

North-West ROMANCES

STORIES 20c
OF THE
WILDERNESS FRONTIER

SPOILERS OF PARADISE VALLEY

A STEAM-MADE TROPICAL
OASIS HIDDEN IN THE
ICE-BOUND WILDERNESS
—A SAVAGE LOST RACE
AND A WHITE-SKINNED,
GOLDEN-HAIRED GIRL.

by
ROGER DANIELS

TUNDRA GOLD

by
FRED NEBEL

HOBNAIL JUSTICE

by
CHAS. NELSON

SAUNDERS
FICTION HOUSE
MAGAZINES

NO LAW BELOW ZERO

DEATH WAS MARKED FOR
THE RED-COAT WHO TREKKED
THE BLOOD-SPECKED MURDER
TRAIL—BUT CORPORAL M'CREE
WAS HARD TO KILL.

A COMPLETE NORTHLAND
NOVELET BY

A. de HERRIES
SMITH



North-West ROMANCES



T. T. SCOTT, *President and General Manager*
MALCOLM REISS, *Editor*

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A Complete Novel of the Yukon

- TUNDRA GOLD** Fred L. Nebel 3
"Gold stamped!" The whisper raced on blizzard wings. Cameo Dowd, five-ace king, Burke, the Chechako, and the Girl from Outside follow it to feud's end where the Grim Reaper waited for pay-off.

Three Thrilling Snowland Novelets

- NO LAW BELOW ZERO** A. deHerries Smith 42
Corporal McCree mushed along a blood-specked murder trail—lured deeper and deeper into the frozen Bering by the rumor of a beautiful ice-girl and the ghostly crew of a long-lost mystery ship.
- BUCCANEER OF THE BARRENS** Sewell P. Wright 76
Eau Blanc was forbidden territory, a Barrenland fur-pirate's guarded wilderness. But the grinning young trapper raised his war-flag there, daring Desjoie's Cree killers to come and blast him out.
- SPOILERS OF PARADISE VALLEY** Roger Daniels 106
Through the blizzard's endless wrath stumbled grim-jawed Peters of the Mounted, seeking a green Eden amid that white wilderness, where a Golden Goddess ruled a lost race of savage blue-eyed warriors.

Four Fast Northwest Short Stories

- BLOOD BROTHER OF THE SNOW-GODS** Sgt. Dan O'Rourke 33
To the Klingat huts of far-off Hoonyah, Cramer sailed to claim his torture-stake bride.
- OUTLAW OF THE SNOWS** H. S. M. Kemp 64
Ahead lay freedom. Yet law-tagged Billy Nelson turned back to side a Redcoat foe.
- HOBNAIL JUSTICE** Charles Nelson 72
Giant-powder booms—and a timber-topper gambles his life on a swaying death-spar.
- FLAMING RIVER** Edwin M. Sampson 96
Fugitives both! One from the leaping tongues of death—the other from Mounty law.



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Hobnail Justice

By CHARLES NELSON

A leaping flame licks against the sky. Green-topped timber echoes its thunder—and a timber-topper gambles his life high up on a dizzy tower of death.

RIPLEY VAUGHN, high-rigger of Camp Five, called "Rip" for short by the logging-crew, left the bunk-house Sunday after dinner and made for the camp boss's house, dressed in his best. On the porch railing sat Peggy, Preston's pretty daughter, her slender body leaning against a post, slim arms poised, looking at the green, sun-drenched hills through a pair of field-glasses. Rip snatched off his hat and called:

"How's chances for a look?"

"Fine, come on up," invited Peggy. "The view is splendid from here. Looks as if somebody had piled the country on end to

be photographed. I can see every donkey-engine and spar tree!"

Rip took a seat on the rail beside her, but forgot to use the glasses she handed him, being fascinated by the picture of Peggy herself. Her shining hair was lifted by the light breeze, her hazel eyes glinted in the sun. Rip wanted to say:

"Peggy, I've been crazy about you ever since we met. I can't live without you!"

Instead, he asked with a note of doubtful eagerness in his voice: "How about the dance Saturday night at Tarbridge. I've got a car and I'd certainly like to take you if you want to go."

She smiled apologetically. "I'm sorry, Mr. Vaughn. Honest, I'd like to, but I've promised Mr. Lorenz."

"Oh, I see," said Rip, politely, but looking as if he had accidentally bitten into a quinine capsule. "My luck!"

There was a moment or two of embarrassed silence while Rip recovered. "How do you like being back in camp again after Portland?" he asked finally. "You used to call yourself a timber beast like the rest of us." Then, a little anxiously, "You haven't gotten a longing to live in the city?"

"No, I'm glad to be back. I love the woods. But—Portland was lots of fun, in a way. The men are so nice, and take you everywhere. And they dress so well and—"

"Like Lorenz!" Rip broke in, and then could have bitten his tongue off.

Peggy colored. "Mr. Vaughn," she said soberly, "you know what the woods have done to me—killed my brothers and broke my mother's heart. Sometimes I think I hate them. In the city I can forget. But I got homesick and had to come back—to this—" Peggy made a graceful sweep with her hand toward the circle of hills. "And now I feel as if I must get away from it again, I don't know—"

Rip could not reply to this. He had been holding the glasses to his eyes while she spoke, to conceal the feeling they were sure to show. Now he handed them to her and abruptly changed the subject.

"See that big 200-foot tree over there to the right—just behind the cleared spot?" He guided her hands, his own a trifle unsteady. "Going to top 'er tomorrow, with powder for a charge. If you watch, maybe you can see it."

"Sure, that'll be great!"

"Well, so long! Got a date in town. See you later."

Although he would have been glad to linger, her ready "So long!" left him no excuse.

As Rip strode down the path he met Lorenz headed for the Prestons'. A nod and scowl were the only recognition he vouchsafed the timekeeper. Rip disliked him for a high-collar city dude. It was common rumor in camp that he was well-fixed and was trying to persuade Peggy to marry him and go to town to live. Rumor also had it that old man Preston wasn't unagreeable to the idea of being

relieved of the care and responsibility of a motherless daughter.

Rip's thoughts were in a turmoil. How badly he wanted this girl nobody but himself knew. Still, mad as he was about her, he recognized that his feeling was purely selfish and looked the facts in the face. He wanted her to be happy above anything else. Evidently she liked the timekeeper; the fellow could give her more than he, Rip, would probably ever be able to; and how could he expect her to prefer camp life to the swell times to be had in town? Didn't he himself break away whenever he got staked? Oh, h—ll, what was the use?

Rip jumped in his flivver, stepped on the starter and headed recklessly for Tar-bridge, where he knew of a poker game that might help him forget for a while.

THE next day in the timber was a trying one for Rip. It was blustery—always unfavorable weather for high-climbing work. The spar-tree, or legging-mast, he was rigging up happened to be a monster gnarled fir more than eight feet through at the foot, thick-barked and the wood as hard as bone. Where he had to cut off its top, one hundred and fifty feet above the ground, the trunk was four feet through. Some of the limb-cutting had already been done, but Rip labored all day, standing in mid-air on his spurs, sweltering and sweating, axing off branch after branch, some of them as big around as his thigh. The edge of his wide, high-climber's belt chafed his waist, the spur-straps burned like hot bands, his legs ached, tired from strain. But he wanted to finish the job that day and kept at it doggedly.

At last he was cutting the ledge or shelf on which he was to lay the powder sticks. All around the tough trunk his sharp ax bit out the chips like a man notching a huge pencil to break it in two. The powder was hoisted up to him by the hand-line he had already rigged, and he laid it on the circular shelf several sticks deep, around the tree-trunk, ready for priming. As he took the coil of fuse in his hand he fumbled it and it fell. A gust of wind steered it into a small brush-filled gulch close by. He called down to his helpers and they went to look for it. The search took time and Rip lost patience,

came down himself and joined the hunt, with no success. There was no more fuse handy and he was stuck. As there was time to spare, however, he decided to go to camp for some.

When he reached the commissary and opened the door he got a shock. Peggy was there, standing in front of the counter with Lorenz. They were alone, her hand in his, her head bowed. She broke away when she saw Rip and hurried past him through the door without a word.

He closed it and followed her. "Peggy!" he called, "wait a minute, I want to tell you something!"

"Mr. Vaughn," she interrupted him hastily, "I've—" Her eyes met Rip's for an instant and she forgot what was on her tongue at the look she saw in them. Holding out her hand she said lightly, to hide her embarrassment: "Goodby! I'm off for town tomorrow."

"You mean for good?"

Peggy nodded and looked away un- easily.

Rip took her hand and gripped it till her fingers wincled. "Good-by," he said huskily. And then, "Good luck!"

Peggy turned quickly toward her house.

RIP returned to the commissary in a desperate frame of mind. Preston heard his request for fuse and came out of the back room. Lorenz hunted through the shelves, then remembered having lent the last roll to Camp Four.

"Why the devil wasn't more ordered long ago!" commented Preston, testily. "I can't look after every little thing!"

"I'll hunt again," said the timekeeper. Preston joined in the search. Finally Lorenz dug out a short piece of fuse from a corner. "Is this long enough?" he asked innocently, holding it up.

"Hardly!" answered Preston. Then for the green timekeeper's benefit:

"It takes about eight or ten feet for a shot. You see it must be long enough to give the man who lights it a chance to get down the tree and make his getaway before the blast goes off."

"Oh, I see," said Lorenz.

Preston turned to Rip. "Did you look all over for the fuse you lost?"

Rip, in no pleasant humor himself, grasped at the implication in Preston's ques-

tion and replied, "I sure did!" Then added: "Well, there's no fuse, so that settles it, I guess. May as well call it a day."

"Yes—unless you could whittle the dam' top off with your pocket-knife! You might try!"

Rip turned red. Without a word he took the foot-long fuse lying on the counter and went out.

Preston hastened after him and called good-naturedly: "Hey, Rip! Come back here, you young fool!"

But the high-climber was already on his speeder, going toward the woods. His back had the look of a blank wall. He flew rather than rode back to the timber. Arrived at the spar-tree he stood boiling with resentment while he capped the bit of fuse. He'd show them what a real timber-beast could do! He put on his climbing rigging in silence. His helpers spoke to him but he answered briefly and went up the trunk as swiftly as an ape in a palm-tree. At the powder-shelf he took the short piece of fuse from his pocket, leaned on his life-rope and jammed it viciously into a stick of dynamite, which he placed in the bunch around the tree. Then he glanced below.

"T-i-m-b-e-r!" he bellowed.

The men ran into the clear, looking aloft and wondering. Rip struck a match and the wind promptly blew it out. With a scowl he threw it away and struck another, which met the same fate. He grew vindictively calm. With deliberate slowness he fished a third match from his overalls, struck it and, shielding it with his cupped hands, lit the fuse. It hissed venomously, like a snake about to strike. Rip slacked and dropped the bight of his life-rope, jumped both his spurs out of the bark and let himself fall straight down the tree as far as his rope would permit. When his spurs hit the bark again he was many feet below the powder. He made another leap down. . . .

WITH a roar the explosion came. The force of the blast almost shook him from the tree. The trunk trembled as if a giant's fist had dealt it a savage blow. Leaning far back on his belt Rip looked above him. A circle of gray-black smoke had sprung out from the notch and spread on the wind. He had been able to get far

enough from the great blast to withstand the shock of it. But there was the huge, tottering top. To which side would it lean and fall? Would its massive limbs rake the trunk in descending and brush him from his footing? Would its butt strike him and knock him off? He was still a hundred and fifty feet from the ground.

Splinters, fir-needle and pieces of bark began to rain on his shoulders and up-turned face. He dodged them as well as he could, never taking his eyes off the tons-heavy top. Nearly cut in two by the powder, it began to incline toward the earth. A piece of bark cut Rip's lip and blood spurted over his cheek. His hat was knocked off. A big sliver fell across his braced arm, numbing it.

But through it all his eyes remained riveted on the threatening mass of top and limbs over his head. Now it was nearly at a right angle. The whining swish of its fall sounded like a coming gale. It took off with a spiteful kick that sent the freed trunk tossing and reeling.

Rip circled on his spurs till he was opposite the hurtling top, his movements quick and sure as an acrobat's. As he made the half-circuit the logging-camp buildings flashed into view. Unconsciously his glance picked out the foreman's house. His thoughts raced to Peggy as he caught up the slack of his rope and flattened himself against the trunk. There was a sudden rush of wind, followed by a crash of branches as the top struck the ground. He was safe—and he had shown them! Blown the damn top off with a finger-length of fuse!

IN reckless downward leaps he reached the ground. His helpers stood gaping. Without word or sign he coiled his rope around his waist and made for the railroad track and the speeder, across the chaos of down timber. His eyes glowed, his head was in the air and his hair ruffled in the wind. His right arm hung stiff by his side, but with his left he wiped his mouth, leaving a bloody smear across his face. Belted and spurred, grim and grimy in his short black slicker, brown overalls and steel-caulked high-top shoes, he resembled a strangely accoutred warrior fresh from victory.

Jumping on the speeder he raced for camp. Midway he met the foreman coming toward him on a second speeder. Both slackened their pace and put on brakes, stopping within a few feet. Preston spoke first.

"I heard the shot. Did you find the fuse?" His voice was casual.

"No," answered Rip with suppressed scorn, "I whittled the damn top off with my pocket-knife!"

Foreman and high-climber measured each other. Again Preston spoke. "Get on my car and let me have yours. I want to go to the landing."

They changed cars without further remark and rode off in opposite directions, neither looking back.

When Rip was a short way from camp a woman came running toward him. As he came close he recognized Peggy. He slammed on the brake and stared. Her hair was blowing in the wind, her face was flushed and she was out of breath. She gazed at him as if she were seeing a ghost. Rip noticed half-dried tears on her cheeks. With a leap he was on the ground.

Peggy flung herself headlong into his arms, panting: "Rip, Rip, I thought you were killed!"

Rip kissed her hard, heedless of his cut lip. Peggy got out her handkerchief and wiped his face tenderly. Reckless of his hurt arm Rip snatched the tiny square from her hand and drew her to him. His belt and rope made a rough embrace, but she didn't seem to mind.

She lay in his arm, repeating: "Oh, Rip, I thought you were killed! I was watching through the glasses. You didn't make the ground and when the top fell and I couldn't see you I ran to the commissary. Dad had left and so I ran. . . . Oh, Rip!"

"Well, I'm certainly alive," Rip reassured her. Then frowning: "But Lorenz—aren't you going to marry Lorenz?"

"Why, no!" answered Peggy, emphatically. "I turned him down. I was saying good-by when you came into the commissary."

"But what about going back to town?"

"Sh-h! I'm a logger's woman! I didn't know till I thought I had lost you. I belong in the timber—with you, Rip. I'm a timber beast, too!"