

I- 131 Bride of the Klondike (Keeper of the Flame)

By Lois Walker

ESTABLISHING THE RHYTHM

To find the proper rhythm for this rhyming piece, first read-aloud and clap through the sections as you go. Each underlined word or word part falls directly on a beat. As you read, clap on each underlined word, keeping the rhythm steady. Be careful not to read too fast! This is a rehearsal technique and readers will not clap throughout these sections during performance. After you have established the beat, it is time to start interpreting, experimenting, and having fun with the words by varying tempo, volume, inflection, and expression.

READING THE SCRIPT

This piece has been formatted for 5 to 30 readers. After the first 5 formatted reader numbers, the remaining reader numbers have been left blank. This way, you can divide the remaining lines between your 5 readers, or add as many new readers as you wish to finish the piece.

Note: An unformatted version of the story is also included so that you may do your own formatting and assign reading parts in any way that works best for your reading group.

HISTORY: The historic information below was found online: "Women of the Gold Rush" <http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/gold/women.html>.

When she stepped off the ship Excelsior in July, Ethel Berry did not look like a woman worth over \$100,000. Her worn and tattered dress was held together with her husband's belt. Seattle reporters, alerted to the great wealth on board the Excelsior by reports from the earlier

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arrival of another ship from the far north, were immediately taken with the cheery woman amongst the grizzled miners and quickly named her "The Bride of the Klondike."

Ethel had gone to the Klondike with her husband, Clarence Berry, who had first gone north seeking his fortune in 1894. Clarence and Ethel were wed when he returned from the Yukon to California in the fall of 1895. When Clarence returned north the next spring, Ethel was at his side. The trip was longer and harder than the young bride had expected. The couple left Juneau, Alaska on March 24, 1895 and arrived at their destination on June 10.

Clarence didn't have much money, so he had to go to work tending bar. When George Carmack came into the bar one evening boasting of his great gold discovery, Clarence decided to take a chance. He set out for the new discovery, staking a claim on Eldorado Creek. Ethel followed later, bringing five tons of supplies with her. The couple set up camp, suffering through the icy winter in a poorly built 12 x 16 foot log cabin with no floor and a pitiful window covered with a flour sack. Clarence's claim on Eldorado Creek would prove to be one of the richest claims in the Klondike.

In a later interview, Ethel Berry described some of the hardships of that winter. "We could not get one drop of water without first melting the ice, which necessitated keeping a fire going all the time. Keeping the fire is enough to occupy the whole of one person's time. The wood is full of pitch and blazes up and is out again almost before one can walk across the room and back."

ALL: She was called "Bride of the Klondike".
This bride of Yukon fame
Kept her cabin fire burning.
Ethel Berry was her name.

READER 1: When it's winter in the Klondike
There's one thing that's required...

READER 2: And that's to keep the cabin stove...

READER 3: Filled up with wood and fired.

READER 4: For there's not a drop of water
Without melting first the ice.

READER 5: So keeping that wood burning
Is the Klondike winter's price.

ALL: She was called "Bride of the Klondike".
This bride of Yukon fame
Kept her cabin fire burning.
Ethel Berry was her name.

READER No, you can't live through the winter
Without water – this we know.

READER It's for drinking, cooking, bathing,
For survival in deep snow.

READER And Edith feared the outcome
If they ran all out of water,

READER So she kept that wood fire burning...

READER Like a Klondike native's daughter.

ALL: She was called "Bride of the Klondike".
This bride of Yukon fame
Kept her cabin fire burning.
Ethel Berry was her name.

READER Her husband, Clarence Berry,
Tending bar one Yukon night,

READER Heard that Eldorado Creek
Was the place where he just might...

READER Strike gold...

READER And so he went there,
Set up camp and staked a claim.

READER And Ethel followed later
As "keeper of the flame".

ALL: She was called "Bride of the Klondike".
 This bride of Yukon fame
 Kept her cabin fire burning.
 Ethel Berry was her name.

READER Their log cabin had no floor
 It was small and dark – a shack.

READER It had one tiny window
 Covered with a flour sack.

READER But through the icy winter
 The cabin stove blazed hot.

READER Edith fed that hungry stove...

READER And never once forgot!

ALL: She was called "Bride of the Klondike".
 This bride of Yukon fame
 Kept her cabin fire burning.
 Ethel Berry was her name.

READER Her wood was full of pitch.
 Flashed hot, then faded out.

READER Night and day she fed that stove,
 She knew her job – she had no doubt.