



By **PERCY LONGHURST**

Illustrated by Harry Lane

A Story of the Great Gold Rush in the Klondyke

WHEN gold is discovered in a new country a "rush" to stake out claims follows immediately; those first on the ground usually get the pick of the rich claims. How these claims become the property of the staker is well enough known. The man drives in a wooden peg at the four corners of the area of ground of a size as mining law requires, and there, most people think, is an end of it. What is forgotten—fiction writers almost always forget it—is that the ground so staked out does not become the property of the person putting in the pegs until he has recorded his claim at the office of the nearest government recording official. At least, that is the law in Canada. A certain time is allowed after driving the pegs in which to make the record; if that period elapses, then others are at liberty to re-stake and claim the ground.

I remember one case of this kind up in the Klondyke. It gave rise to a race that every man and woman in Dawson City turned out to see.

Bonanza Creek was one of the richest of the many Klondyke locations, and I'd be afraid to say how many millions of dollars' worth of dust were taken from it. One of the last claims staked when the rush took place was never recorded for some reason or other and the pegger disappeared—left the country, perhaps. In due time the government officials gave notice this claim would be available for re-staking, as soon after midnight on a certain date as anyone chose to go there. To avoid any trouble

a N.W.M. policeman was sent up to the spot to give the signal when midnight arrived.

More than a dozen miners turned up, but for some reason all dropped out but two—a long-limbed, cast-iron Canadian miner and a Swede—a tremendously big fellow, strong as a giant and active as a wolf. Each had his pegs ready and both were waiting some time before midnight for the policeman to give the word "Go!"

The signal was given, and off shot the two men like bullets from a gun, as soon as each had put a peg at the corner of the claim just outside which each was standing. Then they reached the farther side of the claim, five hundred feet, to put in further pegs.

It was winter-time, of course, cold as charity, and so close were the two men that the policeman and the other miners who had turned out to watch the contest declared a dead heat. The claim would go to which of the two was first to reach the Recorder's office. That was Fortymile—only seventy-five miles and a bit away!

Off the pair started, on foot, almost shoulder to shoulder, over ice and broken ground covered with frozen, slippery snow, *not* at top speed, for the first stopping-place, Dawson, from whence the rest of the long race would be continued with the aid of dog sleds, was eighteen miles away. Both were seasoned runners, all brawn and muscle, hardened and toughened by their work, and each determined to go on until he dropped.

Early morning saw them in Dawson,

where they arrived within a few minutes of each other, the Swede ahead. Both had friends in the city; these got to work, fixed up a hasty breakfast, prepared a dog team, and loaded the sled with grub, etc.—and the “etc.” was mighty little and the grub not much more, as in a long and hard race every pound of weight was going to tell.

The two teams started on their race together, amid a scene of excitement and to the accompaniment of such cheering as only Dawson City in 1896 could have produced.

It was a record race—in record time. First one and then the other drew ahead, due to clever jockeying upon the none-too-wide trail; and neither man spared himself, his whip nor his dogs, though the huskies seemed to enter into the spirit of the race and tore along the frozen snow at a pace threatening disaster if anything should be hit.

At 4 p.m. the record office at Fortymile was closed, and to reach it before this hap-

pened was the intention of both men, as the door would not be opened again until nine o'clock next morning. So through the long day they drove, cheering their galloping teams.

Within three miles of the goal the team of the Canadian, who was leading, suddenly gave out. They were used up. Deaf to the voice of their driver, careless of the stinging cuts from his long whip, they stopped, curled themselves on the snow just as they fell, and stayed there.

Looking back along the trail, the Canadian could see the team of his rival, and his hopes rose. His sight was good enough to tell him the Swede's dogs were in but very little better condition than his own. He could hear the driver's stentorian shouts, could see the constant rise and fall of the flogging whip, but the dogs were not to be shifted from a mere painful crawl.

Right; he would finish the journey afoot. And off he started. And hard in pursuit



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came the herculean Swede, he, too, abandoning his exhausted team.

Within half a mile the Canadian had been overhauled, but try as he might, the Swede could not get a yard ahead. With gritted teeth and labouring lungs the two determined men pounded along side by side.

Each was not far from his last gasp, but neither meant giving in.

At last the barrack yard, within which was situated the recording office, came in sight, and the runners' wearied limbs found an increase of strength. Both spurted, and it was neck-and-neck that they blundered through the wide open gate. Here it was the big Swede made a mistake. He had never been within the barrack square, and he made straight for the biggest block of buildings. The Canadian knew better. He was familiar with the place, and aware that the recorder's office was on the right hand side of the square. It was the officers' quarters for which the Swede was making. He allowed the Swede to dash past him, then turned away to his right.

In five seconds he had gained the door



The Canadian was so weary he flopped across the threshold, crying as he fell: "Sixty above on Bonanza!"

of the office, and just found strength sufficient to push it open. But he was too weak to lift his foot over the six-inch threshold. Down he flopped across it crying as he fell:

"Sixty above on Bonanza"—the designation of the claim.

And before the startled official had well realised

the meaning of the words they were repeated, by the Swede, as he tripped and fell over the body of his rival.

"Well, boys," said the Recorder, when the men had recovered sufficiently to be able to talk; "it looks as if it's been much of a dead-heat from start to finish. Say, why not divide the claim between you?"

And that is what they did. Joint-owners, they worked the claim together.

I wish I could tell you, as a pleasant finish to the story, that the plucky owners were suitably rewarded for their tremendous struggle. One feels that they *ought* to have become rich men as a result. But they didn't. They had all their trouble for nothing. There wasn't an ounce of gold on the entire claim!

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