

***FRANK
L. PACKARD***



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Frank L. Packard

The Sin That Was His

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THE END

1917

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THE SIN
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THE SIN THAT WAS HIS

BY

FRANK L. PACKARD

AUTHOR OF "THE ADVENTURES OF JIMMIE DALK,"
"THE MIRACLE MAN," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANCES ROGERS

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CHAPTER I—THREE-ACE ARTIE

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OF Arthur Leroy, commonly known throughout the Yukon as Three-Ace Artie, Ton-Nugget Camp knew a good deal—and equally knew very little. He had drifted in casually one day, and, evidently finding the environment remuneratively to his liking, had stayed. He was a bird of passage—tarrying perhaps for the spring clean-up.

He was not exactly elegant in his apparel, for the conditions of an out-post mining camp did not lend themselves to elegance; but he was immeasurably the best dressed and most scrupulously groomed man that side of Dawson. His hands, for instance, were very soft and white; but then, he did no work—that is, of a nature to impair their nicety.

His name was somewhat confusing. It might be either French or English, according to the twist that was given to its pronunciation—and Three-Ace Artie could give it either twist with equal facility. He confessed to being a Canadian—which was the only confession of any nature whatsoever that Three-Ace Artie had ever been known to make. He spoke English in a manner that left no doubt in the world but that it was his native language—except in the mind of Canuck John, the only French Canadian in the camp, who was equally positive that in the person of Three-Ace Artie he had unquestionably found a compatriot born to the French tongue.

A few old-timers around Dawson might have remembered, if it had not been so commonplace an occurrence when it happened, that Leroy, as a very young man, had toiled in over the White Pass; though that being only a matter of some four years ago at this time, Leroy was still a very young man, even if somewhat of a change had taken place in his appearance—due possibly, or possibly not, to the rigours of the climate. Three-Ace Artie since then had grown a full beard. But Leroy's arrival, being but one of so many, the old-timers had found in it nothing to remember.

Other and more definite particulars concerning Three-Ace Artie, however, were in the possession of Ton-Nugget Camp. Three-Ace Artie had no temperance proclivities—but he never drank during business hours. No one had ever seen a glass at his elbow when there was a pack of cards on the table! Frankly a professional gambler, he was admitted to be a good one—and square. He was polished, but not too suave; he was unquestionably possessed of far more than an ordinary education, but he never permitted his erudition to become objectionable; and he had a reputation for coolness and nerve that Ton-Nugget Camp had seen enhanced on several occasions and belied on none. He was of medium height, broad shouldered, and muscular; he had black hair and black eyes; under the beard the jaw was square; unruffled, he was genial; ruffled, he was known to be dangerous; and, still too young to show the markings of an ungracious life, his forehead was unwrinkled, and his skin clear and fresh.

Also, during his three months' sojourn in Ton-Nugget Camp, he was credited, not without reason, in having won considerably more than he had lost. Upon these details rested whatever claim to an intimate acquaintanceship with Three-Ace Artie the camp could boast; for the rest, Ton-Nugget Camp, in common with the Yukon in general, was quite privileged to hazard as many guesses as it pleased!

In a word, such was Three-Ace Artie's status in Ton-Nugget Camp when there arrived one afternoon a young man, little more than a boy, patently fresh from the East. And here, though Ton-Nugget Camp was quick to take the newcomer's measure, and, ignoring the other's claim to the self-conferred title of Gerald Rogers, promptly dubbed him the Kid, it permitted, through lack of observation, a slight detail to escape its notice that might otherwise perhaps have suggested a new and promising field for its guesses concerning Three-Ace Artie.

Though at no more distant a date than a few days previous to his arrival, the Kid had probably never seen a "poke" in his life before, much less one filled with currency in the shape of gold dust, he had, in the first flush of his entry to MacDonald's, and with the life-long air of one accustomed to doing nothing else, flung a very new and pleasantly-filled poke in the general direction of the scales at the end of the bar, and, leaning back against the counter, supporting himself on his elbows, proceeded to "set them up" for all concerned. MacDonald's, collectively and individually, which is to say no small portion of the camp, for MacDonald's was at once hotel, store, bar and general hang-out, obeyed the invitation without undue delay, and was in

the act of enjoying the newcomer's hospitality when Three-Ace Artie strolled in.

Some one nearest the bar reached out a glass to the gambler over the intervening heads, the cluster of men broke away that the ceremony of introduction with the stranger might be duly performed—and Ton-Nugget Camp, failing to note the sudden tightening of the gambler's fingers around his glass, the startled flash in the dark eyes that was instantly veiled by half dropped, sleepy lids, heard only Three-Ace Artie's, "Glad to know you, Mr. Rogers," in the gambler's usual and quietly modulated voice.

Following that, however, not being entirely unsophisticated, Ton-Nugget Camp stuck its tongue in its cheek and awaited developments—meanwhile making the most of its own opportunities, for the Kid, boisterous, loose with his money, was obviously too shining a mark for even amateurs to overlook. Ton-Nugget Camp, therefore, was, while expectant, quite content that Three-Ace Artie should, through motives which it attributed to professional delicacy, avoid rather than make any hurried advances toward intimacy with the newcomer; since, not feeling the restraint of any professional ethics itself, Ton-Nugget Camp was enabled to take up a few little collections on its own account via the stud poker route at the expense of the Kid.

Two days passed, during which Three-Ace Artie, besides being little in evidence, refrained entirely from pressing his attentions upon the stranger; but despite this, thanks to the adroitness of certain members of the community and his own all too frequent attendance upon the bar, matters were not flourishing with the Kid. The Kid drank far more than

was good for him, played far more than was good for him, and, flushed and fuddled with liquor, played none too well. True, there were those in the camp who offered earnest, genuine and well-meant advice, amongst them a grim old Presbyterian by the name of Murdock Shaw, who was credited with being the head of an incipient, and therefore harmless, reform movement—but this advice the Kid, quite as warmly as it was offered, consigned to other climes in conjunction with its progenitors; and, as a result, all that was left of his original poke at the expiration of those two days was an empty chamois bag from which, possibly by way of compensation, the offensive newness had been considerably worn off.

“If he's got any more,” said the amateurs, licking their lips, “here's hopin' that Three-Ace Artie 'll keep on overlookin' the bet!”

And then, the next afternoon, the Kid flashed another poke, quite as new and quite as pleasantly-nurtured as its predecessor—and Three-Ace Artie seemed to awake suddenly to the knock of opportunity at his door.

With just what finesse and aplomb the gambler inveigled the Kid into the game no one was prepared to say—it was a detail of no moment, except to Three-Ace Artie, who could be confidently trusted to take care of such matters, when moved to do so, with the courtly and genial graciousness of one conferring a favour on the other! But, be that as it may, the first intimation the few loungers who were in MacDonald's at the time had that anything was in the wind was the sight of MacDonald, behind the bar, obligingly exchanging the pokes of both men for poker chips. The

loungers present thereupon immediately expressed their interest by congregating around the table as Three-Ace Artie and the Kid sat down.

“Stud?” suggested Three-Ace Artie, with an engaging smile.

The Kid, already none too sober, nodded his head.

“And table stakes!” he supplemented, with a somewhat lordly flourish of the replenished glass that he had carried with him from the bar.

“Of course!” murmured the gambler.

It was still early afternoon, but an afternoon of the long-night of the northern winter, sunless, with only a subdued twilight without, and the big metal lamps, hanging from the ceiling, were lighted. In the centre of the room a box-stove alternately crackled and purred, its sheet-iron sides glowing dull red. The bare, rough-boarded room, save for the little group, was empty. Behind the bar, with a sort of curious, cynical smile that supplied no additional beauty to his shrewd, hard-lined visage, MacDonald himself propped his bullet-head in his hands, elbows on the counter, to watch the proceedings.

Three-Ace Artie and the Kid began to play. Occasionally the door opened, admitting a miner who took a brisk, fore-intentioned step or two toward the bar—and catching sight of the game in progress, as though magnet-drawn, immediately changed his direction and joined those already around the table. But neither Three-Ace Artie nor the Kid appeared to pay any attention to the constantly augmenting number of spectators. The game see-sawed, fortune smiling with apparently unbiased fickleness first on one, then on the

other. The Kid grew a little more noisy, a little more intoxicated—as MacDonald, from a mere spectator, became an attendant at the Kid's frequent beck and call. Three-Ace Artie was entirely professional—there was no glass at Three-Ace Artie's elbow, when he lost he smiled good-humouredly, when he won he smoothed over the other's discomfiture with self-deprecatory tact; he was unperturbed and cordial, he bet sparingly and in moderation—to enjoy the game, as it were, for the game's own sake, the stakes being, as it were again, simply to supply a little additional zest and tang, and for no other reason whatever!

And, then, little by little, the Kid began to force the game; and, as the stakes grew higher, began to lose steadily, with the result that an hour of play saw most of the chips, instead of a glass, flanking Three-Ace Artie's elbow—and saw a large proportion of Ton-Nugget Camp, to whom the word in some mysterious manner had gone forth, flanking the table five and six deep.

The more the Kid lost, the more he drank. Whatever ease of manner, whatever composure he had originally possessed was gone now. His hair straggled unkemptly over his forehead, his cheeks were flushed, his lips worked constantly on the butt of an unlighted cigarette.

The crowd pressed a little closer, leaned a little further over the table. There was something almost fascinating in the deftness with which the soft, white hands of Three-Ace Artie caressed the cards, there was something almost fascinating, too, in the cool impassiveness of the gambler's poise, and in the sort of languid selfpossession that lighted the dark eyes; but Ton-Nugget Camp had lived too long in

familiarity with Three-Ace Artie to be interested in the gambler's personality at that moment—its interest was centred in the game. The play now had all the earmarks of a grand finale. There were big stakes on the table—and the last of the Kid's chips. The crowd raised itself on tiptoes. Both men turned their “hole” cards. Three-Ace Artie reached out calmly, drew the chips toward him, smiled almost apologetically, and, picking up the deck, riffled the cards tentatively—the opposite side of the table was bare of stakes.

For a moment the Kid circled his lips with the tip of his tongue, and flirited his hair back from his forehead with an uncertain, jerky motion of his hand; then he snatched up his glass, spilled a portion of its contents, gulped down the remainder, and began to fumble under his vest, finally wrenching out a money-belt.

“Go on—what do you think!” he said thickly. “I ain't done yet! I'll get mine back, an' yours, too! Table stakes—eh? I'll get you this time—b'God! Table stakes—eh—again? What do you say?”

“Of course!” murmured Three-Ace Artie politely.

And then the crowd shuffled its feet uneasily. Murdock Shaw, who had edged his way close to the table, leaned over and touched the Kid's shoulder.

“I'd cut it out, if I was you, son,” he advised bluntly. “You're drunk—and a mark!”

A sort of quick, sibilant intake of breath came from the circle around the table. Like a flash, one of Three-Ace Artie's hands, from the deck of cards, vanished under the table; and the dark eyes, the slumber gone from their depths,

narrowed dangerously on Murdock Shaw. Then Three-Ace Artie smiled—unpleasantly.

“It isn't as though you were *new* in the Yukon, Murdock”—there was a deadliness in the quiet, level tones. “What's the idea?”

Like magic, to right and left, on each side of the table, the crowd cleared a line behind the two men—then silence.

The gambler's hand remained beneath the table; his eyes cold, alert, never wavering for the fraction of a second from the miner's face.

Perhaps a minute passed. The miner did not speak or move, save that his lips tightened and the tan of his face took on a deeper hue.

Then Three-Ace Artie spoke again:

“Are you *calling*, Murdock?” he inquired softly.

The miner hesitated an instant, then turned abruptly on his heel.

“When I call you,” he said evenly, over his shoulder, “it will break you for keeps—and you won't have long to wait, either!”

The Kid, who had been alternating a maudlin gaze from the face of one man to the other, stood up now, and, hanging to the back of his chair, watched the miner's retreat in a fuddled way.

“Say, go chase yourself!” he called out, in sudden inspiration—and, glancing around for approval, laughed boisterously at his own drunken humour.

The door closed on Murdock Shaw. The Kid slipped down into his chair, dumped a handful of American double-eagles

out of the money-belt—and, reaching again for his glass, banged it on the table.

“Gimme another!” he shouted in the direction of the bar. “Hey—Mac—d'ye hear! Gimme another drink!”

Three-Ace Artie's hands were above the table again—the slim, delicate, tapering fingers shuffling, riffing, and reshuffling the cards.

MacDonald approached the table, and picked up the empty glass.

“Wait!” commanded the Kid ponderously, and scowled suddenly in the throes of another inspiration. He pointed a finger at Three-Ace Artie. “Say—give him one, too!” He wagged his head sapiently. “If he wants any more chance at my money, he's got to have one, too! That's what! Old guy's right about that! I'm the only one that's drunk—you've got to drink, too! What'll you have—eh?”

The group had closed in around the table again, and now all eyes were riveted, curiously, expectantly, upon Three-Ace Artie. If the gambler had one fixed principle from which, as Ton-Nugget Camp had excellent reasons for knowing, neither argument nor cajolery had ever moved him, it was that of refusing to drink while he played—but now, while all eyes were on Three-Ace Artie, Three-Ace Artie's eyes were on the pile of American gold that the Kid had displayed. There was a quick little curve to the gambler's lips, that became a slightly tolerant, slightly good-natured smile—and then the crowd nodded significantly to itself.

“Why, certainly!” said Three-Ace Artie pleasantly. “Give me the same, Mac.”

“That's the talk!” applauded the Kid.

Three-Ace Artie pushed the cards across the table.

“This is a new game!” announced the Kid. “Cut for deal. Table stakes!”

They cut. Three-Ace Artie won, riffled the cards several times, passed them over to be cut again, and dealt the first card apiece face down.

The Kid examined his card in approved fashion by pulling it slightly over the edge of the table and secretively turning up one corner; then, still face down, he pushed it back, and, MacDonald, returning with the glasses from the bar at that moment, reached greedily for his own and tossed it off. He nodded with heavy satisfaction as Three-Ace Artie drained the other glass. Again he examined his card as before.

“That's a pretty good card!” he stated with owlish gravity. “Worth pretty good bet!” He laid a stack of his gold eagles upon the card.

Three-Ace Artie placed an equivalent number of chips upon his own card, and dealt another apiece—face up now on the table. An eight-spot of spades fell to the Kid; a ten-spot of diamonds to Three-Ace Artie.

“Worth jus' much as before!” declared the Kid—and laid another stack of eagles upon the card.

“Mine's worth a little more this time,” smiled Three-Ace Artie—and doubled the bet.

“Sure!” mumbled the Kid. “Sure thing!”

Again Three-Ace Artie dealt—a king of hearts to the Kid; a deuce of hearts to himself.

The Kid's hand seemed to tremble eagerly, as he fumbled with his gold eagles. He glanced furtively at the gambler—and then, as though trying to read in Three-Ace

Artie's face how far he might safely egg the other on, he began to drop coin after coin upon his cards.

The crowd stirred a little uncomfortably. The Kid had undoubtedly the better hand so far, but he had made a fool play—a blind man could have read through the back of the card that was so carefully guarded face down on the table. The Kid had a pair of kings against a possible pair of tens or deuces on the gambler's side.

Three-Ace Artie imperturbably “saw” the bet—and coolly dealt the fourth card. Another king fell to the Kid; another deuce to himself.

The Kid's eyes were burning feverishly now. He bet again, laughing, chuckling drunkenly as he swept forward a generous share of his remaining gold—and with a quiet, unostentatiously appraising glance at what was left of the pile of eagles, Three-Ace Artie raised heavily.

Then, for the first time, the Kid hesitated, and a momentary frightened look flashed across his face. He lifted the corner of his “hole” card again and again nervously, as though to assure himself that he had made no mistake—and finally laughed with raucous confidence again, and, pushing the hair out of his eyes, demanded another drink, and returned the raise.

The onlookers sucked in their breath—but this time approved the Kid's play. The cards showed a pair of deuces and a ten-spot spread out before Three-Ace Artie, a pair of kings and an eight-spot in front of the Kid. But the Kid had already given his hand away, and with a king in the “hole,” making three kings, Three-Ace Artie could not possibly win unless his “hole” card was a deuce or a ten, and on top of

that that his next and final card should be a deuce or ten as well. It looked all the Kid's way.

Three-Ace Artie again “saw” the other's raise—and dealt the last card.

There was a sudden shuffling of feet, as the crowd leaned tensely forward. A jack fell face up before the Kid—a ten-spot fell before the gambler. Three-Ace Artie showed two pairs—it all depended now on what he held as his “hole” card.

But the Kid, either because he was too fuddled to take the possibilities into account, or because he was drunkenly obsessed with the invincibility of his own three kings, laughed hilariously.

“I got you!” he cried—and bet half of his remaining gold.

Three-Ace Artie's smile was cordial.

“Might as well go all the way then,” he suggested—and raised to the limit of the Kid's last gold eagle.

The Kid laughed again. He had played cunningly—quite cunningly. The gambler had fallen into the trap. All his hand showed was two kings.

“I'll see you! I'll see you!”—he was lurching excitedly in his chair, as he pushed the rest of his money forward. “This is the time little old two pairs are no good!” He turned his “hole” card triumphantly. “Three kings” he gurgled—and reached for the stakes.

“Just a minute,” objected Three-Ace Artie blandly.

He faced his other card. “I've got another ten here. Full house—three tens and a pair of deuces.”

A dead silence fell upon the room. The Kid, lurching in his chair, stared in a dazed, stunned way at the other's cards—

and then his face went a deathly white. One hand crept aimlessly to his forehead and brushed across his eyes; and after a moment, leaning heavily upon the table, he stood up, still swaying. But he was not swaying from drunkenness now. The shock seemed to have sobered him, bringing a haggard misery into his eyes. The crowd watched, making no comment. Three-Ace Artie, without lifting his eyes, was calmly engaged in stacking the gold eagles into little piles in front of him. The Kid moistened his lips with his tongue, attempted to speak—and succeeded only in * swallowing hard once or twice. Then, with a pitiful effort to pull himself together, he forced a smile.

“I—I can't play any more,” he said. “I'm cleaned out”—and turned away from the table.

The crowd made way for him, following him with its eyes as he crossed the room and disappeared through a back door at the side of the bar, making evidently for his “hotel” room upstairs. Three-Ace Artie said nothing—he was imperturbably pocketing the gold eagles now. The crowd drifted away from the table, dispersed around the room, and some went out. Three-Ace Artie rose from the table and carried the chips back to the bar.

“Guess I'll cash in, Mac,” he drawled.

The proprietor pushed the two pokes across the bar.

“Step up, gentlemen!” invited the gambler amiably, wheeling with his back against the bar to face the room.

An air of uneasiness, an awkward tension had settled upon the place. Some few more went out; but the others, as though glad of the relief afforded the situation by Three-Ace Artie's invitation, stepped promptly forward.

Three-Ace Artie's hand encircled a stiff four-fingers of raw spirit.

“Here's how!” he said—and drained his glass.

Somebody “set them up” again; Three-Ace Artie repeated the performance—and MacDonald's resumed its normal poise.

For perhaps half an hour Three-Ace Artie leaned against the bar, joining in a dice game that some one had inaugurated; and then, interest in this lagging, with a yawn and a casual remark about going up to his shack for a snooze, he put on his overcoat, pulled his fur cap well down over his ears, sauntered to the door—and, with a cheery wave of his hand, went out.

But once outside the door, Three-Ace Artie's nonchalance dropped from him, and he stood motionless in the dull light of the winter afternoon peering sharply up and down the camp's single shack-lined street. There was no one in sight. He turned quickly then, and, treading noiselessly in the snow, stole along beside the building to a door at the further end. He opened this cautiously, stepped inside, and, in semidarkness here, halted again to listen. The sounds from the adjoining barroom reached him plainly, but that was all. Satisfied that he was unobserved, he moved swiftly forward to where, at the end of the sort of passageway which he had entered, a steep, ladder-like stairway led upward. He mounted this stealthily, gained the landing above, and, groping his way now along a narrow hallway, suddenly flung open a door.

“Who's there!” came a quick, startled cry from within.

“Don't talk so loud—damn it!” growled Three-Ace

Artie, in a hoarse whisper. "You can hear yourself think through these partitions!" He struck a match, and lighted a candle which he found on the combination table and washing-stand near the bed.

The Kid's face, drawn and colourless, loomed up in the yellow light from the edge of the bed, as he bent forward, blinking in a kind of miserable wonder at Three-Ace Artie.

"You!" he gasped.

Three-Ace Artie closed the door softly.

"Some high-roller, you are, aren't you!" he observed caustically.

The Kid did not answer.

For a full minute Three-Ace Artie eyed the other in silence—then he laughed shortly.

"I don't know which of us is the bigger damn fool—you trying to buy a through ticket to hell; or yours truly for what I'm going to do now! Maybe you have learned your lesson, maybe you haven't; but anyway I am going to take the chance. I'm not here to preach, but I'll push a little personal advice out of long experience your way. The booze and the pasteboards won't get you anywhere—except into the kind of mess you are up against now. If you are hankering for more of it, go to it—that's all. It's your hunt!"

He flung the Kid's poke suddenly upon the table, and piled the gold eagles beside it.

A flush crept into the Kid's cheeks. He leaned further forward, staring helplessly, now at Three-Ace Artie, now at the money on the table.

"W-what do you mean?" he stammered.

“It isn't very hard to guess, is it?” said Three-Ace Artie quietly. “Here's your money—but there's just one little condition tied to it. I can't afford to let the impression get around that I'm establishing any precedents—see? And if the boys heard of this they'd think I was suffering from softening of the brain! You get away from here without saying anything to anybody—and stay away. Bixley, one of the boys, is going over to the next camp this afternoon—and you go with him.”

“You—you're giving me back the money?” faltered the Kid.

“Well, it sort of looks that way,” smiled Three-Ace Artie.

A certain dignity came to the Kid—and he held out his hand.

“You're a white man,” he said huskily. “But I can't accept it. I took it pretty hard down there perhaps, it seemed to get me all of a sudden when the booze went out; but I'm not all yellow. You won it—I can't take it back. It's yours.”

“No; it's not mine”—Three-Ace Artie was still smiling. “That's the way to talk, Kid. I like that. But you're wrong—it's yours by rights.”

“By rights?” The Kid hesitated, studying Three-Ace Artie's face. “You mean,” he ventured slowly, “that the game wasn't on the level—that you stacked the cards?”

Three-Ace Artie shook his head.

“I never stacked a card on a man in my life.”

“Then I don't understand what you mean,” said the Kid. “How can it be mine by rights?”

“It's simple enough,” replied Three-Ace Artie. “I'm paying back a little debt I owe, that's all. I figured the boys had

pecked around about deep enough on the outskirts of your pile, and that it was about time for me to sit in and save the rest. I cleaned you out a little faster than I expected, a little faster perhaps than the next man will if you try it again—but not any the less thoroughly. It's the 'next man' I'm trying to steer you away from, Kid.”

“Yes, I know”—the Kid spoke almost mechanically. “But a debt?”—his eyes were searching the gambler's face perplexedly now. Then suddenly: “Who are you?” he demanded. “There's something familiar about you. I thought there was the first time I saw you the other afternoon. And yet I can't place you.”

“Don't try,” said Three-Ace Artie softly. He reached out and laid his hand on the other's shoulder. “It wouldn't do you or me any good. There are some things best forgotten. I'm telling you the truth, that's all you need to know. You're entitled to the money—and another chance. Let it go at that. You agree to the bargain, don't you? You leave here with Bixley this afternoon—and this is between you and me, Kid, and no one else on earth.”

For a moment the Kid's gaze held steadily on Three-Ace Artie; then his eyes filled.

“Yes; I'll go,” he said in a low voice. “I guess I'm not going to forget this—or you. I don't know what I would have done, and I want to tell you——”

“Never mind that!” interrupted Three-Ace Artie with sudden gruffness. “It's what you do from now on that counts. You've got to hurry now. Any of the boys will show you Bixley's shack, if you don't know where it is. Just tell Bixley what you want, and he'll take you along. He'll be glad

of company on the trail. Shake!” He caught the other's hand, wrung it in a hard grip—and turned to the door. “Good luck to you, Kid!” he said—and closed the door behind him.

As cautiously as he had entered, Three-Ace Artie made his way downstairs again; and, once outside, started briskly in the direction of his shack, that he had acquired, bag and baggage, shortly after his arrival in the camp, from a miner who was pulling out. It was some three or four hundred yards from MacDonald's, and as he went along, feet crunching in the snow from his swinging stride, he began quite abruptly to whistle a cheery air. It was too bitterly cold, however, to whistle, so instead he resorted to humming pleasantly to himself.

He stamped the snow from his feet as he reached the shack, opened the door, and went in. A few embers still glowed in the box-stove, and he threw on a stick of wood and opened the damper. He lighted a lamp, and stood for a moment looking around him. There was a bunk at one side of the shack, the table, the stove, a single chair, a few books on a rude shelf, a kit bag in one corner, a skin of some sort on the floor, and a small cupboard containing supplies and cooking utensils. Three-Ace Artie, however, did not appear to be obsessed with the inventory of his surroundings. There was a whimsical smile on his lips, as he pulled off his fur cap and tossed it on the bunk.

“I guess,” said Three-Ace Artie, “it will give the Recording Angel quite a shock to chalk one up on the other side of the page for me!”

CHAPTER II—THE TOAST

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THREE-ACE ARTIE, sprawled comfortably cally at the book he held in his hand, a copy of Hugo's *Claude Gueux* in French, tossed it to the foot of the bunk, and sat up, dangling his legs over the edge.

A mood that had long been a stranger to him, a mellow mood, as he had defined it to himself, had kept him away from MacDonald's that night. It was the glow of self-benediction, as it were, ever since he had left the boy's room that afternoon, though it had puzzled him to some extent to explain its effect upon himself—that, for instance, the corollary should take the form of a quiet evening, a pipe, and Hugo.

He shrugged his shoulders. It had been so nevertheless. His shoulders lifted again—it was decidedly an incongruous proceeding for one known as Three-Ace Artie!

His thoughts reverted to the Kid. No one had come to the shack since he had returned from the hotel, but he knew the Kid had left the camp, for he had watched from the shack window as Bixley and the boy had passed down the street together. The Kid would not play the fool again for a while, that was certain—whatever he did eventually.

Three-Ace Artie stared introspectively at the lamp, out at full length upon his bunk, yawned, and looked at his watch. It was already after midnight. He glanced a little quizzically.

Kid, of course! He had been conscious of an inward flame for a moment—then for the third time shrugged his shoulders.