

# CHANGES of CHANCE

Rex Beach

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### CHAPTER VIII. (Continued)

After they had sawed for awhile Jerry cried: "Hey! She's runnin' out again!" He accompanied this remark by an abrupt cessation of effort. As a result the saw stopped in its downward course and Tom's chin came into violent contact with the upper handle.

The man above uttered a cry of pain and fury; he clapped a hand to his face as if to catch and save his teeth.

Jerry giggled with a shameless lack of feeling. "Spit 'em out," he cackled. "They ain't no more good to you than a mouthful of popcorn." He was not really amused at his partner's mishap; on the contrary, he was more than a little concerned by it, but fatigue had rendered him absurdly hysterical and the constant friction of mental, spiritual, and physical contact with Tom had fretted his soul as that saw dust inside his clothes had fretted his body. "He, he! Ho, ho!" he chortled. "You don't shove. Oh, no! All the same, whenever I stop pullin' you butt your brains out."

"I ain't shove!" The ferocity of this denial was modified and muffled by reason of the fact that a greater part of the speaker's hand was inside his mouth as this fingers were taking stock of its contents.

"All right you didn't shove. Have it your way. I said she was runnin' out again. We ain't cuttin' wedges, we're cuttin' boat-seats."

"Well why don't you pull straight? I can't follow a line with you skinning the cat on your end."

"My fault again, eh? Mr. Quirk showed the whites of his eyes and his face grew purple. "Lemme tell you some thing, Tom. I've studied you, careful, as man and boy, for a matter of thirty years, but I never seen you in all your hideousness till this trip. I got you now, though; I got you all added up and subtracted and I'll tell you the answer. It's my opinion, backed by fingers, that you're a dam— He hesitated, then with a hesitating effort he managed to gulp the remainder of the sentence. In a changed voice he said: "Oh, what's the use? I s'pose you've got feelin'. Come on lets get

through."

Linton peered down over the edge of the log. "It's your opinion I'm a what?" He inquired with vicious calmness.

"Nothing. It's no use to tell you. Now then, lift, bite, leg— Why don't you lift?"

"I am lifting. Leggo your end!" Mr. Linton tugged violently but the saw came up slowly. It rose and fell several times but with the same feeling of dead weight attached to it. Tom wiped the sweat out of his eyes and once again in a stormy voice he addressed his partner: "If you don't get off them handles I'll take a stick and knock you off. What you grinnin' at?"

"Why, she's stuck, that's all. Drive your wedge— Jerry's words ended in an agonized yelp; he began to paw blindly. "You did that—spit 'em out!"

"Did what?"

"Kicked sawdust in my eyes. I saw you!"

Mr. Linton's voice when he spoke held that same sinister note of restrained ferocity which had characterized it heretofore. "When I start kicking I won't kick sawdust into your eyes! I'll kick your eyes into that sawdust. That's what I'll do. I'll stomp 'em out like a pair of grapes."

"You try it! You try anything with me," Jerry chattered, in a sinister frenzy. "You've got a bad reputation at home; you're a malo hombre—a side-winder, you are, and your bite is certain death. That's what they say. Well, ever see a Mexican hog cut a rattler? That's me—wild hog!"

"Wild hog? What's wild about you?" sneered the other. "You picked the right animal but the wrong variety. Any kind of a hog makes a bad partner."

For a time the work proceeded in silence, then the latter speaker resumed: "You said I was a dam! something or other. What was it?" The object of this inquiry maintained an offensive, nay an insulting, silence. "A what?" Linton persisted.

Quirk looked up through his mask of sawdust. "If you're gettin' tired again why don't you say so? I'll wait while you rest." He opened his eyes in apparent astonishment, then he cried: "Hello! Why, it's raining."

"It ain't raining," Tom declared.

"Must be—your face is wet," once more the speaker cackled shrilly in a manner intended to be truthful, but which was in reality insulting beyond human endurance. "I never saw moisture on your brow, Tom, except when it rained or when you sat too close to a fire."

"What was it you wanted to call me and was scared to?" Mr. Linton urged, venomously. "A dam what?"

"Oh, I forgot the precise epithet I had in mind. But a new one comes to my lips 'most every minute. I think I aimed to call you a dam! old fool. Something like that."

Slowly, carefully, Mr. Linton descended from the scaffold, leaving the whip-saw in its place. He was shaking with rage, with weakness, and with fatigue.

"Old? Me old? I'm a fool, I admit, or I wouldn't have lugged your loads and done your work the way I have. But you see, I'm strong and vigorous, and I feel sorry for a tottering wreck like you—"

"Lugged my loads?" snorted the smaller man. "Me a wreck? My Gawd!"

"I did your packing and your washing and your cooking, and mine, too, just because you was feeble and because I've got consideration for my seniors. I was raised that way. I honored your age, Jerry. I knew you was about all in, but I never called you old. I wouldn't hurt your feelings. What did you do? You set around on your bony hips and criticized and picked at me. But you've picked my last feather off and I'm plumb raw. Right here we split!"

Jerry Quirk staggered slightly

and leaned against a post for support. His knees were wobbly; he, too, ached in every bone and muscle; he too, had been goaded into an insane temper, but that which maddened him beyond expression was this unwarranted charge of incompetency.

"Spit it in," he agreed. "That'll take a load off my shoulders."

"We'll cut our grub fifty-fifty, then I'll hit you a clout with the traces and turn you a-loose."

Jerry was still dazed, for his world had come to an end, but he pretended to an extravagant joy and managed to chirp: "Good news—the first I've had since we went partners. I'll sure kick up my heels. What'll we do with the boat?"

"Cut her in two."

"Right. We'll toss up for ends. We'll divide everything the same way, down to the skillet."

"Every blame' thing," Linton agreed.

Side by side they set off heavily through the woods.

Quarrels similar to this were of daily occurrence on the trail, but especially common were they here at Lunderman, for all the devices of the devil the one most trying to human patience is a whip-saw. It is a saying in the North that to know a man one must eat at a sack of flour with him; it is also generally recognized that a partnership which survives the vexations of a saw-pit is time and weather proof—a predestined union more sacred and more perfect even than that of matrimony. Few indeed have stood the test.

It was in this loosening of sentimental ties, in the breach of friendships and the birth of bitter enmities, where "law" the deepest tragedy of the Chilkoat and the Chilkat trails. Under ordinary circumstances men of opposite temperaments may live with each other in harmony and die in mutual accord, but circumstances here were extraordinary, abnormal hardship, monotony, fatigue score the very soul; constant close association renders men absurdly petulant and childishly quarrelsome. Many are the heartaches charged against those early days and those early trails.

Of course there was much less internal friction in outfits like Kirby's or the Countess Courteau's where the men worked under orders, but even there relations were often strained. Both Dan Roy and Pierce Phillips had had their troubles, their problems—nobody could escape them—but on the whole they had held their men together pretty well and had made fair progress, all things considered. Roy had experience to draw upon, while Phillips had none; nevertheless, the Countess was a good counselor and this brief training in authority was of extreme value to the younger man, who developed some of the qualities of leadership. As a result of their frequent conferences, a frank, free intimacy had sprung up between Pierce and his employer, an intimacy both gratifying and disappointing to him. Just how it affected the woman he could not tell. As a matter of fact he made little effort to learn, being for the moment too deeply con-

cerned in the great change that had come over him.

Pierce Phillips made no effort to deceive himself; he was in love, yes desperately in love, and his intuition grew with every hour. It was his first serious affair and quite naturally his newness took his breath. He had heard of puppy love and he scorned it, but this was not that kind, he told himself; he was an epic adoration, a full-grown, deathless man's affection such as comes to none but the favored of the gods and then but once in a lifetime. The reason was patent—it lay in the fact that the object of his soul-consuming worship was not an ordinary woman. No, the Countess was cast in heroic mold and she inspired love of a character to match her individuality; she was one of those rare, flaming creatures the like of whom illuminate the pages of history. She was another Cleopatra, a regal, matchless creature.

To be sure, she was not at all the sort of woman he had expected to love, therefore he loved her the more; nor was she the sort he had chosen as his ideal. But it is this abandonment of old ideals and acceptance of new which signifies youth's evolution into maturity.

(To be continued)

Electricity Contracts Obtained. SANDY, Ore.—Contracts for the installation of electric lights have been obtained from residents east of the Sandy city limits all along

the loop highway, including summer home colonies up the mountains. Three-year contracts were made at \$1.50 a month minimum rate. The company is called the Mount Hood Electric company, and the electricity will be obtained from the Bull Run power plant. It is also said the lights are to be put in at once, and that a big transformer will be put in at Sandy.

The Turk's Sunday comes on Friday, putting them two days ahead of us in eating too much.



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5 lb. box Perfection Soda Crackers	54c	None To Equal, per sack	\$2.09
		Per bbl.	\$8.29
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