacco smoke.

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