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CHAPTER I.

TOM SCOTT TO THE RESCUE.

"Here's Dyea, and this is Skagway. The White pass starts off here and goes right plumb over the mountains like this—"

And the speaker made a bold stroke with a huge piece of chalk with which he was ornamenting the floor of the village store in Merrivale, where everything was dispensed from postage stamps to lace curtains.

Clustered about his kneeling figure were a dozen men of all ages whose eyes were eagerly following the rude map of Alaska which Hank Merritt was drawing for their benefit.

For stories of the wonderful wealth of this far-off Eldorado had penetrated even this remote place among the hills of New Hampshire, and the Globe reports of the lucky strikes made by venturesome argonauts had stirred the blood of every man in the village until the riches of the Yukon valley had become the all-engrossing topic among those who met every evening at this public rendezvous to pass an hour or two after their day's toil was finished.

"This is where you strike the lake," he continued, "and then it's 'bout all water the rest of the way, near as I can make out. Gold is so spicdy they dig it out just as easy as we spicdy up worms to go fishing with. Gee whizz! I'd like to try it if it wasn't so darned far off an' didn't cost so much to get there."

The arrival of the mail interrupted his artistic efforts, and when the handful of letters had been put away the postmaster was called upon to read aloud from the papers anything new regarding the favorite topic.

"The steamer P. W. Wenre had eight miners on board who brought out a total of \$460,000. Others had \$10,000 to \$30,000 apiece, and some refused to give their figures. The steamer Portland brought down \$1,000,000. One man got \$216 from a pan of dirt, and two miners cleaned up \$6,000 in a single day's work."

As the reader paused one might have heard a pin drop, so intense was the silence for fully a minute. Then a dozen voices broke out in exclamations of amazement and disbelief and in the turmoil nothing intelligible could be distinguished.

There was one listener, however, who said nothing, but after the rest had calmed down a bit he secured a copy of the paper and hastened to the farm where he was employed with a wild impulse surging through his brain. In his little room under the eaves he eagerly devoured the article he had heard at the store, and in another column he found an interview with one of the pioneers of Dawson City, giving full details as to the proper outfit and its cost.

It was midnight when the stalwart young farmer sought his couch, and for the first time in his healthy life sleep refused to come to him, for he had made up his mind to leave the village where the greater part of his youth had been spent and seek his fortune in this distant land, where a stout heart and strong hands seemed able to force Nature to relax her icy grip on her golden stores.

Tom Scott's life had been an uneventful one. He was the only son of a sea captain and until the death of his mother they lived on Cape Cod. Then an uncle took him on his farm at Merrivale and his father continued his roving life. A few years ago, however, Obad Rider, a native of Merrivale, who had sailed with Tom's father as mate, returned to the village with a story which made a great sensation at the time. It was to the effect that Capt. Scott had deserted his ship at San Francisco and absconded with a large sum of money belonging to the owners.

Tom was a lad of 18 at the time, but few eye-witnesses would ever forget the scene when he hurried the lie at the brawny sailor and fought like a young tiger until overpowered by the brute strength of his father's defamer, whose nose was disfigured for life in the encounter and who vowed vengeance for his injury.

This was four years ago, but Tom Scott still felt the disgrace cast upon his name. His uncle had now been dead over three years, and Tom had saved the wages paid him by the farmer for whom he had worked since that time, until he possessed about \$400, which was deposited in the village savings bank. This would buy him a miner's outfit, but how to reach the far northwest was the problem.

His sleep was troubled that night, but with the morning came the determination to start at once for Boston and trust to fortune to join one of the numerous expeditions organizing there.

His announcement was received with amazement, but Tom Scott was a man of prompt action, and that afternoon saw him in Boston. He had been in the city several times before, and had no difficulty in finding a respectable hotel where the rate was within his means, but by the time he had eaten his supper it was growing dark and a thick snow-storm set in. He determined, however, to lose no time in his search, and made his way to the water front, where he had no doubt he could obtain all the needed information.

Atlantic avenue was practically deserted when he reached it, and the big flakes had covered the ground with a white mantle which made his footsteps inaudible as he walked along, not without a slight feeling of uneasiness as he thought of his little capital strapped about his waist under his clothes in a waterproof belt which had been his first purchase.

As he approached a saloon from which came a confused murmur of voices and a sharp clinking of glasses, two men came out directly in front of him and turned in the direction in which he was walking, being only a few feet in advance. Coming from the well-lighted saloon as they did into the thick storm, they failed to notice Tom, and upon this fact his whole future depended, although he was far from suspecting such an improbable thing at the time.

"I tell you he's going on that bark to San Francisco," said the taller of the two men, eagerly. "He's bound for the Klondike, and he must have a fat roll with him. I heard him say he would buy his outfit out there. We can lay for him on the dock when he is going on board."

"It's a risky job," replied the other, nervously. "Oh, what's the matter with you?" was the angry rejoinder. "Nothing, but we take great risks. I don't like it."

"There's no risk at all," urged the other. "All we have to do is just tap him on the head and go through him. The whole thing won't take a minute, and we can be at the West end before he knows what struck him. I'm going to have his stuff, and if you want to go back on me, I'll—"

The rest of the sentence was indistinguishable. The word Klondike had naturally attracted Tom's attention, and he had involuntarily strained to catch the men's conversation, but he felt a sudden thrill of horror as he realized the full import of what he had just heard.

What could he do? That the men were planning a robbery, if not a murder, was evident. He could not warn the intended victim, for he had no means of finding or knowing him, and to lose sight of the men to find an officer was out of the question. Then the athletic young fellow set his teeth and shrugged his broad shoulders, while under his gloves a pair of hard fists balled up involuntarily.

To some it might have occurred to pay no attention to the matter, but Tom Scott was of different caliber. It was true that he had seen little of the great world, but he was brave to a fault, and nature had added a tall, well-knit frame to this gift. He determined to prevent the villains from accomplishing their purpose if it lay in his power, and had no doubt of his ability to do so.

Fearful that the men might turn and see him, he slackened his pace and allowed them to gain several yards on him, keeping close to the buildings himself and hoping each moment to see an officer.

But none appeared, and soon the two thugs turned into a dark, narrow alleyway, which led to one of the wharves, and were lost to view.

Tom was in a quandary. To venture into the place was to invite attack from the villains, and he decided to wait in a convenient doorway until the intended victim came along or an officer should appear to whom he could tell his story.

A few yards to the right he found a sheltered recess in front of a block, and took up his station, keeping a sharp lookout in the direction of the saloon, where he naturally supposed the men was enjoying himself. A short distance away a street lamp shone dimly through the falling snow, and threw a broad band of light on the sidewalk, across which no one could pass without being seen by him.

It was a situation to try the stoutest nerves, for Tom was unarmed, and the man he was trying to save might be intoxicated, while the two robbers would surely be provided with all the tools of their trade. A dozen schemes flashed through his mind as he gazed in the shadow, only to be discarded as useless. The time dragged slowly enough, but his resolution did not falter.

Suddenly a dark figure came staggering across the lighted space and Tom's heart gave a bound. Was this his man? Would he have sense enough to understand his danger?

No, the drunken sailor lurched heavily along and turned up a side street a short distance beyond the alleyway, where the men were hidden.

Another and still another followed at intervals, but none paused on their way and Tom began to wonder if his ears had not played him false. He was beginning to waver when a slight crunching noise at his left caused him to turn quickly in time to see the form of a man disappear in the alleyway, having approached from the opposite direction while Tom was looking up the avenue.

What was to be done? He stood for a moment with his heart beating tumultuously and every nerve tingling. Then from the dark opening

came a muffled cry, followed by an oath and the sound of a struggle.

Tom cast one quick look about him. No one was in sight and the next instant he had pulled off his gloves and darted up the passageway at full speed.

The darkness was intense for a short distance, but after a few yards he emerged into a small open space in the midst of which the three men were writhing and twisting in desperate struggles. Tom was unable to distinguish one from another, but as he reached the spot one man tore himself free and shouted:

"Help! Police! Stand back or I'll shoot—"

The rest of his threat was drowned by a heavy blow from a blackjack, which knocked the weapon from his hand.

"Stop!" cried Tom, springing toward the assailant.

He was too late, for a second blow stretched the stranger senseless and bleeding on the snow, and with an angry snarl the robber turned just as Tom's right fist shot out with tremendous force.

Down went the man like a stricken ox and Tom grappled with the other with a shout of triumph. His blood was up, and, lifting his smaller opponent bodily from the ground, he shook him as a mastiff would a terrier.

"Hands off!" panted the helpless man, fiercely. "Curse you, what are you trying to do?"

He was not long in doubt, for Tom buried him against the side of a stone building with such force that he fell in an inert heap and lay motionless.

Tom turned to see what had become of the taller man, but at that instant he felt a sharp pain in his side and a strong hand seized him by the throat and beat him backwards, while a hoarse voice hissed in his ear:

"Take that for your pains, you meddling fool!"

With a desperate effort he twisted himself free from his assailant, springing aside barely in time to escape another lunge of the murderous knife he had just felt.

Again the fellow lunged viciously at him, but Tom caught his wrist, and a desperate struggle ensued. Although much the stronger man, Tom found it no easy task to avoid the blade, and the two swayed back and forth over the snow, the man trying to free his hand for a decisive stroke, and Tom bending all his efforts to prevent it. Soon, however, his iron grip began to tell, and he felt his enemy's muscles relax. Putting all his strength into a supreme effort, he wrenching the knife free, exclaiming:

"I've got you now, you murderer, and I don't leave you till you are behind the bars!"

But even in the moment of his victory he felt a cold ring of steel pressed against his ear, and these ominous words sounded behind him:

"Hold up your hands, mister, or you're a dead man! Quick, I say, or I'll shoot!"

It was a moment of fearful peril. There was murder in the man's tones, and Tom felt it. He released his grasp slowly, and the larger man pushed him suddenly backward, crying:

"Shoot him, you idiot!" His action saved Tom's life, for the other man pressed the trigger at the same instant, the bullet passing a foot in front of the young man's face, and flattening against the wall at his side. Tom still retained the knife, and with a quick slash he struck the hand which held the revolver, causing the owner to drop it, with a yell of pain, and dash off toward the street at full speed, followed by his companion, who had evidently no desire to face Tom alone.

As the men disappeared he turned, to find the stranger he had rescued groaning with pain, and trying to get on his feet.

"Take my arm and see if you can't stand," said Tom. "Are you badly hurt?"

"My right arm is helpless, and my head goes round like a top," was the faint reply; "but I'm coming round all right, I guess. I got a nasty clip from one of them cutthroats. I came to just as that hay pulled his gun on you, and I tried to get up, but everything swam round so I couldn't. You're a plucky chum—"

There was a suspicious moisture in his eyes, as he turned hastily and left the room, leaving Tom to his pleasant thoughts.

He could hardly realize all that had been crowded into the few hours since his arrival, and his sleep was broken by fitful dreams, in which robbers and robbers played prominent roles.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

DOES COFFEE AGREE WITH YOU? If no, drink Grain-O—made from pure grains. A lady writes: "The first time I made Grain-O I did not like it but after using it for one week nothing would induce me to go back to coffee." It nourishes and feeds the system. The children can drink it freely with great benefit. It is the strengthening substance of pure grains. Get a package today from your grocer, follow the directions in making it and you will have a delicious and beautiful table beverage for old and young.

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"Can you get up?" interrupted Tom, lastly. "If you can I'll just find that pistol and we'll get away from this place. If not, I'll leave you the weapon and go after help. I'm out in the side, but I don't know how bad it is."

A moment's search discovered the weapon, and after assisting the injured man to his feet they were moving slowly up the wharf when a bright ray of light suddenly penetrated the darkness and a tall policeman appeared before them, throwing the searching beams of a dark lantern upon them.

"What's going on down there?" he demanded. "Didn't I hear a shot just a moment ago?"

Tom was about to reply when his companion exclaimed:

"Two men knocked me down and would have robbed me but for this man here, who pitched into them. They both ran up this way."

"I passed two men," said the officer. "One was tall and the other short. Were they the ones?"

Upon receiving an affirmative reply, he turned on his heels and dashed off in pursuit of the evildoers, who by this time had made good their escape.

As the avenue was reached a herald happened along and Tom hailed it as his companion's suggestion.

"Take us to the police station on Battery street," he said to the driver, and in a few moments they stood before the official in a well-lighted room telling their story. A physician was in attendance upon a prisoner and he soon made a rapid examination of their wounds.

"A few strips of plaster will fix your scalp all right," said he to the elder man, "and your arm is only numb from the blow. You'll be all right to-morrow." Then turning to Tom, he added:

"You have had a very narrow escape from death, young man. That knife was meant for your heart. As it is, it glanced on a rib and there is no damage done. It is only a slight flesh wound, which will give you no trouble whatever."

A few moments sufficed to dress the cut properly, and after turning over the knife and revolver to the authorities, to aid in identifying the two robbers, Tom was about to start for his hotel when his new acquaintance said, bluntly:

"Hold on a minute. I'd like to know the name of the man who stood by an old chap to-night and saved my life. How did you happen along so handy like?"

"My name is Tom Scott, and I happened to hear those men planning to rob somebody, so I kept an eye on them. That's all."

"No, it ain't all, by a long chalk," was the hearty response. "You did more'n that, and I might be chucked into the dock before this only for your pluck. My name is John Avery, and I'm pretty well known along the water front as a man of my word. If I can ever do you a good turn you can count on me. Live here in the city?"

"No, I'm just from New Hampshire," said Tom.

"Looking for work?"

"No, I'm trying to find a chance to get to the Klondike."

"Then, by thunder, you needn't look any longer," was the prompt reply. "Because I'm bound there myself, and you shall go with me if you want to. I wouldn't ask a better mate than you. Where are you stopping?"

Tom mentioned the name of his hotel and the other said at once:

"All right. Let's go there and talk this thing over."

Half an hour later they were seated in the smoking room and Tom's modest story was told. When he had finished his friend said:

"That's a good, straight yarn, and some day I may have one to tell you that will open your eyes. All I need to say now is that my name is John Avery, I'm an old 39-er without wife or child, and I'm bound for the Klondike to get my pile. It's waiting for me there, all right. I've taken passage on a sailing vessel because I like the water and hate the cars. Besides, there is no use getting there before spring. I will pay your passage out on the same vessel, and you can keep your little pile. If the Yukon camps are anything like the old days in California, you'll need it all and more, too. We'll call it a loan or anything you like, and you can pay me when you strike a rich claim."

Tom protested faintly, but he was overwhelmed at the prospect, and soon yielded.

"We'll see about getting your passage the first thing in the morning," said Avery. "and now, as my old head is giving me particular fits, I guess I'll get a bed here and turn in. I was calculating to sleep on board to-night, but I'll wait for daylight before I try that trip again."

Then, pressing Tom's hand warmly, the old miner said:

"Good night, mate. You oughter sleep well after saving a man's life, and money, too. Do you know I have \$5,000 in my clothes, and but for you it wouldn't be there now."

There was a suspicious moisture in his eyes, as he turned hastily and left the room, leaving Tom to his pleasant thoughts.

He could hardly realize all that had been crowded into the few hours since his arrival, and his sleep was broken by fitful dreams, in which robbers and robbers played prominent roles.

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Administrator's Appointment. (First Published June 2, 1899.) Public notice is hereby given that on the 26th day of May, 1899, the Probate Court of Allen County, Kansas, appointed the undersigned as administrator of the estate of John Lookart, deceased. A. H. CAMPBELL. Ewing & Savage. Attorneys at Law. Office over Ewart's Dry Goods Store. J. M. MARON, G. M. NELSON.

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