

OLE'S EUREKA

By MARCELLE REBER.

Mrs. Pembroke paused a moment, wiped her glasses, adjusted them more securely on her ample nose and her sharp eyes looked up the road.

Through the small cloud of dust she saw the day shift straggling homeward from another day of toil at the Polar Star mine, with here and there a dinner pail or basket glinting in intermittent splashes of light in the setting sun.

Higher up, where the jack pines and hemlock boulders pangled over the face of the mountain side, another form had come into view—a tall, slender man, his shoulders rocking slightly under the weight of the heavy pack-sack. In his hand a pick balanced lightly as he wound his way along. Then he caught the first sight of the homeward miners. A deafening roar of derisive laughter, followed by the host of lusty voices, which smote the woman's ears as she stood listening.

"Hello, Ole!" called one of the crowd. "Find that mother lode yet been a lookin' fer?"

"Great Napoleon! There's no misadoubtin' that none! Sure as you live it's Ole Oleson, hot-footin' it back from the 'rusty' hills, and the men from the Polar Star are a kiddin' him because he ain't found that dratted old mother lode. Shuck that dratted old mother lode. Shucks! There ain't no sech a thing," sighed Mrs. Pembroke, spying a weed or two in her petunia bed, stooping down to get them.

"Well, I ain't agoin' to say that Ole Oleson is loco, with all his galavantin' around in 'mule stubbornness' as the men folk call it, huntin' fer that gold. Come right down to horse sense, he's a carryin' more right now than the hull pannel of them take so much pleasure in kiddin' the poor fellow. And, the durn fools think because he's a poor Swede, gives them double license to berate him. Well, what luck this time, Ole?" asked Mrs. Pembroke, as the big fellow came through the gate.

The man's bronze face broke into a shadow of a smile. Closing the gate, he set the pick down and slid the heavy pack from his shoulders and rested them against the

picket fence at his feet.

"I reckon you're as hungry as a she wolf. You sure do look all tuckered out."

He sagged wearily against the fence before answering, mopping his streaming brow with a faded red bandanna.

"I wouldn't mind it so much, Mrs. Pembroke—the luck and that—if it was not for the Polar Star outfit. You heard them, I suppose? They flung it at me hard down the road a while ago, and the whole thing is passed along. It is not the years I have wasted, it is not the money I have spent grubstaking myself; it is just admitting I'm beat, and the whole outfit rubbing the sore."

"Never mind! Ole, you are still young and strong, and, I dare say, your two hands are still willin' to find something to do to get a rise in the world and settle down comfortable and be happy the rest of your life to make up for the days of weary toil and disappointments of the hills. Come on in the house and refresh the inner man with a bite of real vittals, and you'll feel a lot more cheerful," coaxed Mrs. Pembroke.

Ole followed the woman, after a long wistful look at the fast blurring hills.

A musical laugh fell upon his ears, and a golden-haired girl came through the doorway.

"Sylvia!" exclaimed Ole, "I was wondering where you were hiding." "I heard you talking to mother. Had to rub my eyes to make sure it was really you. Didn't strike it, I suppose, Ole?"

Instinctively the girl took her answer from his face. She flushed a little as she sat down on a low stool by the bay window, switching the subject hurriedly before the man's lips could make a reply.

"I am getting along wonderfully well with my lessons, Ole, and the punctuations don't bother me hardly any at all. It will take your breath away, honest it will."

Her seventeen years had dowered the girl with a wild rose type of beauty, as she sat there softly folding dainty creases in her smooth, white apron; all the frank innocence of the child spoke in her fair young eyes. She watched him half critically with that subtle, mysterious look which springs up from the depths of the new woman's heart.

"I am glad that you are making headway with the books, Sylvia. I was thinking sometime ago, that you are very quick to learn," he

stammered, for he was a trifle shy under the clear gaze of her blue eyes.

"Just think of it, Ole. Sylvia has learned all the books that you gave her and is a hungerin' for more. It surely does beat everything how that girl drinks up learning. I never had a chance when I was her age, and after her papa died, it was all work, nothing but work, and Sylvia had to help, especially when she was old enough to wait table and do other things. Yes, just think of it: Sylvia wrote a letter last week. Did you get an answer to it, dear?"

The flush of deep crimson which flooded the girl's face was not lost on the man, who was on the point of speaking but fell silent again.

Ole Oleson boarded with M. S. Pembroke, when he was not scouring the hills for the mother lode. Four years ago, his first venture into that part of the country, while coming down a narrow trail which led to the river, a rattle snake rolled from the steep bank on the trail, coiled and struck him ere he was aware of it. He hurried on to the river. There he found a camping party, who, seeing that he was ill, rushed to him and inquired what was the matter.

"A rattler's got me," he told them; then he heard a wild cry, and before he knew what was happening a young girl had thrown herself upon her knees, unlacing his heavy boots. At that moment a terrible fit of nausea seized him; when he recovered, he learned that the girl had insisted in sucking the deadly soger's poison from the wound, saving his life. The girl was Sylvia. He loved her at first sight, and his love grew as the four years passed by.

He knew that the Polar Star did not have the mother lode. He had always felt sure of that. He had probed around on the breast of old Mother Earth, trying to find its hidden place, but, after four years of almost constant search, he was defeated.

Oh, how he wanted gold, and lots of it, for Sylvia! It was always for Sylvia. He would lie under the star-jewelled sky, alone in the solitary hills, and dream wonderful dreams that gold could make come true.

He had not confessed his love to Sylvia. Well had he concealed it. Did she love him? Could it be possible that she loved Hal Templeton? Was it to Hal that she had written? A great struggle was

going on in the heart of the man. It was Sylvia's mother who came to the rescue.

"Sylvia, do you know that Ole's given up searching for the mother lode?"

The girl sank back in the depths of the window, confused, her face flushing very pink.

"Oh, Ole—it don't mean you have stopped the search? I was feeling sure that you would find it—that—maybe you wasn't gold locoed after all." She stopped abruptly, seeing that her words hurt him.

"Yes, Sylvia, I am planning to head back east in the morning. It had to come. It has been home here, with your mother and you, all these years. I am likely to miss you both."

The girl was tracing a pattern with her fingers on the floor of the window, her eyes downcast.

"I was thinking—maybe you would find a job at the Polar Star."

"I couldn't stay, Sylvia, and—the Polar Star—well, I couldn't stand going there. Perhaps, now that you write letters—" he halted at the open door, "you might write a line to me—sometime?"

Again the pink flush flamed over her face, but she did not answer.

Out in the garden, Ole, after pulling hard on his cigar, awoke to the fact that it was not lighted. Soon the usual clattering sound from the kitchen floated out to him. They were clearing away the dinner things. He knew they would be out in the garden soon. In his present mood he did not feel inclined for conversation. When the women sought the cool, fresh air, he had taken himself off to his tidy little room upstairs. Sylvia, listening to his heavy steps, felt that he had purposely avoided her, and she knew that he was gathering his few belongings. He did not appear downstairs again that evening.

"Sylvia! Oh Sylvia! Where in the world has that girl run to? Hey, Sylvia! Won't you come and say good-bye to Ole?"

They waited, but the girl was nowhere to be seen or heard. Mrs. Pembroke grew flustered, wiping her face with an ample fold of her snowy apron.

"I declare it isn't like her to be runnin' off that way. I suppose she is out of sight studying that precious book."

Ole had picked up his luggage irresolutely; now he laid it down

again. "It would be too bad to go away without saying good-bye to Sylvia. I cannot do it, after all these years of splendid comradeship."

Something impelled him in the direction of the old trail that wound upward, winding along in the rear of the scattered row of tumbled down mining cabins. For years it had been abandoned by the men, coming and going, the main road having long since taken its place.

Somehow, Hal Templeton—son of part owner of the Polar Star mine, with his handsome, cynical face and flattering tongue, popped into his mental vision. And Sylvia, he thought, had not cared when Hal was packed off to an eastern college. Sylvia had written to him then? That she received a reply was not known. But she cared! Her warm blushes had told him so.

Every nook and cleft of the winding trail held sweet memories. It had lured them both for many a quiet afternoon of chatter when he had been forced to rest up a day or two from the laborious task in the hills. Here he had listened to her first lessons from the precious books he had bought for her. Why had she fled from him without a word?

On and on he wound his way to where the riotous vine maple sprang nearly waist high. Ole stopped dead still, arrested by a small white scrap of paper lodged in a small scrub oak bush. A minute, and he was wearily marching on again. He reached forth for the fluttering slip of white, turning it over in his fingers. On it were a few words, in pencil. Before their meaning dawned upon him, he spelled out the words, "I love you, and I miss you very, very much."

That was all. He could gather nothing from the washed out lines below. The balance was gone. A give away bit, torn from one of Sylvia's letters. She had copied from this the very one she had sent to Hal Templeton.

Shamed-faced, he turned about, searching for such other portions as might be lurking around, swept there by the breeze. About one hundred feet farther along another shred caught his eye. Reaching for it, off the upper edge of the trail, he slipped, a stone rolling under his foot. He kicked at it. Suddenly he hurried himself downward, a low, wild cry escaping his lips.

"The rock is quartz! Gold-bearing quartz! Why, it's gold!" He

fell upon his knees and his wild hungry stare of fascination gave place to hot, ferocious yearning.

He stood up, staggering like a man drunk on too much old wine, with the tightly clinched rock deep in the palm of his hand. How did it get there? His heart sank for a minute. Was it just a fragment from the Polar Star, cast there from the pocket of a passing miner? No, his experienced eyes told him no. It was not possible.

He stood waist deep in the tangled vine maple, a half-dozen yards from where he had seen it. Nowhere was there any sign of a ledge or boulder within the sweep of his vision.

A loud thumping noise smote upon him—what was it? He listened; it was the loud beating of his own heart. Over head a band of squawking ravens was sailing by in search of the putrid odor that evidently had reached the acute member by which they were led, aroused him from the trance-like state into which his find had plunged him. The next instant a blind rage seized him. He had told the old wise heads that he'd find the mother lode.

Madly he sprang through the twisted vine maple thicket, now throttling spear oak and chickpeppin burs and brambles with his bare hands, his lips burning dry. He had ceased to voice his thoughts any longer.

Battering his way through, he searched wild-eyed and panting.

"I'll find you, old mother lode, and prove I'm right. Oh, so I'm a young pip-in-jay, am I?" he muttered aloud, "and a smart aleck. I'll show you," he gloated.

Once he stopped, exhausted, excitement oozing from every pore and fibre of his being. He renewed his strength and rushed on again. He parted through the maple and spear oak. Ahead of him loomed a cliff of rock. He battered his way perilously to it and around it to a low humpy ridge.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, in supreme satisfaction. "Here you are, all screened off on both sides. Carefully he picked his way over and around the ridge, running an experienced eye along the broken face of the great dyke. Still he searched. He gave a wild cry there! There was the fissure! A wide ribbon-like band of glittering yellow met his startled gaze, growing wider as it followed the great porphyry contact westerly—just as

he visioned it would be when he found it. He gave a mad shout of joy.

Ole's faculties were slow in returning. He had been gold starved so long. Now he was stunned and bewildered. Finally he steadied himself and began to examine the exposed portions of the mother lode, carefully gauging its course and richness, scrambling to the highest point of the ridge, where, for the first time, he got his direction.

He saw that he was on a parallel line with the dyke of the Polar Star mine, the same being a series of shoots which intruded through the fissure of the dacite wall from the mother lode. He mentally surveyed the distance from the Polar Star mine and smiled the golden smile of one who has won a great victory.

All at once the great yellow lode was blotted out. Down the trail came Sylvia. He saw her wearily throw herself on the ground in a fit of violent sobs. Ole stumbled quickly downward, trying to find a way out of the maples to the trail, and in a few minutes was at her side.

"Sylvia! Sylvia!" he cried, "why did you run away from me?"

The girl turned up her head, disclosing a tear-stained face. The next moment she turned away and looked far across the hills.

"Go away, Ole! Please go," she cried, her voice shaking with emotion.

"But, Sylvia—I shall not go away—for some days, at least." He watched her, amazed, his voice had thrilled with something of the old excitement. Sylvia moved slightly, but did not lift her head.

"I mean, Ole, I—I mean—I did not want you to see me, so—so—I came up here," and she burst into tears.

Ole came nearer, touching her shoulder, cut to the soul by her distress.

"Sylvia?"

No answer, save the convulsive sobs.

"If it was about the letter, now? You see, I have no claim to be angry—what if you did write to Hal Templeton?"

"I—I did not write to—to Hal! It was to you, Ole. Didn't you teach me to read and write?"

Now he strode near, his heart beating wildly.

"To me, Sylvia? You wrote that letter to me?"

But she looked afar over the

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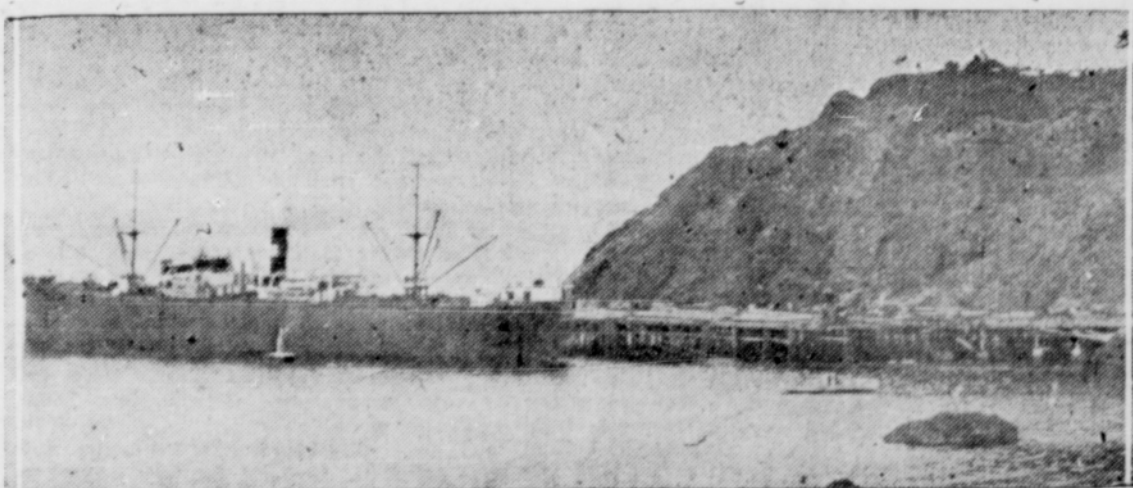
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