

The Scarlet Lady

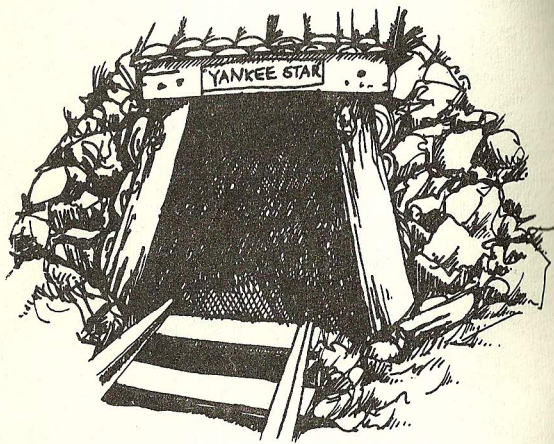
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THE SCARLET LADY

CHAPTER 1

Mr. William A. Jensen, the head of the Exploration Department of a big mining company was sitting dreaming in his office. Bill Jensen was an active and efficient man with little time to spare and he was not often idle, but this afternoon he sat dreaming over a report he had just read.

The report was from a geologist, his friend John Randall, about the investigation of a gold mine in the Kootenay District of British Columbia. John did not recommend further exploration. He said that the main orebody was exhausted and although there might be some ore left at the upper level, there was little evidence of ore below the present workings, and the diamond drilling from the surface to test this would be costly in steep ground.

In any other case, Bill Jensen would approve the conclusion of the geologist, but he was reluctant to do so for a reason he felt was purely emotional.

Bill had sent John Randall to investigate the Yankee Star Mine near the Village of Stump Bridge. Stump Bridge was where Bill was born and it was at the Yankee Star that he got his first job at the age of fifteen.

Bill had left Stump Bridge when he was twenty, under painful circumstances, and he never went back. He even avoided travelling through the Kootenays, but now, for some reason, he could not explain he decided to go and see the old mine. He phoned John Randall to tell him that he was coming and then went back to recalling dreamily the years of his youth.

Bill's father and mother came from Scandinavia and took a homestead in the Valley when everybody in the Country was chasing for gold. They were young, hard working people with high moral standards and they went courageously through the hardship of the first years. Bill, the oldest son, went to work at the mine to help the family with his pay. He had a younger brother and two sisters and the family needed his help.

Bill was nineteen when he fell in love for the first time. His sweetheart was lovely, but what they call a 'bad woman'. She chose him and devoted herself to his happiness, then disappeared one day without warning and left him in distress. He had never forgiven her for that betrayal.

Bill had a successful life. He started at the bottom in his mining career and rose to his present position by studying and working hard. He had inherited some puritanism from his parents; he would not do anything he thought was wrong, even if his most vital interests would depend on this. He would not argue, but he did not trust anyone who had been insincere to him, even once. Otherwise, he was easy going and sincere and he had many friends. He had a loving wife who had died four years ago and his three fine children were all married now.

Bill's life in later years had been peaceful and happy but, in his inner-self he knew that all this happiness could not be compared with the glorious days of his youth. He seldom thought about his first sweetheart but he could not really forget her, and now the remembrance of these early years overwhelmed him.



CHAPTER 2

Two days later Bill was back in his native land; he took a U-Drive car at the airport and drove through a once familiar landscape. He could not recognize his country! Farms with modern houses had replaced the black loghouses and shacks. The white waters of his river were spanned by new bridges and dams. The old gravel road winding above high cliffs had been relocated; a modern super-highway had replaced it and Bill could not find familiar landmarks.

The town where he went shopping with his father was still familiar to him, but it was without streetcars, without the stern-wheelers on the lake. No passenger trains were at the once pretty station. A supermarket occupied a whole block of the old city, but many of the commercial buildings he could recognize, and the cozy steep-roofed dwellings of gingerbread architecture still towered up the steep streets, and flowers bloomed profusely in all the gardens as before.

Bill had a meal at a hotel he had admired before, which seemed to him now quite small and not luxurious at all.

Bill had another surprise when he reached Stump Bridge. The Village was a ghost town! Not one new house was to be seen. One hotel was renovated and in use. A garage was installed in an old warehouse, a general store occupied a corner of an otherwise empty stone building. Few dwellings were in use. The remainder of the village was vacant houses now falling to ruin.

Bill was saddened by the desolation. He felt that the picture of Stump Bridge that he had cherished for many years was vanishing in his memory.

John Randall was waiting for Bill in the coffee shop of the Allan Hotel. John had two helpers with him; students hired for the summer, Sam and Vic; future mining engineers.

Bill and John were soon engaged in a conversation about the Yankee Star. John had the old maps but Bill could recollect details that had never been recorded. Bill thought that the upper level could be investigated by diamond drilling from the old adit.

In his opinion the mine should be accessible as he knew that the ground was good at this elevation.

They went, all four of them, to the upper portal of the mine and found the entrance blocked by a cave-in, as John had mentioned in his report. Bill was convinced that the obstruction was local and the good ground was close, he decided to clear the way. John knew a contractor in town who was familiar with the job — he would call on him. The

students started to move some muck but they were called back. They had not realized how dangerous this was.

It was still early when the party got back to the Village. Bill took his car and drove along to his father's farm. It was falling to ruin. He walked through the yard and entered the house. He did not find much that reminded him of his youth. Obviously somebody had occupied the farm and remodelled it after Bill's family left.

Bill drove to the Village and found the cabin he once built for himself and his girl. The windows were boarded over and high weeds grew in the yard, but the cabin had not suffered from time as badly as the surrounding houses. Finding the door locked, Bill was about to leave, when he heard a voice behind him – "Do you want to rent this house?" An attractive young woman was smiling at him and holding an old fashioned key.

"Do you want to see inside?" she said. She opened the door – "I haven't any time now, I have to go. Keep the key and hang it there when you are through".

She gave him the key and walked away, across the street and through the door of the Grand Hotel at the end of the block.



Bill entered the cabin. Everything was dusty but he found things as he had left them. It was surprising that after so many years, nothing was removed. Bill sat at the table looking around recalling the days of his happiness. The invisible presence of his sweetheart bewitched him and he forgot the insult, he forgot his bitterness; he was happy again.

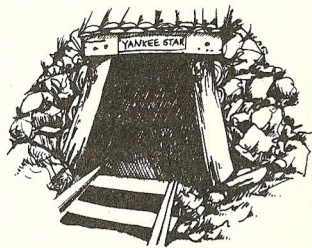
It was late when Bill came out of the cabin. John and the students were waiting for him for supper. Bill told them of his visit to the farm and to the cabin, and the surprising difference in decay.

"Who owns that cabin?" He asked the waitress. She did not know, but she knew the cabin he meant.

"Ask at the garage" She said, "They are old-timers".

“But a girl opened the door and offered to rent the house”, said Bill. The waitress hesitated – “It could be the ghost” she said. “ask at the garage”. The two young people laughed, and Bill smiled.

“There are many transients, and they settle in unoccupied houses. I assure you that this girl was not a ghost. Good looking, good humored, very polite, and very real”.



CHAPTER 3

Bill had a bad night. He could not sleep, of course he did not believe in ghosts, but if people were speaking about a girl ghost in his cabin it would be Margot's ghost they meant.

Bill could not remember the features of the girl who gave him the key. Worse than that, he could not remember the features of Margot. He had not kept a picture of her and it was so long ago. Still – he would recognize her, even though she would be a very old woman now. She was older than Bill, maybe six or seven years older. There could be nothing in common with the young girl he met. Now Bill realized that he was making fantastic suppositions, mixing the present with the past.

In the morning Bill Jensen left for home. He stopped at the garage for gas and stepped down to speak with the mechanic. “Yes, the man knew about the ghost. She used to weep in her cabin, many had heard her weeping but for many years nobody had heard her any more”.

“Yes – somebody had seen the ghost also. They saw her sitting on a bench at the railway station, waiting for the train to come but it was long ago, there had not been any passenger trains for more than ten years.

"Yes, people avoided this cabin, nobody wanted to live there, nobody wanted to buy it when it was for sale for unpaid taxes".

"If the gentleman wanted to know more about this cabin he should go to the Nursing Home in town", said the Mechanic.

"My father is there. He is paralyzed but clear in mind and he would be glad to tell you all about the ghost".

Bill was confused; there was a legend about Margot, that was sure. Maybe she had been waiting for him at the station the day he missed the train. He did not know it, but then, why had nobody told him this when he was searching for her so desperately? And why did they make a ghost of her memory?

Bill had time to spare before taking the plane, so he went to the Nursing Home. Old Steve Schmidt recognized him. They had worked together at the Yankee Star. They had not been immediately great friends, but now they felt happy to meet each other.

Steve Schmidt was very talkative; speaking about the days of the gold mines, their fellow miners, the work done, and the sad days when the mines were closing one by one.

Finally Bill asked about the ghost. Steve did not answer at once. Then finally, "Do you know how your girl died?" Bill knew nothing about Margot's death.

"Well, it was by accident that the miners killed her" said Steve. "It happened New Year's Eve. Your girl came up the hill to our mine with two guys. She came to the cookhouse to sing and to dance for the miners. Everybody enjoyed the entertainment and she stayed to drink with us. She drank a lot. We were all drunk. And then somebody wanted her. You know that she was . . . well, before she was with you, she was with everybody. She tried to resist but she was drunk and everyone of us wanted her, so the game went on and on. Finally one boy realized that she was getting cold. She was dead, you see. I am sorry to tell you all that, Bill, I feel bad, you understand, but you should know".

Bill was silent.

"We got scared", continued Steve, "We realized we murdered her". "We could not hide the corpse nowhere in all that snow, so we put her on a flat car and drove her underground. We buried her in loose muck on the upper level, in that big abandoned stope east of the main shaft. Some boys took her keys, went to your cabin and collected her belongings. We carried it all to the same stope and in the morning we blasted down the roof. The guys said that you would believe that she left, and that is what you thought.

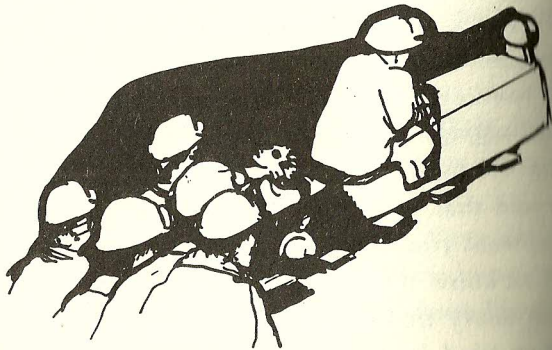
"You know that heavy trunk of hers?" "Well, it was so heavy that some guys said there was gold in it. They tried to dig it out after you left. But then

somebody heard her cry in her cabin and nobody dared to go digging any more”.

Bill knew that the trunk was filled with books, her French books. Not gold of course, but why did no one have mercy for him when he was so desperate. Steve said that Bill's father was told about Margot's death. Bill did not want to say that he had not seen his father before leaving and that he had never written home. How had his father, a puritan, taken that story? What had he thought about it?

Now Bill understood the origin of Margot's legend. How wrong he had been to believe in her betrayal. But why had she gone to that drinking party? As soon as he had left, she had gone back to her old habits.

More bitterness filled Bill's heart.



CHAPTER 4

Two weeks later Bill Jensen was back in Stump Bridge. He had no urgent reason to come because the clearing of the adit was not complete. Bill spent a morning at the portal with John, then went to the Village in the afternoon. He left the car at the hotel and walked across the ghost town, looking for the familiar places. Half an hour later he was in front of his cabin. The key was hanging on the same place where he had put it and he was about to enter the door when he heard a voice. Somebody was singing in the house. Singing in French.

“Ne suis pas jalou, tait toi,
Je n'ai qu'un amour, c'est toi”

This was Margot's tune and it was Margot's voice, a deep alto. Bill swung the door open and entered the cabin. There was nobody and no voice. Everything was in place as he had left it two weeks ago.

Bill resisted his fear. He certainly was frightened, but he sat at the table listening. Everything was quiet. Bill stayed for a while, swept the dust here and there, swept the floor, then looked in the cabinets and drawers for a recorder or phonograph.

Bill had a mixed feeling of fear and desire to see Margot. She attracted him. Why had he entered the cabin hearing her voice? But was there a voice? Was it not imagination? Did he not expect to hear her cry when approaching the house? Bill convinced himself that he had not heard the voice. He went back to his hotel and told no one.

The next day was Sunday. Bill and John went fishing. The students did not join them. They were going to town in the Land Rover.

Sam and Vic were friends. They helped each other and shared their work and knowledge and their news and even their property to a certain extent, but what different characters they were!

Sam was a lucky fellow and always in high spirits. He took pleasure in his work and studying was easy for him because of an excellent memory. He had an extraordinary success with girls, but he did not take it too seriously and the girls did not stick to him. He was blond, husky and rather handsome, skillful with his hands and witty in conversation.

Vic was dark and slim. He was serious in his studies and punctual in his work. His love affairs were lasting and sometimes painful. Vic thought of responsibility and duty in life whereas Sam took life as pleasant. But both were friends and never quarreled for long.

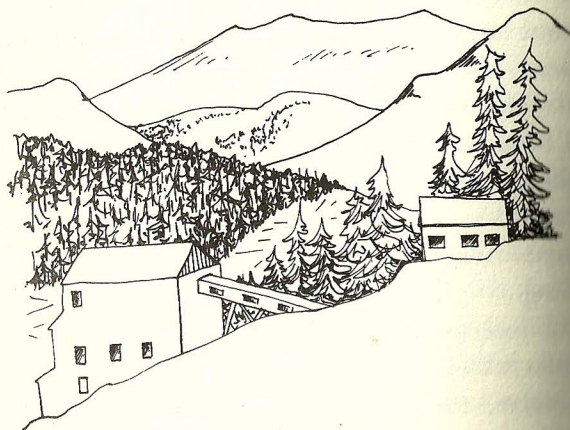
This time they came back with a surprise. When supper was over and the party was resting in the lobby — the only room in that small hotel where you could do it — the students told how they had visited the Yankee Star in search of treasure.

They had taken their lamps and gear, crawled over the pile of muck at the entrance and found all the way clear. They produced a bagful of samples and an accurate record of location for them.

John was unhappy about the adventure. It was extremely dangerous to enter a mine that had not been checked for loose ground or gas pockets, and he was responsible for his men. He scolded his helpers. Had he not told them how dangerous it was? John had never heard about a treasure. Who told them there was one? Vic said that the miners working for the contractor knew about the treasure and they were planning to go for a search. The students wanted to be first; they went — but found nothing.

Bill interfered. He thanked the boys for the samples which he could take at once for assaying. Of course, the mine was dangerous — and they should never attempt another visit before the mine was checked. Bill told them about the treasure. He told the story of the Scarlet Lady as he heard it from Steve Schmidt, but he did not say it was his girl. Of course, there could be no gold in that poor girl's trunk. And it would be buried deep under the collapsed roof at the stope.

Sam was impressed with the story. He said this would not happen in our days. If he had been there he would not have allowed the girl to be molested in that way. Vic was surprised that nobody had been punished. Surely somebody was responsible for that death.



CHAPTER 5

The next day Sam drove the Land Rover to town for supplies. On the way he met a pretty girl hitch-hiking and he picked her up.

At her instigation he drove off the highway and onto a logging road to a charming glade beside a waterfall. The girl proposed a swim. They had a short swim in the chilly water and the girl stretched on a mossy rock to dry. The sun was hot, the forest quiet, the girl lovely.

Sam laid beside her and kissed her. The girl resisted mildly. "Don't do it - please don't, you will be sorry", but he abused her anyhow. Sam rested a minute then looked at her face, the girl had fainted. Her eyes were wide open and rolled up, her mouth twisted in a painful grin. Sam listened to her heart. There was no beat and her body was cold, ice cold. She was still beautiful but in a frightening way. Sam jumped up. What should he do? He ran to the beach where they had left their clothing and put his clothes on. He ran back to the girl.

The girl was gone. He called — “Rita! — Rita, Come back. I won’t touch you any more”. Then he realized that the girl had died in his arms. He got frightened — ran to his truck and drove away.

He told his story to his friends after supper.

Vic was convinced that the girl had played a joke on his friend, but Sam did not believe it possible.

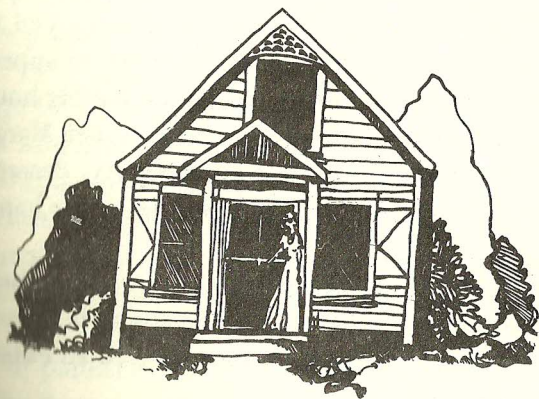
John thought the girl was sick. He read a story by Guy de Maupassant of a girl who fainted that way. The girl probably knew it and resisted Sam. She would not do it on purpose.

Bill did not say a word. He thought of Margot and her death. There was a similiarity in the two cases. Was Sam inventing a story or did it really happen to him, and if it did was not the ghost of Margot involved in that encounter? But why did he think about Margot again and again? What had happened to his cool, realistic mind? Why did he go back to his cabin every time he could do it? Why was he always expecting to see her or hear her voice?

The next day Bill was going back to the office. He took the samples with him. He spent an hour in town visiting with Steve Schmidt but did not mention Margot any more. After visiting Sam he still had some time left. He went to the Land Registry Office. He wanted to know who owned his cabin now. It was still registered in his name but taxes were due for many years. Bill inquired

how much was due and was astonished at the modesty of the sum. He wrote a cheque and the cabin was his again.

When Bill boarded the plane he asked himself why had he bought that cabin? He certainly did not need it. Was it not the ghost of Margot who influenced him? Should he not avoid this country? Bili decided not to return to Stump Bridge — Ever!



CHAPTER 6

In a month's time Bill Jensen was back at Stump Bridge. He cancelled his holiday trip to Europe and settled in the Village. The cabin was renovated under John Randall's supervision and Bill could then enjoy the comforts of rural life. He fished, hunted, rode across familiar hills and enjoyed his cabin. He still was waiting for the ghost to appear. He got the keys of the Grand Hotel, the big house at the end of the block where he had met Margot for the first time. The hotel was empty, deserted and dusty — but still full of memories of his happy days.

Yankee Star was progressing better than expected. The samples collected by the students showed good grade and diamond drilling showed an extension of the orebody.

Nobody could say that Bill had made a mistake insisting on further investigation. His presence at Stump Bridge was explained by his interest in the mine. The ghost story was forgotten.

Stump Bridge was not an abandoned place, as many ghost towns are, because its location on the main highway. People could live there and drive to town for work and shopping. City taxes were low and freedom from all municipal restrictions made the place attractive for some people. The one hundred population was not all oldtimers. But the pioneer spirit prevailed. People were active and helpful and social activity was more intense than in town. A city park with sports grounds, a community hall, a curling rink arena, all old buildings were repaired and kept in good operating conditions.

Sports events were held every weekend and parades, shows and competitions were organized on Statutory holidays. Certainly Stump Bridge was not a dead spot and the students enjoyed it.

On Dominion Day, the first day of July, a parade and a raft race on the little river were organized. The river was at its peak and at that time of the year the rafts made of no more than three logs, were paddled down the white waters over bars and rapids to the next Village, ten miles downstream. People gathered from neighbouring towns and villages and a joyful crowd filled Stump Bridge.

Sam came with a nice looking girl and joined Bill and John at supper. Vic did not appear. The girl was joyful and witty, the supper was gay, but she paid more attention to John than to Sam and poor

Sam felt frustrated. John was in good humor. He joked and talked all the time and the girl kept up with his spirit. Finally Sam left.

Bill was sitting beside the girl trying to make up his mind. He was sure he knew the girl – but when and where he met her he could not remember. Finally John and the girl decided to go for a walk. The girl stood up and Bill had a glance at her reflection in the mirror on the opposite wall. Their eyes crossed. Bill's blood froze in his veins – she was Margot and she recognized him. She was not the elderly woman Margot would be if she lived, but the Margot of his youth, young and pretty.

She walked out and John followed. Bill heard their happy voices in the street. He could not move from his seat he was so frightened. She was a ghost and now John, his friend was with her. What would happen to John?



CHAPTER 7

John Randall followed the girl. They walked along the river and sat on the beach. John kissed the girl and she returned the caress. Later on – she said that they will be more comfortable in a room and she showed him the way to a hotel he had not seen before.

John was resting beside the woman when he felt something strange; she was silent. He looked at her face – she had fainted. Her blue eyes were wide open and rolled up. Her pretty mouth was twisted in a painful grin. He took her hand – it was already cold and stiff. Sam's description sparking through his mind; he had jumped out of bed and at that moment the lights went out.

It was pitch dark in that room. John tried to find his clothes but he could not find them, he could not remember where he had put them and how the room was. He bumped against the bed and fell across the body of the woman which was now icy cold. John was in a panic. He found a door and ran out. All the hotel was in darkness. He barely managed to find his way out into the street.

The chilly night air made him come to his senses. His fright left him and he felt angry. What a naughty joke! If she was sick, she should have warned him. Maybe he should go back and help her? Cold fear crept in his mind just at the thought of going back.

That damned girl had induced him to remove all his clothes. He could not go home to his hotel. He would have to cross the lobby and pass by the open door of the Beer Parlor. He did not want to do that.

Somebody was walking along the street with a flashlight and John started to sneak away – but – at the next corner, he came upon the highway and a powerful streetlight. He could not go further. He jumped a fence and hid behind a house. A light bulb lit the front yard but it was dark where he was.

The back door of the house was not locked and John entered a veranda searching for some clothing – but found none. Someone had entered the yard and came into the house. John attempted a noiseless retreat – but bumped against a chair as he hurried out. A spring-loaded door slammed behind him.

John fled toward the alley and walked stealthily away from the highway and the lights. He thought once more of going to the hotel room to recover his clothing but cold fear came over him again. John finally found a clothes line with some

women's wear on it and two sheets. John decided to grab a sheet, but when he pulled the line, the rollers made a noise. Lights went on, first in the house, then in the yard. John fled, wrapped in the sheet, which was uncomfortably damp.

The only place John could go was Bill's cabin. Bill was a friend, he would believe his story, but it was not easy to find the way in the dark. John Randall, wrapped in the sheet, climbed fences, crossed yards, passed abandoned houses. Avoiding lights and streets and keeping a wary eye for by-passers, he finally reached Bill's cabin and knocked at the door.



CHAPTER 8

During the time that John Randall was strolling in the dark, Bill Jensen was wondering what was happening to himself. Something was wrong with his mind. This ghost story about his sweetheart disturbed him so much that he had hallucinations. A few days ago he could not recall the features of Margot and now he recognized her at a glance in the mirror. Should he consult a psychiatrist?

When John knocked at his door, and came in wrapped in a bed sheet, Bill was not only surprised but also happy to discover that he was not the only one to have visions. The main thing was that John was not hurt and his story showed that Bill's mind had not gone wrong completely. The two of them should be able to find some explanation.

Bill produced some clothes for John and prepared a hot rum for them both. They spent the remainder of the night discussing the strange events.

Bill and John were rational people and they could not accept the ghost story, but there were too many irrational facts to explain.

There must be a girl. A sick girl. And it could be the same woman that Sam had met. But why did not Sam say it was the same girl? Or perhaps he did not want to say. Or the girl herself talked him into playing a joke on John Randall.

They both decided that Sam would not do that.

Listening to John's description, Bill recognized the Grand Hotel where John was trapped, but Bill had visited the place a few days before and he was positive that the electricity was not connected and that most of the wiring was pulled down. There could be no light, and it could not have gone off when the girl fainted.

Something was wrong about this story — unless some hypnosis was involved.

And then Bill was positive he had recognized Margot.

Bill tried to remember all he knew about his girl. He would not speak of his love to anybody, but John was involved in the ghost story and Bill himself was not sure of his mind.

So Bill told John the story of his love.

"I was eighteen", said Bill, "when I saw Margot for the first time". "I was not impressed, or rather I was unfavourably impressed", he said. "I was born in a puritanical family where entertainment was considered sinful. Margot was a singer and a dancer, everything I should avoid".

“The first time I saw her was at a mining party at the Grand Hotel where she entertained. The Manager of the mine was the host and he had his wife with him, so I thought it was all right. It was the first time I was invited to a party like this.”

“There was a stage show and Margot came on stage and danced in a red gown. The boys called her ‘The Scarlet Lady’ and cheered her, but to me she was personified sin. Even that name ‘Scarlet Lady’ was sin.

I did not say much at home and I did not go to that bar again, but I could not forget her. I had never seen a dancer before. It could be that the fact that she was a sinner attracted me. I did not know.

The second time I met Margot, at the Grand Hotel also, I had a friend, a miner, a little older than I. He was a leader and very sure of himself. This boy was leaving to go north. He boasted about this and organized a farewell party. He invited everybody from our shift and me too. I thought I should not say no.

At the party Margot was the main attraction. He had his arm around her waist all the time, petting and kissing her in front of all of us.

You see how I felt? I thought it was a wedding and she was leaving for the north with him.

Then my friend stood up, thanked all of us for coming and said that he was leaving his girl without mate and protection. He wanted now to appoint a

successor. I was shocked. But, the girl jumped on the counter and started dancing and singing – “Who is the Successor? Who wants me?”

I cannot say that I was disgusted – just afraid, or rather upset. I did not believe that the girl could be that bad. I did not want to stay and made a move towards the door, but she jumped off the counter and grabbed me by the arm.

“Here is the successor,” she shouted. “I have him”.

The boys surrounded us, cheering me. What could I do?



Bill stayed dreaming for a while then he continued. "We landed in that hotel room with all the boys around shouting and laughing and congratulating me. The girl was kissing me all the time"

"Once they left us alone, Margot started to cry. Margot was a strange woman. I never saw her crying except that one time. She was crying and sobbing and I did not know what to do. I tried to comfort her and promised all kinds of nonsense. The boys told me that I had to give her twenty dollars and when I produced the money, that made her cry more than before."



"She stopped crying — washed her face and came back smiling. She was very nice to me then, and also in the morning."

I asked her before leaving — "how can I help you?"

"She said that she appreciated my offer, and that I was the only one who could help her, but she could not say anything now. She would think about it and tell me another time."

"Well, I never came back you see. I wanted to go but I postponed it every time. Money was the reason. I was only a miner's helper with a dollar an hour pay and I knew that Mother needed my money at home. I could not afford a twenty dollar visit every time."

"I never stopped thinking about Margot. In spite of her trade and the public opinion, I could not accept the idea that she was a bad woman. Though I was unable to help her, I was ashamed of my broken promise."

"One day I heard that the 'Scarlet Lady' had left town. I was upset. I was so upset that I went to a saloon and got drunk. Real drunk — for the first time in my life. My family was disappointed and I did not drink any more. Gradually all settled down — I forgot Margot. I was happy at home."

CHAPTER 9

"Is that all?" said John.

"No", said Bill, "If that were the whole story there would be no ghost".

"Do you really believe there is one?" said John.

"You are the witness – not me alone", said Bill.

"Let us see what happened next. One day, sometime after Christmas, Margot was back at Stump Bridge. I saw her entering the dining room of the bookhouse at the mine camp."

"She was hired as a waitress, you see. She was thin and sick looking but still smiling as maliciously as before. The miners were saying that she had an operation and could not go with men as she did before."

"I was impressed as you may imagine, I was rather clumsy. I did not sneer at her return as the others did. I did not even speak to her, but I could not stop watching her across the hall. Some of my friends scoffed at me, but not badly."

"One day, Margot came to me and picked me up just like that! She said that she had my promise to help her and she needed me now. I followed her like a lamb. She wanted me to be her man and protect her from other men during the time she was sick. She said it would be no sin but a generous action and I agreed."

"She arranged a job for me at the Grand Hotel. I was a janitor and I also helped the barman so I could be present when she was performing on stage or drinking with the customers. I was young and strong and proud to be her man. The boys did not scoff at me any more."

"My family was not happy, of course. Mother refused to take my money which I brought her as usual. She said it was money of sin. My father told me that he did not blame me as I was a man now. I realized however, he did not want me to see Margot anymore. He did not want Margot around the farm, not near the farm he said. But, I stuck to that girl. Margot was always praising me for everything and in front of everybody. Not in front of me, but the boys told me this. She told them that I was generous and clever and whatnot. She had her room downstairs and at the hotel. I had a small room in the attic at the hotel and I did not like it. She offered me money to buy a lot in the Village and build myself a cabin. "This cabin here – I built it myself", he stated. "The cabin was not finished yet when I installed a heater and moved in. I could spend more time working in this way".

"The cabin was not finished and not comfortable at all when one evening after work, Margot came to me and said, "Let's go home". She meant the cabin. We spent the night together and we moved in the next day."

"Margot continued her performing on stage, and she stayed drinking late with customers – but I was always present and she never failed. Her sickness justified her behaviour and people accepted the excuse. In fact she was my wife."

"She worked with me at the cabin and fixed it in her French way – nothing costly you know, but neat and cozy, curtains and napkins, and books, and personal things. I thought it was the prettiest in the country. She did not like people entering our house unless invited. She had no girl friends and she did not want the boys of the mine in her home."

"She was very ambitious and her voice was her main interest. Margot practiced singing and reading books, and studied operas by listening to records. I think she could have done it, if she had lived. Not in Stump Bridge, of course."

"She was ambitious for me. She wanted me to study and become a Mining Engineer. I followed her advice much later as you know. I still think it was Margot that put it in my mind. We never spoke of love. She did not like it and she stopped me every time I started talking about love. Strange girl – she did everything to please me, never argued, never lost her temper. But I never knew nothing about her previous life. She told me that she was born in Paris and her parents were well off people."

"Her father died and her mother remarried when Margot was fifteen. Then all went to hell, she said. "Our business, our money and me". She never spoke about her future life. She did not complain. She did not complain about her sickness, or the fact that she could not perform although I knew she was very upset. She never cried. This is the girl – she is my sweetheart. Now how about the ghost? "I don't know what she wants".

"But what happened that New Year's Day?" asked John. "The story that Steve Schmidt told you".

"I cannot understand," said Bill. "I cannot understand how she could go to that party, and why?" The doctor told her not to perform any more because she was sick again. She should know the danger. She stayed at home and I was working at the mine. I got my blasting certificate and had a good pay. We were not short of money. If she wanted, she could go to the Hotel and dance there. People knew and liked her. Nothing would happen. I thought about despair. I think there was no reason for despair, she would have recovered. The doctor told her that she would be singing and dancing again."

"What happened at Christmas? We were invited by my father to spend Christmas Eve together with the family after Church. It was the first time Margot was invited. My father was very courteous with Margot. I had not ever seen my father so

cordial, but mother looked afraid and when I started to speak about marriage, mother protested. Margot interferred and said that she would not marry me because she was a sick woman who could not have children. She said that I needed a healthy wife. That settled the argument. The evening ended happily and I thought Margot was accepted in the family.”

“A few days later, my father came to the cabin with my brother, George, to pay a visit. Father needed my advice on a business he had in town. I wanted to help, because I was proud to be trusted by my father. We decided to go together and Margot did not say a word. I took two days off at the mine and we went.”

“We left on the 29th day of December and were supposed to be back New Year’s Eve – but we missed the train. We came back by train on New Year’s Day in the afternoon and I went home straight from the station. I had a present for Margot but she was not there. She was gone for good and so was everything she owned. Can you imagine how I felt? I lost everything at once. I hated Margot. I hated my father for taking me away from home. I hated my mother because I thought that Margot had left because of her. I looked for Margot all around Stump Bridge. People did not know or did not want to talk about it. I understand that. I sensed conspiracy and suspected my family. I too, left Stump Bridge forever and I never wrote home.”

“It never occurred to me that Margot was dead.” Bill was deeply upset. John was silent. Bill prepared another drink.



CHAPTER 10

At dawn, John and Bill entered the Grand Hotel. Bill had the key and John showed the way to the room where he had been trapped.

There was no corpse in the bed and the bed was not made up. There were no sheets or blankets and it was dusty. All John's clothing was neatly folded on a chair and his coat was on a hanger.

The electrical fixture was not there and two wires were sticking out of the ceiling. There could be no electric light in this room. There was evidence that John had been in the room but there was also evidence that his story was not true. John could have been under some hypnosis or charm and Bill could also have been under some hypnosis when he thought he recognized Margot in that strange girl. Somebody was making fun of them all.

Sam had introduced this girl, so he could be in the plot or he could be a victim too. They decided to approach Sam at breakfast.

At breakfast, Bill Jensen was alone at a table with Sam. John Randall had left early and had taken Vic with him. Bill tried to switch the conversation to yesterday's girl. Sam, usually talka-

tive, was reluctant to speak. From the few words Bill heard, he could understand that Sam had been waiting for the girl to come, but when she came, she ignored him, so Sam felt hurt.

Bill thought of himself. Was he not in the same position? He had been waiting for Margot to appear and when he recognized her and their eyes met, he got scared and backed out. Should he not have said a kind word to her? But what? That he was sorry that he had been angry with her? That he had not known? That he loved her again? Quite unexpectedly Sam said, "I did not apologize — that is why she ignored me." "Apologize for what?" Bill asked.

"For being scared. Leave it alone. I do not know what I am saying, I had better go." And Sam left in a hurry.

Bill thought that it was strange that Sam, a young man so carefree and joyful would have the same feelings as he did.

The next day ghost stories spread over Stump Bridge. Many people had seen, or at least heard John's wandering in the dark. There were many witnesses and their stories were becoming more fantastic every time they were told.

The next evening, many witnesses met some more ghosts and there was no end of ghost descriptions. Of course, John's adventure was not known and Sam's hitch-hiker was forgotten.

At the end of the week, there were three factions in the Village. The most conservative Oldtimers were convinced that the ghost of 'The Scarlet Lady' was haunting the streets because the prospecting party disturbed the grave of the poor girl. Another faction was convinced that somebody was pulling a joke on the prospectors, scaring them out of the Village and still another faction was sure that it was a trick of the Company which wanted to scare people of the Village and keep the prices of real estate low. As the 'Scarlet Lady' did not appear any more, these rumours faded away.

John Randall made a declaration that the Mining Company will respect the grave of 'The Scarlet Lady' if they find it. But they had absolutely no official information that such a grave existed.

Sam and Vic reacted differently to the ghost rumours. Vic scoffed at the merry tales he was convinced that somebody was trying to hinder the work of the party. The treasure hunt was the first imposition and now they wanted to scare the miners out of entering the drift. This was sound reasoning.

Sam was not affirmative. He listened to all rumours and took notes but the rumours were contradictory and nothing could be concluded by computing it. Sam was visibly dispirited. He came several times to see Bill at the cabin and asked him about the 'Scarlet Lady'. Who was she? And how long ago did she live? And what did she look like? He did not know that she was Bill's girl. Now Bill became convinced that Sam had met the ghost.

Sam was under the spell, as he was himself. Should he break the spell? He had no desire to do so, neither did Sam.

Vic was worried about Sam. He tried to talk him out of his superstitions. He had never met Sam's girl but he hated her for what she had done to his friend. Of course he did not think she was a ghost, nor did he think she was a sick girl as Sam had told him. He was now convinced that she was a naughty girl and pulled tricks to keep Sam under her charm. Vic did not believe that Sam's girl had anything to do with the ghost story. The ghost was the Village gossip and Sam's girl was a real girl, thought Vic.

Vic had his own car, a Volkswagen, which he drove to town very often. He had a girl there. Sam said that he had met the girl, that she was not pretty, but nice, and that she was living with her parents and working in a store.

In spite of this steady romance, Vic got in trouble with the ghost. One night, about two o'clock in the morning, Stump Bridge was awakened by shouts and screaming. Vic was caught by some ghost hunters and beaten. He was wrapped in a sheet and had no other clothing.

Now the Villagers were convinced that the students had planned all that ghost story. The prospecting party suffered badly from that state of affairs.

Vic told his friends that he was driving home from town at midnight and had picked up a lonely hitch-hiking girl. It was dark and he could not see her well. She made advances at him and he gave in. When they reached Stump Bridge, she showed him the way to a big abandoned house which was very dark. She stole all his clothing and disappeared. He took a sheet from the bed and was just reaching home when he was caught. Vic was not hurt badly but he was mad at the naughty joke.

In the evening, Bill and John went to the Grand Hotel and made a search. They found Vic's clothing in the same room, nicely folded. They did not say where they found it when John gave the parcel back to Vic. Both students felt guilty but they did not see why.

Bill and John were sure now that there was a conspiracy — and some hypnotism involved.

CHAPTER 11

This time the ghost appeared in the open. It did not settle the dispute about its origin but at least nobody could deny that something unusual was going on in Stump Bridge.

This is how it happened: A Klondyke night party was organized by the Elks, in the old Stump Bridge Community Hall. People gathered from all the neighbouring Villages in gold diggers' outfits with shovels and gold pans, fake money and fake gold. Dancing and drinking and gambling went on as in the old times. Real gambling with real money.

John and Bill did not go to that party. They stayed in Bill's cabin discussing the plans of the mine.

Vic went to town to get his girlfriend, while Sam came to the party with a very pretty girl in a long red cotton dress. They entered the gambling room and Sam gave his girl a dollar to start betting. She won. She won again and again. Soon there was a pile of money in front of her and a crowd of onlookers around. She was a passionate gambler and a master bluffer. She moved from one table to another and her luck held.

Presently, however, she stared dreamy-eyed with her money in front of her on the table. She raised her head and looked around.

"You have all watched me win," she said. "And you thought to yourselves that there was something unnatural about it. All these ghost stories came to your mind and you suspect me not to be natural too. "What will you do if I am not? Beat me like you beat a young man the other night? Why? What did the ghost do to you? Oldtimers say that she was crying in her cabin. Did one of these oldtimers have compassion on her? Never, just fear and hatred. Why?"

Nobody answered and the crowd of onlookers backed away from her. Sam stayed alone beside the girl.

"You see, you are scared", she said. "You should rather be scared of yourselves. I know what is coming. Some of you think that if she is the ghost she cannot take the money with her — so when she vanishes or does something spectacular I will grab her money in the confusion. There are many of you who think like this and somebody will be hurt and you will put the blame on me".

She stood up and walked towards the door, then turned and faced the crowd. "Well I am the ghost, and I do not want anybody to be hurt and I warn you — do not touch the money".

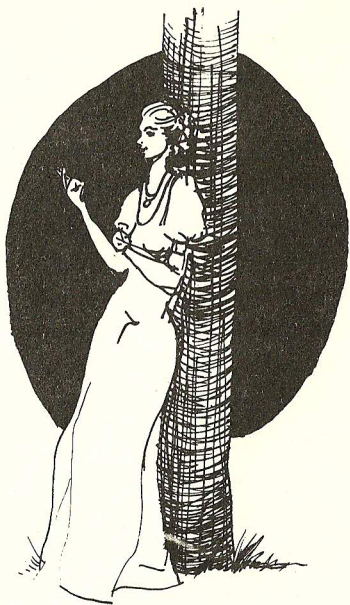
She faced the crowd and the men faced her. They were all fascinated by the beauty of the girl and they all wanted her. She turned, ran out, and slammed the door behind her.

Nobody moved. Nobody took the money. They were bewitched. Sam came to his senses first and he ran out behind his girl.

Vic was in the Dance Hall when he saw Margot rushing through the room. He recognized her at once. She was the girl who bewitched him and took his clothing. Then he saw Sam running behind. Both disappeared. "Sam is in danger", he said and then ran behind leaving his own girl to wait for him in the room. Vic was convinced that Sam was bewitched and that he should help him out of that charm.

Vic ran through the dark streets but he could not see Sam, nor the girl anywhere. He went to Bill's cabin for help. Bill and John had been spending the evening with a bottle of rye. They took a lamp from their mining gear and went to the Grand Hotel. Nobody was there. They separated and went through the Village in search of Sam.

Vic was going back to the Community Hall when he saw Margot leaning against a power pole and smoking a cigarette. She was smiling maliciously at him. Vic grabbed her by the arm. "Where is Sam?" he shouted. She looked frightened.



"I have not seen him since I left," she said.

"Where is Sam?" he shouted again, "you bewitched him and you destroyed him. You will kill him. Where is Sam?"

She jerked loose and ran away. Before she could escape however, he caught her, lifted her in his arms, and carried her kicking and screaming to his car. He pushed her into the car and drove away.

Some people saw the scene but did not interfere. Some were frightened and some were too far. They gathered together commenting on the event.

Meanwhile, John met Sam searching for his girl and they were coming back when they met the little crowd and were told that Vic had grabbed the girl. Now Sam was out of his wits. He loved that girl, he was bewitched since their encounter at the waterfall. She may have been the ghost but it didn't matter, he was infatuated.

John took the Land Rover and they rushed in pursuit to Vic.

Vic was driving fast, and the girl was not screaming but sobbing in her corner. Vic did not know what he would do with the girl. He thought that he would dump her out at the mine portal and maybe give her a spanking. She should know that he was not afraid of ghost stories and she could not bewitch him.

Vic drove up the winding and steep mining road. At a switchback when he had to slow down, the girl opened the door, jumped out and fled. Vic stopped the car and ran after her. He had almost caught up with her when she turned around and slapped his face hard. Furious, he lashed out with all his strength and hit her above the ear, first with his right hand, then with his left. She was still standing straight — but he threw her on the ground and held her down with his knees, hit her breasts and her stomach while she tried to protect her face with her arm. Again and again he struck her until she was motionless.

Slowly, Vic got up and walked to his car. What had he done? He had killed the girl. He had not wanted to do that. His hands were sore, so sore that he could scarcely put the key in the ignition. All around him the night was silent. The darkness prevented him from seeing his hands, which became more and more painful with every passing minute.

Finally, a car came up the mining road. The Land Rover stopped behind him. Sam and John came to him, asking what had happened. Vic told them he had killed the ghost. He had not wanted to do it. He was afraid of what he had done. They went, all three of them, to the place where Vic had left the corpse, but there was no corpse. They found a road sign lying on the ground, smashed and blood-spotted. There was also blood on the ground and on the rocks.

Apparently in his fury, Vic had smashed his fists against the sign-pole and the rocks. He found that his wounds were full of splinters and sand. He spent a week in the hospital and stayed depressed for a long time.

The inhabitants of Stump Bridge were more puzzled than ever. Many had seen the ghost, but who would believe she was a ghost? She had not done anything an ordinary woman could not do or say, except perhaps that no woman in her right mind would leave over a Thousand Dollars behind as she did. The money was collected by the Elks

Treasurer and recorded as a donation by the 'Scarlet Lady'. This at least was positive.

The members of the prospecting party had played a strange role in this event. First Sam brought in the ghost and then he ran off behind her. He certainly would not run behind a ghost. Then Vic grabbed the girl and drove away with her and that was not a ghost story either. He came back hurt, but what they all were telling, nobody in this world would believe. The girl disappeared once more. Nevertheless rumours of this story spread all over the country and many tourists and even people of neighbouring towns came to Stump Bridge to see the ghost.

Bill Jensen was upset, he felt hurt that she had come and he did not meet her. She came for Sam? His Margot was Sam's girl now? The ghost of Margot, Sam's girl! What nonsense! Was she teasing him?

JULY 1ST.
 1920.
 For the first time
 in
 STUMP BRIDGE
THE SCARLET LADY
 MARGERITE ROY
 COME AND SEE HER GHOST DANCING
 AT STUMP BRIDGE.
 PARIS.
 ENTERTAINING HER GUESTS.
 AT THE
GRAND HOTEL BAR.
 EVERYBODY WELCOME.

CHAPTER 12

After this event, the ghost did not show up for a long time. She appeared at Labour Day and also in a spectacular manner.

Several events were planned in Stump Bridge and a talent show was scheduled for the evening. Tourists and strangers filled the little Village and the Community Hall was overcrowded. They all expected the ghost to appear and she came.

She came at the talent show, right on stage, and stayed for a half an hour, singing and dancing, captivating her audience, but it was only when she walked down the steps, crossed the hall and left, that people realized that she was wearing a scarlet cotton dress and was singing with a French accent. Even people who had seen her at the Klondyke Night did not recognize her until after the show. Nobody got frightened. Everybody was convinced that the organizers had invited the girl to perform. It was such a tourist attraction that Stump Bridge could become famous all over the world.

People were cheering and laughing and calling her back on the stage but she did not come. Her name on the program was Rita Red. Surely no ghost would play this joke.

The organizers, on the other hand, were frightened and confused. They had never heard of the singer and they had not printed that name on the program. They did not dare to say anything; not to that audience anyhow.

When Margot came on stage, Bill and John were sitting together, close to the stage. They recognized her immediately. John was uneasy, looking at the woman he had seen collapse in his arms. Bill was fascinated. He listened to her dear voice and he admired her beautiful figure as she danced; all the love of his early youth returned to him as he watched her.

When she was gone and the audience started to leave the hall, John wanted to go but Bill was expecting her to return. John did not want to abandon his friend and he stayed.

When the hall was empty, Margot came. She walked down the steps of the stage and said "Come on Bill, let's go home". The same simple words which started the blessed happiness of his youth.

Bill, full of love and contentment, followed her. John, full of fear could not move.

Through the dark streets they went, Bill, walking behind the girl, admiring her beautiful dark hair and her light-footed walk. They entered the cabin,

and she went straight to the bedroom. She opened the closet, pushed a partition aside; in the recess was her scarlet gown, her stage shoes and a suitcase. She put the suitcase on the bed and opened it. Inside there was money.

"Look Bill, this is what people say is my treasure. It is not my money, but nobody will come to claim it now, so it is yours. I was not an honest woman, you known, and a stupid girl too. I always put my faith in money, not people. I did not like people of your kind. I was always suspicious of their sincerity. I do not know how I could have fallen in love with you. But I did.

"Don't interrupt me Bill. I have hardly the time to tell you all I want to say.

"Come here. Let us sit at the table as we usually did, I loved you, Bill. I loved you so badly that I sincerely wanted to be good, to be worth you. But still I did not trust my luck; it was impossible to be so happy. In spite of my sickness, in spite of my vanishing hopes, I was happy with you. I did not believe that it would last. Something had to happen and it did. I thought you would leave me, or your parents would take you away from me. Yes, I was convinced of this. I was always suspicious of your family. It was an obsession and when you did not come home on that New Year's Eve, I was sure that I had lost you.

Your mother was at the station and I think she did see my distress. She came to me with a word of kindness, but I met her with hate and ran away.

What happened next was panic and despair. I did not know what to do. Your two friends wanted me to perform at the mine. It was a way out of my panic I thought, but it was not. Panic and distress all the way into death.

I cannot explain to you what it is, that steady, timeless distress. The only relief is love of those left behind. But there was no sympathy for me. Nobody! Even you, Bill. Your anger at me was a dark shadow. A black spot in pitch darkness. Now it is over; you love me again, but believe me, it did hurt. Do you know who gave me the first relief? Your parents! Who could expect this? They knew what happened to me and they understood my distress. They prayed for me! I do not know what good it did them, but to me it was as if two little lights came up in the dark. Very regularly they came up.



And then there was one little light only. Your father died. But his presence there was good to me. Just as if there was a breeze on a very hot day. So sweet it was.

Love me, Bill, Love me very much. Believe me, it helps. Don't stay here. Go. But don't forget me. Don't leave me alone in the dark."

Her voice dropped to a mere whisper. "Please Bill, take me out of that grave of shame — send me back to France — any churchyard will do."

She was losing her breath. "Send me back to my land" she whispered. A puff of wind swung the door open. She ran out.

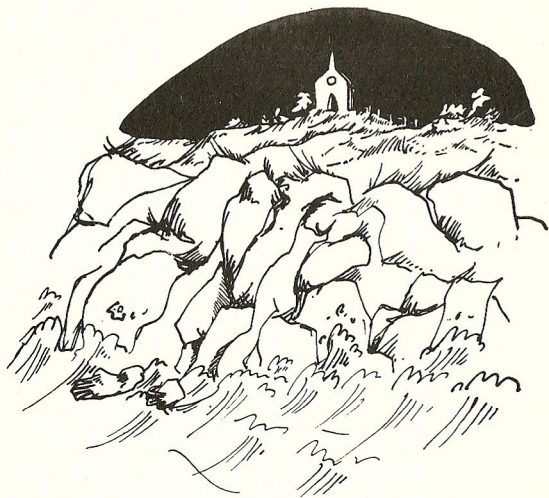
Bill's heart was filled with unutterable sorrow. He sat at the table with tears running down his wrinkled cheeks.

When John Randall came to the cabin an hour later, he found the door open and Bill asleep with his head on the table. The wind was blowing money bills around the room.

It took John some time to waken his friend. Bill could remember following the girl to his cabin and the money she gave him was there, but then he could not say when he slept.

Once more they spent the night talking about the tragic fate of the little French singer girl.

In the morning, Bill left Stump Bridge forever.



The new company put Yankee Star into production. John Randall was appointed Manager. Sam came back as Mining Engineer. Vic never came back to Stump Bridge, even to visit his friend Sam.

The new mine was an open pit mined from the surface. When the excavation reached the old workings and the stope 4110-E3, they proceeded with care. Sam came to supervise the digging. They unearthed a skeleton and some debris, but nothing of value.

Carefully they collected the bones, placed them in a box, and shipped them to France.

Bill Jensen was there, waiting to bury his girl.

Nelson, B.C. December, 1973.

