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SMOKE BELLEW

By JACK LONDON

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SYNOPSIS.

Christopher Bellew, a tenderfoot, starts for the Klondike in a gold rush and pluckily works at the back breaking toll of packing freight.

He meets a beautiful girl, Joy Gastell, deserts his own party, and he and Shorty, a new acquaintance, hire out to two wealthy prospectors. Joy has nicknamed him "Smoke."

CHAPTER III.

The New Gentleman's Man.

HALF the time the wind blew a gale and Smoke Bellew staggered against it along the lake beach. In the gray of dawn a dozen boats were being loaded with the precious outfits packed across Chilkoot. They were clumsy, homemade boats, put together by men who were not boat builders out of planks they had saved by hand from green

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spruce trees. One boat, already loaded, was just starting, and Kit paused to watch.

"This wind, which was fair down the lake, here blew in squarely on the beach, kicking up a misty sea in the shallows. The men of the departing boat waded in high rubber boots as they shoved it out toward deeper water. Twice they did this. Clambering aboard and falling to row clear, the boat was swept back and grounded. Kit noticed that the spray on the sides of the boat quickly turned to ice. The third attempt was a partial success. The last two men to climb in were wet to their waists, but the boat was afloat. They struggled awkwardly at the heavy oars and slowly worked off shore. Then they hoisted a sail made of blankets, had it carried away in a gust and were swept a third time back on the freezing beach.

Kit gripped to himself and went on. This was what he must expect to encounter, for he, too, in his new role of gentleman's man was to start from the beach in a similar boat that very day.

Everywhere men were at work, and at work desperately, for the closing down of winter was so imminent that it was a gamble whether or not they would get across the great chain of lakes before the freezeup. Yet when Kit arrived at the tent of Messrs. Sprague and Stine he did not find them stirring.

By a fire, under the shelter of a tarpaulin, squatted a short, thick man. "Hello," he said. "Are you Mr. Sprague's new man?"

Kit nodded. "Well, I'm Doc Stine's man," the other went on. "I'm five feet two inches long, an' my name's Shorty—Jack Short, for short. Sit down an' have some grub. The bosses ain't turned out yet."

Thomas Stanley Sprague was a budding mining engineer and the son of a millionaire. Dr. Adolph Stine was also the son of a wealthy father, and through their fathers both had been backed by an investing syndicate in the Klondike adventure.

"Oh, they're sure made of money," Shorty expounded. "When they hit the beach at Dyea freight was 70 cents, but no Indians. There was a party from eastern Oregon, real miners, that'd managed to get a team of Indians together at 70 cents when along comes Sprague an' Stine. They offered 80 cents an' 90, an' at a dollar a pound the Indians jumped the contract an' took off their straps. Stine an' Sprague came through, though it cost them three thousand, an' the Oregon bunch is still on the beach. They won't get through till next year."

"Have another cup of coffee, an' take it from me that I wouldn't travel with no such outfit if I didn't want to get to Klondike so blamed bad. They ain't heared right, did you sign a contract?"

Kit shook his head. "Then I'm sorry for you, pardner. They ain't no grub in the country, an' they'll drop you cold as soon as they hit Dawson. Men are going to starve there this winter. What's your name, pardner?"

"Call me Smoke," said Kit. "Well, Smoke, you'll have a run for your verbal contract just the same. They can sure shed nazuma, but they can't work or turn out of bed in the mornin'. We should have been loaded an' started an hour ago. It's you an' me for the big work. What d'ye know about boatin' on the water? I'm a cowman an' a prospector, but I'm sure tenderfooted on water, an' they don't know punkins. What d'ye know?"

"Search me," Kit answered. "It was 8 o'clock when the call for coffee came from the tent and nearly 9 before the two employers emerged."

"Hello," said Sprague, a ruddy checkered, well fed young man of twenty-five. "Time was made a start, Shorty. You an'— Here he glanced interrogatively at Kit. "I didn't quite catch your name last evening."

"Smoke," Kit answered. "Well, Shorty, you and Smoke had better begin loading the boat."

Sprague strolled away among the tents, to be followed by Dr. Stine, a slender, pallid young man. To move 3,000 pounds on the shoulders 100 yards was no slight task, and to do it in half a gale was exhausting. Then came the loading. As the boat settled it had to be shored farther and farther out, increasing the distance they had to wade.

By 2 o'clock it had all been accomplished, and Kit was weak with the faintness of hunger. His knees were shaking under him. Shorty, in similar predicament, forged through the pots and pans and drew forth a big pot of cold boiled beans in which were embedded large chunks of bacon. There was only one spoon, a long handled one, and they dipped, turn and turn about, into the pot.

Sprague and Stine arrived in the midst of this pleasant occupation. "What's the delay?" Sprague got impatient. "Aren't we ever going to get started?"

Shorty dipped in turn and passed the spoon to Kit. Nor did either speak till the pot was empty and the bottom scraped.

"Of course we ain't been doin' nothin'." Shorty said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "We ain't been doin' nothin' at all. Of course you ain't had nothin' to eat. It was sure careless of me."

"Yes, yes," Stine said quickly. "We ate at one of the tents—friends of ours. But now that you're finished let us get started."

They waded out, and the employers got on board while Kit and Shorty shoved clear. When the waves lapped the tops of their boots they clambered in. The other two men were not prepared with the oars, and the boat swept back and grounded. Half a

dozen times, with a great expenditure of energy, this was repeated.

"I'll take my orders I'll get her off," Sprague finally said. "The attempt was well intended, but before he could clamber on board he was wet to the waist."

"We've got to camp and build a fire," he said as the boat grounded again. "I'm freezing."

"Don't be afraid of a wetting," Stine sneered. "Other men have gone off today wetter than you. Now, I'm going to take her out."

This time it was he who got the wetting and who announced with chattering teeth the news of a fire.

"If you give me a shot at it I think I can get her off," Kit said. "How would you go about it?" Stine snarled at him.

"Sit down and get a good rest till a hull comes in the wind and then buck in for all we're worth."

Simple as the idea was, he had been the first to evolve it. The first time it



Before He Could Clamber on Board He Was Wet to the Waist.

was applied it worked, and they hoisted a blanket to the mast and sped down the lake.

Sprague struggled with the steering sweep for a quarter of an hour and then looked appealingly at Kit, who relieved him.

"My arms are fairly broken with the strain of it," Sprague muttered apologetically.

Kit steered the length of Lindeman, displaying an aptitude that caused both young men of money and disinclination for work to name him boat steerer.

Between Lindeman and Lake Bennett was a portage. The boat, lightly loaded, was lined down the small but violent connecting stream, and here Kit learned a vast deal more about boats and water. But when it came to packing the outfit Stine and Sprague disappeared, and their men spent two days of back breaking toil in getting the outfit across.

They came to the rapids—first the Box canyon and then, several miles below, the White Horse. The Box canyon was adequately named. It was a box, a trap. Once in it, the only way out was through.

On either side arose perpendicular walls of rock. The river narrowed to a fraction of its width and roared through this gloomy passage in a madness of motion that heaped the water in the center into a ridge fully eight feet higher than at the rock sides. The canyon was well fenced, for it had collected its toll of dead from the passing gold rushers.

Tying to the bank above, where lay a score of other anxious boats, Kit and his companions went ahead on foot and gazed down at the swirl of water. Sprague drew back, shuddering.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "A swimmer hasn't a chance in that."

Kit scarcely heard. "We've got to ride that ridge," he said. "If we get off it we'll hit the walls."

"And never know what hit us," was Shorty's verdict. "That's what I say," a stranger, standing alongside and peering down into the canyon, said mournfully. "And I wish I were through it. I've been here for hours. I am not a boatman, and I have with me only my nephew, who is a young boy, and my wife. If you get through safely will you run my boat through?"

Kit looked at Shorty, who delayed to answer.

"He's got his wife with him," Kit suggested.

"Sure," Shorty affirmed. "It was just what I was stoppin' to think about. I knew there was some reason I ought to do it."

Again they turned to go, but Sprague and Stine made no movement.

"Good luck, Smoke, Sprague called to him. "I'll—er—I'll just stay here and watch you."

"We need three men in the boat, two at the oars and one at the steering sweep," Kit said quietly.

Sprague looked at Stine.

"I'm cursed if I do," said that gentleman.

"We can do without them," Kit said to Shorty. "You take the bow with a paddle, and I'll handle the steering sweep. All you'll have to do is just to help keep her straight. Once we've

started you won't be able to bear me. Just keep on keeping her straight."

They cast off the boat and worked out to middle in the quickening current. From the canyon came the ever growing roar. The river sucked in to the entrance with the smoothness of molten glass, and here, as the darkening walls receded them, Shorty took a chew of tobacco and dipped his paddle.

The boat leaped on the first crests of the ridge, and they were deafened by the uproar of wild water that reverberated from the narrow walls and multiplied itself. They were half smothered with flying spray. At times Kit could not see his comrade at the bow. It was only a matter of two minutes, in which time they rode the ridge three-quarters of a mile and emerged in safety and tied to the bank in the eddy below.

Shorty emptied his mouth of tobacco juice he had forgotten to spit and spoke. "Say, we went a few, didn't we? Smoke, I don't mind tellin' you in confidence that before we started I was the gosh dangdest scariestest man this side of the Rocky mountains. Now I'm a bear eater. Come on an' we'll run that other boat through."

After running the stranger's boat through Kit and Shorty met his wife, a slender, stilet woman whose blue eyes were moist with gratitude. Breck himself tried to hand Kit \$50 and then attempted it on Shorty.

"Stranger," was the latter's rejection. "I come into this country to make money outta the ground an' not outta my fellow critters."

Breck, the stranger, rummaged in his boot and produced a demijohn of whiskey. Shorty's hand half went out to it and stopped abruptly. He shook his head.

"There's that blamed White Horse right below, an' they say it's worse than the Box. I reckon I don't dast tackle any lightnin'."

Several miles below they ran in to the bank, and all four walked down to look at the bad water. The river, which was a succession of rapids, was here deflected toward the right bank by a rocky reef. The whole body of water, rushing crookedly into the narrow passage, accelerated its speed frightfully and was upflung into huge waves, white and wrathful. This was the dread name of the White Horse and had been exacted. On one side of the mane was a corkscrew cur-over and suck-under, and on the opposite side was the big whirlpool. To go through the mane itself must be ridden.

As they watched a boat took the head of the rapids above. It was a large boat, fully thirty feet long, laden with several tons of outfit and handled by six men. Before it reached the mane it was plunging and leaping, at times almost hidden by the foam and spray.

Shorty shot a slow, sidelong glance at Kit and said: "She's fair smokin', an' she hasn't hit the worst. They've hauled the oars in. There she takes it now. God! She's gone! No! There she is!"

Big as the boat was, it had been buried from sight in the spring smother between crests. The next side of the thick of the mane, the boat leaped up a crest and into view. To Kit's amazement he saw the whole long bottom clearly outlined. The boat for the fraction of an instant was in the air, the men sitting idly in their places, all save one in the stern, who stood at the steering sweep. Then came the downward plunge into the trough and a second disappearance.

Three times the boat leaped and buried itself. Then those on the bank saw its nose take the whirlpool as it slipped off the mane. The steersman, vainly opposing with full weight on the steering gear, surrendered to the whirlpool and helped the boat to take the circle.

Three times it went around, each time so close to the rocks on which Kit and Shorty stood that either could have leaped on board. The steersman, a man with a reddish beard of recent growth, waved his hand to them.

The only way out of the whirlpool was by the mane, and on the third round the boat entered the mane obliquely at its upper end. Possibly out of fear of the draw of the whirlpool the steersman did not attempt to straighten out quickly enough. When he did it was too late. Alternately in the air and buried, the boat angled the mane and was sucked into the stiff wall of the corkscrew on the opposite side of the river.

A hundred feet below boxes and hales began to float up. Then appeared the bottom of the boat and the scattered heads of six men. Two managed to make the bank in the eddy below. The others were drawn under, and the general fetsam was lost to view, borne on by the swift current around the bend.

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CHAPTER IV.

The Yukon Surrenders.

THERE was a long minute of silence. Shorty was the first to speak.

"Come on," he said. "We might as well tackle it. My feet'll get cold if I stay here any longer."

Shorty and Kit tramped back through a foot of snow to the head of the rapids and cast off the boat.

"You've sure got to keep the top of the ridge," Shorty shouted at him as the boat quickened in the quickening current and took the head of the rapids.

Kit nodded, swayed his strength and weight tentatively on the steering gear and headed the boat for the plunge.

Several minutes later, half swamped and lying against the bank in the eddy below the White Horse, Shorty spat out a mouthful of tobacco juice and shook Kit's hand.

at the top of the bank they met Breck. His wife stood at a little distance. Kit shook his hand.

"I'm afraid your boat can't make it," he said. "It is smaller than ours and a bit cranky."

The man pulled out a roll of bills. "I'll give you each a hundred if you run it through."

Kit looked out and up the tossing mane of the White Horse. A long, gray twilight was falling. It was turning colder, and the landscape seemed taking on a savage bleakness.

"It ain't that," Shorty was saying. "We don't want your money. But my partner is the real meat with boats, an' when he says you're an' safe I reckon he knows what he's talkin' about."

Kit nodded affirmation and chanced to glance at Mrs. Breck. Her eyes were fixed upon him, and he knew that if ever he had seen prayer in a woman's eyes he was seeing it then. Shorty followed his gaze and saw what he saw. They looked at each other in confusion and did not speak. Moved by the common impulse, they nodded to each other and turned to the trail that led to the head of the rapids.

Barely had they shoved Breck's boat out from the bank and caught the first rough water when the waves began to lap aboard. They were small waves, but it was an earnest of what was to come.

The rapids grew stiffer, and the spray began to fly. In the gathering darkness Kit glimpsed the mane and the crooked fling of the current into it. He worked into this crooked current and felt a glow of satisfaction as the boat hit the head of the mane square in the middle. After that, in the smother, leaping and baring and swamping, he had no clear impression of anything save that he swung his weight on the steering oar.

They emerged breathless, wet through, the boat filled with water almost to the gunwale. Lighter pieces of baggage and outfit were floating inside the boat. A few careful strokes on Shorty's part worked the boat into the draw of the eddy, and the eddy did the rest till the boat softly touched the bank.

Looking down from above was Mrs. Breck. Her prayer had been answered, and the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"You boys have simply got to take the money," Breck called down to them.

Shorty stood up, slipped and sat down in the water, while the boat dipped one gunwale under and righted again.

"Dern the money," said Shorty. "Fetch out that whiskey. Now that it's over I'm gettin' cold feet, an' I'm sure likely to have a chill."

The trail by which he crossed Lake Labarge. Here was no fast current, but a tideless stretch of forty miles which must be rowed unless a fair wind blew. But the time for fair wind was past, and an icy gale blew in their teeth out of the north. This made a rough sea, against which it was almost impossible to pull the boat. Added to their troubles was driving snow; also the freezing of the water on their oar blades kept one man occupied in chipping it off with a hatchet. Compelled to take their turn at the oars, Sprague and Stine patiently loafed.

At the end of three hours Sprague pulled his oar in and said they would

run back into the mouth of the river for shelter. Stine seconded him, and the several hard won miles were lost. A second day, and a third, the same fruitless attempt was made. The freezeup was very imminent.

"We could make it if they had the souls of clams," Kit told Shorty as they dried their moccasins by the fire on the evening of the third day. "We could have made it today if they hadn't turned back. Another hour's work would have fetched that west shore. They're—they're babes in the woods."

Shorty debated a moment. "Look here, Smoke. It's hundreds of miles to Dawson. If we don't want to freeze in here we've got to do somethin'. If we're goin' to Dawson we got to take charge of this here outfit."

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In the morning, long before daylight, Shorty issued his call. "Come on! We roared. 'tumble out, you sleepers! Here's your coffee! Kick into it! We're goin' to make a start!"

Grumbling and complaining, Stine and Sprague were forced to get under way two hours earlier than ever before. If anything, the gale was stiffer, and in a short time every man's face was leed up, while the oars were heavy with ice.

Three hours they struggled, and four, one man steering, one chopping ice, two toiling at the oars and each taking his various turns. The northwest shore loomed nearer and nearer. The gale blew ever harder, and at last Sprague pulled in his oar in token of surrender. Shorty sprang to it, though his relief had only begun.

"Chop ice," he said, handing Sprague the hatchet.

"But what's the use?" the other whined. "We can't make it. We're going to turn back."

"We're goin' on," said Shorty. "Chop ice, an' when you feel better you can spell me."

It was heart-breaking toll, but they gained the shore, only to find it composed of surge beaten rocks and cliffs, with no place to land.

Nobody spoke, and Kit held the boat into the seas as they skirted the forbidding shore. Sometimes they gained no more than a foot to the stroke, and there were times when two or three strokes no more than enabled them to hold their own. Another hour they labored and a second.

A few minutes later Sprague drew in his oar again. "I'm finished," he said, and there were tears in his voice. Stine had ceased rowing, and the boat was drifting backward.

"Turn around, Smoke," Sprague ordered.

And Kit, who never in his life had cursed any man, astonished himself. "I'll see you in h— first," he replied. "Take hold of that oar and pull."

Sprague jerked off a mitten, drew his revolver and turned it on his steersman. This was a new experience to Kit. He had never had a gun presented at him in his life. And now, to his surprise, it seemed to mean nothing at all.

"If you don't put that gun up," he said, "I'll take it away and rap you over the knuckles with it."

"If you don't turn the boat around I'll shoot you," Sprague threatened.

Then Shorty took a hand. He ceased chopping ice and stood up behind Sprague. "Go on an' shoot," said Shorty, wiggling the hatchet. "I'm just achin' for a chance to brain you. Go on an' start the festivities."

"Sprague," Kit said, "I'll give you just thirty seconds to put away that gun and get that oar out."

Sprague hesitated, gave a short hysterical laugh, put the revolver away and bent his back to the work.

For two hours more, inch by inch, they fought their way along the edge of the foaming rocks until Kit feared he had made a mistake. And then, when on the verge of himself turning back, they came abreast of a narrow opening not twenty feet wide, which led into a landlocked inclosure, where the fiercest gusts scarcely favored the surface. It was the haven gained by the boats of previous days. They landed on a shelving beach, and the two employers lay in collapse in the boat, while Kit and Shorty pitched the tent, built a fire and started the cooking.

A cup of coffee, set aside to cool and forgotten, a few minutes later was found coated with half an inch of ice. At 8 o'clock, when Sprague and Stine, already rolled in their blankets, were sleeping the sleep of exhaustion, Kit came back from a look at the boat.

"It's the freezeup, Shorty," he announced. "There's a skin of ice over the whole pond already. The rapid current of the river may keep it open for days. This time tomorrow any boat caught in Lake Labarge remains there until next year."

"You mean we got