

THE WHISTLING VALLEY

A Story of the Yukon

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by

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Donald Erickson

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SOUND

LAUGHTER AND THE CLINK OF GLASSES

GEORGE

...Well, the greatest rivalry I ever heard of was between MacDonald and Mick O'Brien----

BLAKE

That was out at Forty-Mile, wasn't it?

GEORGE

Forty-Mile! It went on all over the Yukon as I remember--  
Do you recall those boys, Jim?

JIM

Yeh, I seem to.

GEORGE

They was in rivalry from the first moment they met on the old Rock Gas comin' down from Whitehorse and MacDonald lost at Blackjack to the Irishman. Mac Never forgave him for that. Mac was the worst loser in the Yukon an' had the memory of an elephant. "I'll remember ye," he said and remember him he did. When O'Brien fell in love, MacDonald chased after the woman in his lumbering fashion until she was forced to marry him out of nothin' but weariness. But when MacDonald staked a paying claim on Hunker Creek who staked beside him but Mickey O'Brien--and found the better ground--in that, hurting MacDonald where he was most sore. Those two hated one another like death but it just seemed they couldn't escape one another--and it was even betting

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around the creeks which would kill the other first.

JIM But neither did.

GEORGE No, neither did. An' that's the craziest part of it— they became partners.

BLAKE Partners! How did that happen?

GEORGE Well—every other day you would find MacDonald measurin' his claim to see if he couldn't cut a few more inches off of Mickey's property. An' Mickey was doin' the same to MacDonald. They never spoke to one another of course, though they often met—but—well, you see, they'd both sunk shafts down to bed drock an' one day their shafts met an' there they were, thirty feet underground, starin' one another in the face....

SOUND LAUGHTER

GEORGE ....It was kind of like meetin' in Hell, as Mickey told me later. Said MacDonald, Looking Mickey in the eye: "I knew sooner or later ye'd be sneakin' onto my claim but I no'er thocht it wud be frae the bottom up, ye miserable little Irish thief." "Why," said Mickey, "you thought of it alright fer that is jist what you are now doin' on my claim but thank heavens I have found ye out an' given ye the shock of yer short unnatural existence." "I'll sue for trespass!" shouted MacDonald. "I'll sue ye for damages!" shouted back O'Brien. And they looked at one another kind of foolish and then started to laugh. And they laughed until they set up

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as partners and could fight in peace. For it was obvious they couldn't get along as enemies.

SOUND           THEY LAUGH

JIM             They was a rivalry, I remember, didn't end so good.

BLAKE          What was that Jim?

JIM             It ain't a pretty story--like George's.

BLAKE          Maybe it's more like the truth, huh?

JIM             As far as I recall George told his story straight.

That's the way it happened. Queer things--good and bad--happened in this Yukon--and they don't need us oldtimers to add to them. This one--tellin' it at all--it's like diggin' up the dead....It all took place in less than two days a long time ago....

GEORGE         Just a minute, Jim--let's have another all around. (CALLING)

Sam! Two all the way!

SAM             (OFF) Comin' up.

GEORGE         Go right on, Jim.

JIM             They's a valley 'bout eighty-five miles northeast of Dawson which they called The Whistlin' Valley. Four men had been into it when Jim first went in to mine it and only one had come out and he never spoke again--jist whistled little tunes to himself. The other three- no one ever found out what happoned to them. But none of it mattered to Jim Bonner. There was gold in there an' he was goin' to git it out an' when he married he took his wife in with him. Maybe it was a mistake. I dunno.

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She was a dancing girl, and pretty, with a lot of black hair an' she like to laugh an' talk an' meet people. Anyway, they were happy fer a coupla weeks. ....Only thing thing troubled her. She remembered one night she'd been dancin' with a boy named Briggs when Jim Bonner cut in an' later Briggs had come up to them an' said to Jim--"I hear you're a Bonner."--an' her husband had answered:--"Yeah?--what of it?" And this fella said: "My name's John Briggs." An' they jist stared at one another in a way that scared her. Nothin' more was said. Briggs turned and disappeared in the crowd. All Bonner would say to her was that she wasn't to have nothin' more to do with Briggs an' no amount of questions would get him to tell her more.....when she found out what she wanted--it was too late.

Wal--it started on a July afternoon in 1901. Jim was down on the stream repairing his sluice boxes an' Martha was pickin' berries on the rise up to the cabin--

MARTHA

HUMMING

JIM

--when her eye caught a shadow moving near her an' she looked up to see him standin' a few feet away--starin' at her--John Briggs!

MARTHA

(WITH A SHARP GASP) What do you want?!

BRIGGS

So yew came with him, did yuh? Yuh lef' me to go with him!

MARTHA

(SCREAMING) Jim! Help! Jim!!

JIM (DISTANT) I'm coming, Martha!

MARTHA (HYSTERICAL) Jim!! Quick! Jim!!

JIM (A LITTLE DISTANCE) Martha?! (COMING UP)  
Martha, what's wrong?

MARTHA He--he was here---he---

JIM Who was there, Martha? Who?

MARTHA Briggs--Briggs----

JIM Briggs?

MARTHA Right there, Jim--he was standin' right there!

JIM Where'd he go?

MARTHA I don't know--along the hill--the hillside I think---Jim?

JIM We gotta git up t'the cabin quick!

MUSIC A VIOLIN NOTE VERY HIGH

MARTHA Jim, what's he goin' to do! Why'd he come up here?

JIM We gotta make a run fer it. We ain't got no safety  
'cept in the cabin--Come on!

MARTHA Is he gonna shoot, Jim?!

JIM He may not be ready. He could be circlin' round. C'mon!  
Run, Martha!

SOUND RUNNING. PANTING.

JIM In the door quick!

SOUND A DOOR SLAMS

JIM ---Made it---

SOUND THEY BREATHE HEAVILY, ONLY GRADUALLY RECOVERING

MARTHA (VERY FRIGHTENED) Ooh! ooh!

JIM You take my pistol--I'll use the rifle---

SOUND JIM OPENS THE BREACH

JIM We got five windows to watch. You take the back one and that one facin' the ridge—I'll watch out the front an' this side. He ain't likely to try comin' at us from the back—he'd need t'git in too close fer his own safety. He'll try pickin' us off from the front. They's about forty yards clear to that fringe of poplar.....

SOUND CRAMMING THE LAST SHELL IN

JIM ....Wal, we're ready fer him now. Long shots from the front, I figure. He's got better cover—he cantake his time pulling the trigger—that's what a woolhat likes.

MARTHA Jim, I can't use this—gun—I—don't know how—

JIM That's alright. Jist keep yer watch, honey.

MARTHA (AFTER A PAUSE) Do you see anything?

JIM Nope. I won't neither.

MARTHA Jim---I---

JIM Huh?

MARTHA A few dances---that's all I had with him, Jim---that's all I knew him. I didn't do nothin' to make him think I was his girl, Jim---

JIM I know it.

MARTHA He must be crazy

JIM He ain't crazy.

MARTHA If I'd given him to think he had some call on me—but he didn't have any—he hardly talked—just danced and payed me. I thought maybe he liked dancing with me—he kept comin' back and payin' for more—but I never

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thought anythin' more than that--honest, Jim.....

JIM           Mebbe he likes yuh--but it don't make a smatterin' of difference--he'd be comin' after me anyhow.

MARTHA        But---why?

JIM            It's in his blood.

MARTHA        Somethin' happened--Jim?

JIM            A long time ago.

MARTHA        It's not because of me?

JIM            Keep lookin', Martha--don't take your eyes off them windows!--no, it weren't you, Martha. It was bound to come--maybe you jist triggered it.

MARTHA        Do you see him?

JIM            Nope.

MARTHA        Maybe he'll go away--when he sees we're safe in the cabin.

JIM            He won't go away----

MARTHA        (PAUSE) It's so quiet.

JIM            Yeh.

MARTHA        He hates you for somethin' you did?

JIM            I nevah seen him--oh mebbe once't or twice when I was a kid--I can't remember--

MARTHA        I don't understand, Jim. Why's he tryin' to kill you if he hasn't nothin' against you?

BRIGGS        (DISTANTLY) Bonner!

JIM            Sst.

BRIGGS        (DISTANTLY) Yuh may's well come out, Bonnah! Ah'm

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sittin' out here till yew do!

**JIM** (SHOUTING) Well, you kin jest sit!!

**BRIGGS** Ah'll give you time to git to covah! No use hurtin' the gal!

**JIM** (SHOUTING) You got a long wait then, Briggs!

**BRIGGS** Yuh 'feared to fight in the open like a man, Bonnah!?  
Yuh gotta hide behind them skirts!

**JIM** (SHOUTING) Alright, Briggs! Ah'll meet y'half way! You start walkin' toward the cabin an I'll--

**SOUND** A RIFLE SHOT CRASHING INTO THE CABIN

**MARTHA** Jim! Jim!

**JIM** (A BIT SHAKEN) I'm alright.

**MARTHA** You're bleedin'!

**JIM** A splinter a wood hit my cheek--s'nothin'. I was careless. He was hopin' I'd git close to the window when I was shoutin' an' that's jist what I did--

**MARTHA** Oh, Jim--(CRYING)--I'm scared, Jim--

**JIM** Now don't--honey.

**MARTHA** I'm goin' out there, Jim--I'm goin' to talk to him--

**JIM** You're not goin' anywhere! You stay put!

**MARTHA** (SOBBING)

**JIM** I think I know where he is--if he ain't moved--the smoke puffed up just under that poplar. I'm gonna try one. Alright, Briggs, lessee if you can shoot faster 'n me.

**SOUND** A CLOSE RIFLE SHOT AND A SECOND ANSWERING BLAST ALMOST SIMULTANEOUSLY - THE SHOTS SOUND SHATTERING IN THE CABIN.

MARTHA

Jim!

JIM

I'm alright, Martha!—He's a snap shooter alright. I was shot several feet. He's too fast.

SOUND

ANOTHER SHELL JAMMED HOME

MUSIC

A VIOLIN NOTE HELD HIGH. OUT.

MARTHA

(ALMOST A WHISPER) Somebody's goin' to die, aint they, Jim?

JIM

That's right—somebody's goin' to die.

MARTHA

Why? Jim what is it?

JIM

What's what?

MARTHA

Why does he hate you?

JIM

I'm a Bonner.

MARTHA

You mean—this's—

JIM

I should've told you before I married you, Martha. But I thought it was finished up an' gone—I nevah figured it would follah me up to the Yukon—

MARTHA

A feud!

JIM

I don't know how long ago it started—mebbe fifty or sixty years. A lotta both families were kill't. But for twenty years they hasn't been one—no one killin'. I thought it was ovah.

MARTHA

It don't make sense, Jim.

JIM

When I met him in the dance hall an' he told me he was a Briggs, I thought mebbe—it didn't mean no more to him than it did to me—that old feud, I mean—

MARTHA

He seemed like a good, clean boy—

JIM

He's God fearin' if that's what y'mean—the Briggs always was God-fearin'.

MARTHA           And yet they'd kill their neighbors!

JIM               I guess in the beginnin' they had to kill or else be  
                  killed. It's the way it was.

MARTHA           You don't want this, do you Jim?

JIM               They's nothin' I kin do about it.

MARTHA           But you don't want it.

JIM               (AFTER A PAUSE) My grandmother lost her daughter, her  
                  husband and three sons in the feud. But she told us  
                  kids once: No one's suffered more'n me but I forgive the  
                  Briggs--I forgive 'em everyone--and I want you kids to  
                  forgive 'em too, because it's a shameful and a wicked  
                  thing, this mulish and bloody hate--an' it's got to stop.  
                  That's what she said an' I s'pose a little of it's rubbed  
                  off on me--I have no love for the Briggs but I don't  
                  hate 'em either.

MARTHA           Tell him that.

JIM               An' git a laugh?

MARTHA           But, Jim, why not? For all you know--deep down--he feels  
                  the same way.

JIM               No, he don't. Briggs learnt to hate a little better'n we  
                  did.

MARTHA           But how do you know? Jim, find out--yell it out through  
                  the window at him.

JIM               What's the use? He wouldn't believe me.

MARTHA           You got to try! As long as there's a chance you got to try!  
                  It's your life an' my life in this, Jim! You gotta think  
                  of me, now, not just yourself and your pride.

JIM It ain't pride. I just know--that's all--it won't do no good. Do you think if he said yes I could go through that door trustin' him? I'd get a hole in my head, an' I'd deserve it--

MARTHA Shout to him anyway--see what he says! He's younger than you, Jim, an' he's more of a hothead but he's a decent boy--I know it. (PAUSE) Jim, will you? (PAUSE)

JIM (QUIETLY) The sun's goin' down an' it's glintin' off his gun...I think mebbe....I've got him.

MARTHA Jim, don't shoot. If you shoot anymore he'll never be friends--he'll never believe you--

JIM Woman--do you think he'd spare us---? It's us or it's him an' I don't intend for it to be us. Now, stay clear!

MARTHA Jim--Jim--please---listen to me---

JIM Git out of my way!

SOUND A SCUFFLE AS HE SHOVES HER BACK

JIM It's too good to mis.....

SOUND CLOSE RIFLE SHOT

(A MOMENT'S SILENCE)

JIM I think I hit him! I saw somethin' move--(SHOUTING) How did you like that, Briggs?....He don't answer..... I'll jist sink a couple more in there.

SOUND LEVERING RAPIDLY HE FIRES TWO SHOTS

(PAUSE)

JIM Not a sound or a flicker. I think I hit him--he didn't shout back an' he didn't shoot back...But I ain't sure--

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I can't be sure! He could be hidin' out there waitin' for me to come out an' see if he's dead....Well, I ain't that much of a fool, Briggs--I can sit here an' wait too ---fer as long as you kin. (PAUSE) How 'bout gettin' somethin' to eat, Martha? No use us starvin'.

MARTHA            Alright, Jim.

JIM                Only don't light a fire. We'll have it cold.

MARTHA            Alright.

MUSIC             VIOLIN---VERY HIGH NOTE HELD.   OUT.

MARTHA            (IN A WHISPER) It's so dark. I can't hardly see you.

JIM                It's a dark night.

(PAUSE)

MARTHA            Jim, what's he doin'?

JIM                If he's dead he ain't doin' nothin'. If he's hit he's sittin' out there bleedin'. If he ain't hit---wal he's either gonna wait till morning or else try to rush in---

MARTHA            I'm scared, Jim....

JIM                I know---I know, honey. But we jist gotta sit tight. I don't think he'll try it tonight---he's gotta shoot through a window an' we kin hit him easier'n he kin hit us because he's framed an' in here we're in the darkest part of the wood.

MARTHA            Jim----

JIM                What?

MARTHA            S'pose he don't show himself tomorrow?

JIM                Then---we sit here tomorra night too. if they still ain't

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no sign nore stir the day after—I'll go have a look.

(PAUSE)

MARTHA

I can't understand it—I mean him trampin' eighty miles all the way from Dawson to kill you. He must hate you a lot.

JIM

Bein' a Briggs he got to hate me. Y'see, Martha, the feud was between two dirt farmers when it started—two families so poor they couldn't scarce feed themselves —an' that's something that kin make you as hard an' bitter as rocksalt. The Briggs is still like that—still scratchin' for a livin' —but my grandfather and my father were hard headed as well as head hearted. And when we were still babies the family moved outta the hills onto a small plantation—an' that was added to over the years....It weren't too long before we kids owned our own horses—an' even had a chance at an eddication. We got as snooty as hell. My father hated the Briggs jist as much as ever an' would have shot one if he'd seen him in the street. But as for us kids—wal, the Briggs were out enemies an' that was excitin' but we didn't hets 'em I reckon any more'n you hate a wild beast—that's what they seemed like to us—livin' way up in the hills.

MARTHA

I heard somethin'.

(SILENCE)

JIM It's jist the wind movin' the branches. Father used te---

MARTHA I'm sure I did.

(MOMENT'S PAUSE)

JIM You're imaginin'....Anyway, for the Briggs kids it was different. They was brought up hatin' us--hatin' our wealth--hatin' our society airs--jealous of what we had an' they didn't ---half starved kids who hated the Bonners more'n anythin' in the world. I remember hearin' about a John Briggs runnin' away from home when he was fifteen. No one heard no more about him. And this must be him. But y'see, Martha, why I can't trust him.

It's him or me--an' I know it--becausehe's only got one aim an' it's to kill me--a Bonner--who took his gal--

MARTHA Are you afraid, Jim?

JIM I can't help it.

MARTHA If it's dark for him it's dark for us. We could sneak out the back way and into them trees an' keep goin'.

JIM We're safer where we are. Here we got cover but if we made a break for it he'd be on our trail in no time an' we'd be as easy shot as fool hens. I've tried to figure a way out, Martha--but I can't--there ain't one.

MARTHA Listen!

JIM What?

MARTHA Like somethin' crawlin' along just outside the house.

JIM Hear them claws scratchin'? It's an animal on the roof.

MARTHA (UNDER HER BREATH) Jim!

JIM Now, take it easy, honey, take it easy.....

MARTHA This place seems to me like the end of the world.

MUSIC VIOLIN NOTE HIGH. HOLD FOR A MOMENT. OUT.

JIM Beginnain' to get light out.

MARTHA Oh, Jim--hold me for a bit---

JIM Honey--Martha--How did y'ever git into it? Here y'were havin' a fine time--a dancin' girl, the most pop'lar in Dawson--every man after you--full of plans for the future --an' y'marry me-----

MARTHA I love you, Jim, but I want you alive. I never knew, Jim --I never had no idea.

JIM I know--I know it. We'll git out of it, honey.

MARTHA I'm scared, Jim, I never been so scared before....

JIM He's more'n likely dead right now, Martha, an' we're safe.

MARTHA If he's alive, Jim, you got to try to talk to him-- Tell him y'don't have any hard feelings--that y'never knew he took me so serious--tell him I'm sorry if I hurt his feelings--but if I did I didn't remember it. We just want to be left alone--Jim, he isn't bad, I danced with him--he's a nice boy--a little rough mebbe but he's alright--Talk to him, Jim. Will you shout to him?

JIM It won't do no good, Martha! I told you!

MARTHA Y'don't wanta give way. It's pride. You're riskin' my life out of nothin' but pride--Well, I don't want to die, Jim. Why should I? Because of some dirt farmers in the south sixty years ago? I'm young an' I've got no part



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in it an' I'm not goin' to die just because you won't bend an inch--because you're too proud an' ignorant to be the first to give way--ignorant!....

**JIM** Y'don't understand, Martha! If you was raised in that country mebbe y'would--This ain't some--some argyment you kin talk your way outta. It's a pledge--a blood pledge--a blood feud! There's nothin' no one kin do-- It was set that way an' can't git out of it. (PAUSE) Martha, I don't want it--but I know just as I know that sun's comin' up--one or the other of us has got to die! .....(PAUSE) I'm sorry you had to get mixed up in it, that's all. I shoulda known mebbe--thet somethin' like this might happen--

**MARTHA** (SOBBING)

**JIM** ---But you married me, Martha!--an' y'gotta stick by me now--whether you want to or not. Maybe you didn't know what you was gettin' into--but you're into it-- that's the way it is. (PAUSE) You better take your post now. It's light out.

**SOUND** HE OPENS THE BREACH OF HIS RIFLE AND SLAMS IT SHUT AGAIN.

**MUSIC** HIGH VIOLIN NOTE HELD FOR A MOMENT. OUT.

**MARTHA** It must be noon. Haven't you seen anythin'?

**JIM** Nothin'!

**MARTHA** He must be dead. He couldn't sit this long out there without movin' or nothin' to eat.

**JIM** Yes, he could. I heard of a Briggs who sat three days

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in ambush jist t'git a shot at my grandpa. He got him, too.

MARTHA But what's he 'spect us t'do?

JIM To go out an' see if he's there.

(PAUSE)

MARTHA D'ye think he is?

JIM I dunno.

MARTHA Can't you tell whether you hit him or not?

JIM I dunno. I think I did—but I can't be sure—

MARTHA Shout to him—see if ye can get him t' answer.

JIM He won't answer. But I got an idee. I'll shoot a couple at the same spot. Mebbe he'll give a jump an' I'll see it.

SOUND TWO RIFLE SHOTS QUICKLY FIRED

(PAUSE)

JIM Not a stir—

MARTHA These mosquitoes—!

JIM They's a lot more out there. If he's alive he'll be half bitten to death.

MARTHA The temperature must be a hundred.

(PAUSE)

Jim—couldn't you slip out the back way? It's only a few yards to the trees an' then circle around behind him?

JIM I can't take the chance—if he ain't hit he's more'n likely changed position—around to this side. I'd make an easy target, wouldn't I, crawlin' out the back? But

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if he don't stir today I'll have to do jist that before dawn tomorra morning. It'll be safer then.

MARTHA Tomorrow mornin'! I can't take another night of this-- I just can't.

JIM Martha, you get hold of yourself.

MARTHA You don't love me! If you loved me you'd take some risks for me.

JIM If you loved me you wouldn't ask me to.

MARTHA (CRYING) I can't help it--I'm a woman and I got no part of this--I want to live-----

JIM You're my wife, Martha--have ye forgot that? You got a part of whatever I'm in--!

MARTHA I can't help it--

JIM Anythin' what's my trouble is your troubel, too. What did ye think ye were doin' when you married me, huh? Don't you understand what that means?--You take me for better or worse--an' you stick by me--you ain't runnin' now!

MARTHA I'm sick, Jim--

JIM Huh?

MARTHA I gotta get outside--I'm sick--

JIM Git down, Martha!

MARTHA I don't want no part of it--I don't want no part of it--

JIM Git back! You wanta git kil't?

MARTHA He wouldn't shoot me. He liked me. I could walk out of here an' he'd let me come to him.

JIM He'd kill you. He wouldn't let you take ten steps.

MARTHA           The last dance we had he said: You're my gal, ain't you? An' he give me ten dollars for the dance.

JIM                So he did say somethin'?

MARTHA            But that's all--that was all, Jim.

JIM                An' what did you do? I s'pose you squeezed his hand an' give him that look!

MARTHA            For ten dollars, why shouldn't I? It's business. I hoped he's ask for more dances if he was payin' that kind of money.

JIM                Besides which you liked him--you'd of done more fer him!

MARTHA            No, I wouldn't. No, Jim. It was just business.

JIM                Business! Wal, it weren't business to him. That was all he needed--it was all fixed--you were his gal.

MARTHA            I knew he liked me but I never said I was his gal--

JIM                You never kissed him---

MARTHA            Oh, just a little one after the last dance--I did that much for a lot of men--

JIM                Business! By God you must have a bank roll!

MARTHA            I didn't come to the Yukon for the fun of it. I was brought up poor--like him. I wanted money--and a good time--

JIM                Is that what you married me fer?

MARTHA            I liked you.

JIM                And by next year you'd've lef' me fer a man you liked better, I s'pose.

MARTHA           Mebbe I would've—mebbe I ain't just the wife you expected. I've got a life to lead, too, an' I ain't like my Ma—who was so loyal her drunken husband could beat her to the floor—an' she wouldn't say a word against him. Just weep for an hour an' then go back to work.

JIM                You're sorry, ain't you—you're sorry you married me!

MARTHA           Yes, I am! Why should I risk my neck over your lousy feud—it don't have nothin' to do with me. It's your fight—not mine! An' you're askin' me to be glad I'm married to you? Well, not right now, thank you.

JIM                Alright, Martha! You've said enough!!

MARTHA           I notice you won't take no chances for my sake—oh no! All you're concerned with is your own skin—why should I worry about yours, can you tell me that?

JIM                If you like that kid so much go on out an' tell him!

MARTHA           That's just what I'm gonna do—if you haven't killed him—

JIM                Go on! Go on! What're you waitin' for! You don't want t'be my wife—go an' be his—!

MARTHA           You won't shout to him—you won't do nothin'—you just want me to sit here day after day while you shiver in that corner—because you're afraid to give way to him an' you're afraid to face him. You're yolla, Jim, yella!

JIM                Go on, then! Go on! He's waitin' for you!

SOUND            DOOR OPENING

(PAUSE)

MARTHA            John Briggs! (PAUSE) John Briggs! Don't shoot! I'm  
                     your friend an' I want to talk to you! (PAUSE) Hold  
                     you fire, John, I can't do you no harm! All I want to  
                     do is git back to Dawson, John! Will you take me---?  
                     I'm coming towards you, John! (HER VOICE GROWS A LITTLE  
                     MORE DISTANT)

JIM                (TO HIMSELF) Martha---oh god---Martha! Martha!

SOUND            STUMBLES TO THE DOOR

JIM                Martha! Come back! Martha! He'll shoot you, Martha!  
                     It don't matter what you do, he'll shoot!

MARTHA           I've taken more'n ten steps, Jim---

SOUND            A DISTANT RIFLE SHOT

JIM                Martha!

SOUND            A SECOND SHOT

JIM                I'm comin', Martha, I'm comin'!....Briggs, this is fer you!

SOUND            CLOSE RAPID FIRING..RUNNING...FIRING...THE FARTHER GUN  
                     STOPS FIRING..JIM LEVERS ANOTHER ROUND IN.

JIM                Where are yuh, Briggs?

SOUND            MOVING THROUGH BUSHES.. CRACKLE OF BRANCHES ETC. STOPS.

JIM                There y'are! An' still wide eyed!

BRIGGS           (PAINFULLY) I jist about....got yuh, Bonnah!

JIM                But yuh didn't.

BRIGGS           What yew waitin' fer, Bonnah? Y'got me last night in  
                     the shouldah an' now y'got me in the neck. Ah cain't  
                     shoot no more. Git it ovah with.

JIM                Why did you shoot her, Briggs? What's she done to you?  
                     Why did ye have to shoot her?!

BRIGGS Her? Wal--she was a Bonnah, weren't she?

SOUND A CLOSE RIFLE SHOT

JIM You was a Briggs!

(SILENCE)

JIM (OLD) She lived maybe an hour after that --but she didn't talk--jest stared at the sky that was darkenin' for her-- with her black eyes...(PAUSE) Jim got back to Dawson fast as he could an' they had an inquiry and decided in the end it was self-defense.

SOUND HE TAKES A DRINK

JIM Sure it was. Self-defense. They was a kid out there in the dark who was goin' to kill him. That was fixed an' they wasn't no reason or mercy could enter in but only hate an' it was older an' stronger than they-- (STRUGGLING PAINFULLY IN HIS SPEECH) As for the girl-- why she ran into those bullets, didn't she? She was so scared of death she ran right into it.....The kid shot her--he was the murderer. That's what the law said. The kid was the murderer. But the law couldn't make Jim Bonner believe it. Bonner --who didn't want to kill nobody--put a bullet through the head of a crazy kid and sent his wife out to die... Because he know, y'see, he knew the kid was there. (PAUSE) Well.....that summer in the Whistilin' Valley ....I learnt one thing. We don't know who we are, do you know that--we don't know who we are..... (PAUSE)

**BLAKE** Jim, were you---?

**GEORGE** Never mind, Blake. In the Yukon, we don't ask that kind of question. (PAUSE) Here's lookin' at you, Jim.  
(PAUSE)

**JIM** You bet.

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