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*Soapy Sam Recovers His Reason, and
the Mystery Is Explained*

The Glacier Lode

By STRICKLAND GILLILAN

IT WAS the consensus of opinion, as a lawyer friend of mine used to say about things, that Soapy Sam was balmy. I leave it to you if a fellow isn't batty complete when he sits around and says, with much earnestness:

"I don't own any property, leastwise not the Glacier Lode. But I refuse to sell it. I mustn't either give it away or sell it. I'm waiting for something, I don't know what."

If that isn't loco language pure and simple, I've got vampire bats in my own cupola. Those were mostly his exact words when he could be got to talk at all. He said it oftenest to beady-eyed Carroll, because that nervous person p'odded him most in the conversational line. Not that Soapy ever acted impatient or peeved. Not a peeve. He was always gentle and forbearing with Carroll, but always firm and unchanging.

And still that Glacier Lode stayed unworked and also, so far as we believed with reason, it was totally polluted with pay color.

After he had had his answer, which always seemed to come as a surprise to him, Carroll would cuss a bit under his breath and start in again and reason it all out, while Soapy Sam listened, patient as a cow with a fresh cud. When Carroll had finished, Sam would seem convinced, would reach out and take the inky pen in his hand and—then he'd stop and say over his little piece:

"I don't own the Glacier Lode, but I mustn't sell it or let anybody prospect on it."

Regretfulness and foxiness were equally commingled in his lineaments as he handed out that same answer.

None of us knew any more about it than Carroll did, but we had better control of our curiosity, that's all. We went out and did our little piker clean-ups every day and fought shy of Glacier Lode. Believing Sam was knocking in one of his cylinders or needed a bearing taken up, a spark-plug cleaned or a valve ground or something, and knowing he patrolled the Glacier Lode every day with a perfectly good rifle, we benevolently avoided trouble for him and us by staying in our own little frozen back yards, thawing and washing our little dabs of dust, and let the mystery sizzle. He paid his board regular at the Star Hotel, was quiet and polite and well-behaved, and that helped some. Besides he was our mystery; and we were a bit proud and set up over having something to talk about when other subjects got stale.

But when this Carroll person bobbed up from Chicago and we told him about Soapy Sam and all that we couldn't find out about him, this same Carroll was a marked man for his curiosity from that time on. Any man or woman with bright, beady, poppy eyes is like that, don't you know it? They've got to find out whatever it seems as if they couldn't.

Carroll wouldn't even have picked up a big nugget if he had seen it anywhere else. It was the Glacier Lode he wanted. So he put in nearly all of his time talking to poor old Soap, and the rest of it he gloomed around the bar in bitter discouragement.

Soapy had been there when we arrived; had been camping on the site of the hotel when it was built; and naturally he became a boarder. He had worn a bandaged head, the proprietor said, but soon abandoned the bandage and looked as if he were O. K. But he made the rounds all day and at unexpected times in the night, with that long rifle, seeing to it that nobody tampered with the Glacier Lode. Also he drove in new stakes every time the old ones blackened with the weather, and even painted 'em white with some paint he had shipped in for the purpose. He just had to see those stakes night and day, or he wasn't satisfied.

I leave you to imagine what a juicy morsel this was for a lot of lonesome, wondering, wandering men to chew over on long, dull nights around the stove after Soap had turned in or while he was out for a prowl with his rifle.

And then imagine the effect of such a mystery on that Carroll man with the beady eyes that popped! It was killing him by inches—that and the added daily baffle he brought on himself by nagging at Sam about it, to say nothing of the drink it drove him to. And each time he would be so sure this was the time he would get Soap's signature, and each time he was so keenly disappointed and surprised at hearing the ulti—the ulti—well, you know what I mean.

Finally, Carroll believes he will find out sure. He knows this thing is killing him, and he figures that maybe he is wasting away about nothing. Maybe there isn't any gold there

anyway, he figures. Then he does really go hunting trouble for himself. Not knowing Soap as well as we do who don't know anything about him except to leave the Glacier Lode alone, he figures one day that Soap is elsewhere, and he sneaks out and snoops around behind the big bluff that stands on the northeast corner of the claim. He picks up a handful of dirt and begins pounding it on a stone—frozen solid, of course, as he was afraid to start a thawing fire—and just as he whacks it the second time to burst it, behold Soapy Sam, which Carroll is sure is a mile away, bobs up serenely with that long gun. The rifle hits Soapy's shoulder, there is a puff of white smoke at the end of the barrel. Then Carroll beats the world's sprinting record down the slope, holding one of his hands where the lobe of one of his ears had so recently been, and trying out every noise inside him to see if he had any that would come anywhere near to expressing his feelings of pain and surprise, while we other fellows lay down and laughed until we wept. That beat any running anybody in my family has ever seen, though some of my ancestors were in the Confederate army at the first battle of Bull Run, and had a fine back-view of the Northern army doing one of the first and biggest marathons there ever was.

AFTER that, Carroll lay low awhile, but when he emerged again with only a remnant of an ear on the right side of his head, he entered into the teasing of Soapy Sam with as much earnestness as ever before, and Sam went right on listening with great patience, and we began to think we had two loonies instead of one on our hands.

One day I happened to overhear their conversation, and this is what Soap was telling him:

"Mister——"

"Carroll," said the other man. He always had to tell Soap his name. Soap couldn't remember anybody's name, even his own, which is why we had to nickname him, or rather stick to the name the landlord had given him when he found him on the hotel site.

"Mister Carroll, it's like this. I haven't anything in this head of mine, except one thing. I know that claim mustn't be worked. I don't know what I'm waiting for, though it's something. But that claim mustn't go out of my hands. Probably what you offer is more than it is worth. That ought to weigh heavy with me, but it can't. One of me says so. The other and stronger of me says I mustn't. So you see what you're up against."

And Carroll went away and took a big, long drink, followed in rapid succession with other long drinks, till he was in a fairly ugly frame of mind. He even reached the muttering stage. And the muttering jag stands a chance of being a dangerous one.

That evening he sort of surrounded Soapy and began on him anew, with a good deal of crossness and ugliness in his tone. Sam looks at him rather suspiciously, but still refuses to sign the document releasing any share he may have in the Glacier. At that Carroll, with a motion quicker than one would think a drunk fat man could make, hits Soapy over the head with a little billy he has up his sleeve, and starts to run. The whole camp except a new doctor man who has just come in from Seattle, accompanies Carroll to a point where it seems likely he won't come back, and then we return to see how the patient is getting on.

Soap is still in dreamland when we return, and that doctor, who had been making a good many inquiries about the locoed person before the

trouble took place, is some excited himself. He asks to be left alone with the patient till morning, and we grant his request.

When daylight came, Soap was sitting up in bed, but he seemed like somebody who had come in Soap's place. There was a different kind of light in his eye, and not one of us would call him Soapy. No sir, not one. We felt like saying "Mister" when we looked at him. Before that, it had seemed that Sam was around where we were, but now it seemed we were around where Sam was. I don't know how clear that is to you, but it explains the difference in our attitude toward him. He was busy talking to that new doctor, and the technical sawbones terms they were flinging at each other sounded as if they had both been eating medical dictionaries for months and were just oozing *materia medica* at the pores, or having a running-off of information at the mouth.

Before any of us had time to ask, the new doctor called us around and told us the yarn.

Soapy Sam's name had been Raymond—he had been one of the brightest young surgeons in existence. He had gone with his father to prospect in the new gold country, the youngster being pretty much all in from too close application to brain work without enough exercise to go with it. While he and his father were nosing around the Glacier Lode under a big ice cliff none of us had ever seen, and just after his father had discovered and held up a big chunk of the pure stuff, the cliff fell on his father, crushing him out of existence quicker than the very suddenest of seats. A piece of the falling cliff had hit the young man's skull and laid him out unconscious. When he came to—but we knew a lot more of the story from then on than Soap—than Dr. Raymond did. We even knew he

had got his name because he insisted on keeping clean. He only remembered the last words his father had called to him before the cliff fell:

"We will hold on to this, my son. Wait for me—I'll be out in a minute."

And that was what he had been waiting for, as nearly as he and we could tell.

A WEEK or so later, when Dr. Raymond had got able to get out, he was waiting for his papers for the claim, and in the meantime the force of Soapy Sam's habit took him and his long rifle around the boundaries of Glacier Lode claim.

Just as he came around the edge of the big glacier—the bones of his father had been taken out a few days before and given the decentest burial we could give them—he heard the whack of a pick. He had already noticed that a little smoke was rising from a new shack a mile down the slope.

He stopped and listened. Stepping farther around the turn of the ice, he saw a short, fat man delving away for dear life at a likely-looking hole in the ground. Bringing his rifle to his shoulder he called:

"Stop that!"

The fat man looked up with beady eyes, his face grew pasty, and he yelled:

"Don't, Mister Ghost! Don't shoot! You can have what I've panned out, and I'll leave—honest to God, Mister Ghost, I never will show up here any more!"

Dr. Raymond didn't know what the man was talking about, so he brought him into camp at the point of his rifle, to consult with the rest of us.

When the procession showed up, we all let out a yell:

"Well, Carroll! How did you enjoy your vacation?"

And then Dr. Raymond, that we had been telling about this Carroll person, dropped the rifle, rushed at the fat man, shook his hand, and said:

"Old man, I'm going to give you a partnership in the Glacier Lode. If it hadn't been for you and your blessed billy, I'd still be a looney with only half an idea in my head. Come and have one on me."

And he wasn't talking to Carroll only when he made that last remark either.

So we all went in.

