

HUNDREDS OF CHANCES

by Rex Beach

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CHAPTER X (Continued)

It was a hellish place, it echoed to a deplorable din and it was a tremendous situation to brave it, for the boat did not glide nor slip down the descent; it went in a succession of jarring leaps; it lurched and twisted; it rolled and plunged as if in a determined effort to unseat its passengers and scatter its cargo. To the occupants it seemed as if its joints were opening, as if the boards themselves were being wrenched loose from the ribs to which they were nailed. The men were drenched, of course, for they traveled in a cloud of spray; their feet were ankle-deep in cold water, and every now and then caused them to dash.

How long it lasted, Pierce Phillips never knew; the experience was too terrific to be long lived. It was a nightmare, a hideous phantasmagoria of frightful sensations, a dissolving perception of break, scolding walls, of hydrophobic bladders frothing madly as the flood crashed over them, of treacherous whirlpools, and of pursuing breakers that reached forth licking tongues of destruction. Then the river opened, the cliffs fell away, and the torrent spewed itself into an expanse of whirlpools—a lake of gyrating funnels that warred with one another and threatened to twist the keel from under the boat.

Voices swung close in to the right bank, where an eddy raced up against the flood; some one flung a rope from the shore and drew the boat in.

"Well, I never had no better crew," cried the pilot. "What you think of 'im, eh?" He smiled down at the white-lipped seaman, who leaned forward, panting and dripping.

"Ja—that all of it?" Lucky Broad inquired, weakly.

"Made none a look! Dere's White Orse," Doret indicated a wall of foam and spray farther down the river. Directly across the expanse of whirlpools stood a village named after the rapids. "You get plenty more blinches!"

"You're wrong. I got plenty right now," Doret declared.

"I'm glad the Countess didn't come," said Phillips.

When the men wrung out their clothes and put on their boots they set out along the back trail over the bluffs.

Danny Royal was not an imaginative person. He possessed, to be sure, the superstitions of the average horseman and gambler, and he believed strongly in omens, but he was not a fortune teller and he put his faith in dreams and portents. It bothered him exceedingly, therefore, to discover that he was weighed down by an unaccountable and extremely oppressive sense of apprehension. How or why it had come to oppress him he could not imagine, but for some reason Miles Canon and the stormy waters below it had assumed terrible potentialities and he could not shake off the conviction that they were destined to prove his undoing. This feeling he had allowed to grow until now a fatalistic apathy had settled upon him and his usual cheerfulness was replaced by a senseless irritability. He suffered explosions of temper quite as surprising to the Kirbys, father and daughter, as to himself. On the day of his arrival he was particularly ugly, wherefore Rouletta was impelled to remonstrate with him.

"What ails you, Danny?" she inquired. "You'll have our men quitting."

"I wish they would," he cried.

"Boatmen! They don't know as much about boats as me and Sam."

"They do whatever they're told."

Royal acknowledged this fact ungraciously. "Trouble is we don't know what to tell 'em to do. All Sam knows is 'go on, 'go on,' and I can't steer anything that don't wear a bridle. Why, if this river wasn't fenced in with trees we'd have taken the wrong road and been lost, long ago."

Rouletta nodded thoughtfully. "Father is just as afraid of water as you are. He won't admit it, but I can tell. It has gotten on his nerves and I've had hard work to keep him from drinking."

"Say! Don't let him get started on that!" Danny exclaimed, earnestly. "That would be the last touch."

"Trust my L—"

But Kirby himself appeared at that moment, having returned from a voyage of exploration. Said he: "There's a good town below. I had a chance to sell the outfit."

"Going to do it?" Danny could not conceal his eagerness.

"The other man shook his gray head. "Hardly. For no piker."

"I wish you and Danny would take the package and trust the pilot to run the rapids," Rouletta said.

Kirby turned his expressionless face upon first one then the other of his companions. "Nervous!" he inquired of Royal.

The latter silently admitted that he was.

"Go ahead. You and Letty cross first."

"And you?"

"Oh, I'm going to attack!"

"Father!" the girl began, but old Sam shook his head.

"No. This is my case but, and I'm going to watch it."

Royal's waxen face puckered until it resembled more than ever a withered apple. "Then I'll stick, too," he declared. "I never laid down on you yet, Sam."

"How about you, Letty?"

The girl smiled. "Why, I wouldn't trust you boys out of my sight for a minute. Something would surely happen."

Kirby stooped and kissed his daughter's cheek. "You've always been our mascot, and you've always brought us luck. I'd go to

hell in a paper suit if you were alone. You're a game kid, too, and I want you to be like that, always. Be a thoroughbred. Don't weaken, no matter how bad things break for you. This cargo of mine is worth the best claim in Dawson, and I'll put us on our feet again. All I want is one more chance. Double and quit—that's us."

This was an extraordinarily long speech for "One-armed" Kirby; it showed that he was deeply in earnest.

"Double and quit?" breathed the girl. "Do you mean it, dad?"

"He nodded. "I'm going to leave you here. I don't aim to take my eyes off this large again till she's in Dawson."

Rouletta's face was transformed; there was a great gladness in her eyes—a gladness half obscured by tears. "Double and quit. Oh, my dream of getting—no, no! You've made me very happy, dad."

Royal, who knew this girl's dreams as well as he knew his own, felt a lump in his throat. He was a godless little man, but Rouletta Kirby's joys were holy things to him, her tears distressed him deeply. Therefore he waited away to avoid the sight of them. Her slightest wish had been his law ever since she had mastered words enough to voice a request, and now he, too, was happy to learn that Sam Kirby was at last ready to mold his future in accordance with her desires. Letty had never liked their mode of life; she had accepted it under protest, and with the passing years her unspoken disapproval had assumed the proportions of a great reproach. She had never put that disapproval into words—she was far too loyal for that—but Danny had known. He knew her ambitions and her possibilities, and he had sufficient vision to realize something of the injustice she suffered at her father's hands. Sam loved his daughter as few parents love a child, but he was a strange man and he showed his affection in characteristic ways. It pleased Royal greatly to learn that the old man had awakened to the wrong he did, and that this adventure would serve to close the story, as all good stories close, with a happy ending.

In spite of these cheering thoughts, Danny was unable wholly to shake off his oppressive forebodings, and as he paused on the river-bank to stare with gloomy fascination at the jaws of the gorge, he returned to plant a kiss on the old man's forehead, and awakened to the wrong he did, and that this adventure would serve to close the story, as all good stories close, with a happy ending.

It was an unpropitious moment for any one to address Royal; therefore when he heard himself spoken to, he whirled with a scowl upon his face to plant a kiss on the old man's forehead, and awakened to the wrong he did, and that this adventure would serve to close the story, as all good stories close, with a happy ending.

"Miser, I ain't good hand at mix in 'nother feller's business, but dat pilot you got shes no good."

Royal looked the stranger over from head to foot. "How do you know?" he inquired, sharply.

"Because—I'm pilot myself."

"Oh, I see! You're one of the good ones." Danny's air was surly, his tone forbidding.

"Yes."

"Hate yourself, don't you? I s'pose you want his job. Is that it? No wonder—five hundred needs for fifteen minutes' work. Soft graft, I call it." The speaker laughed unpleasantly. "Well, what does a good pilot charge?"

"Me?" The Canadian shrugged indifferently. "I charge you one thousand dollar."

Royal's jaw dropped. "The devil you say!" he exclaimed.

"I don't want de job—your seawa's no good—but I s'pose a coin will you. One 'ousand dollar or—free trip."

"Nothing doing," snapped the ex-horseman.

"Then! Now I give you 'll ad-

vice. Hell hard to do right in lower end of canon. Dere's been rock dore. Don't touch 'im or you goin' spin lak 'top 'an' mebbe you go over White Orse sideways. Dat's golt' amash you sure."

Royal broke out, peevishly: "Another hot tip, eh? Everybody's got some lead-box information—especially the ones you don't hire. Well, I ain't scared—"

"Oh, yes, you are," said the other man. "Everybody is scared of old place."

"Anyhow, I ain't scared a thousand dollars' worth. Take a lot to scare me that much. I set this place as my mark as a chapel and I bet our seawa goes through with her tail up. Let her bump; she'll finish with me on her back and all her weights. I built her and I named her."

Danny watched the pilot as he swung down to the stony shore and rejoined Pierce Phillips; then he looked on in fascination while they removed their outer garments, stepped into a boat with Kirby and Bridget, and rowed away into the gorge.

"It's—got my coat!" muttered the little jockey.

CHAPTER XI

Although scows larger than the Rouletta had run Miles Canon and the rapids below in safety, perhaps some more ungloriously had ever done so. Royal had built his barge stoutly, to be sure, but of other virtues the craft had none. When loaded she was so clumsy, so obstinate, so headstrong that it required unceasing effort to hold her on a course, or for rowing her, it was almost impossible. She took the first swooping rush into the

gorge, strange to say, in very good form, and thereafter, by dint of Herculean efforts, Royal and his three men managed to hold her head down stream, sweeping between the palisades, she galloped clumsily onward, wallowing like a hippopotamus. Her long pine sweeps, balanced and bored to receive thick three-pine, rose and fell like the stiff legs of some fat, square-headed spider; she reared her bluff bow; then she dove, shrouding herself in spray.

It was a journey to a terrible experience river-men; doubly terrifying was it to Royal and Kirby, who knew nothing whatever of swift water and to whom its perils were magnified a thousandfold.

In spite of his apprehension, which by now had quickened into panic, Kirby rose to the occasion with real credit. His face was like paper, his eyes were wide and strained; nevertheless, he kept his gaze fixed upon the pilot and strove to obey the latter's directions implicitly. Now with all his strength he heaved upon his sweeps; now he backed water violently; at no time did he trust himself to look at the cliffs which were sending past, nor to contemplate the furious turns in the gorge ahead. That would have been too much for him. Even when his clumsy oar all but grazed a binnacle, or when a jagged promontory seemed about to smash his craft, he refused to cease his frantic labors or to more than lift his eyes. He saw that Rouletta Kirby was very pale, and he tried to shout a word of encouragement to her, but his cry was thin and feeble, and it failed to pierce the thunder of the waters. Danny hoped the girl was not as frightened as he, nor as old Sam—the little man would not have wished such a punishment upon his worst enemy.

Kirby, by reason of his disability, of course, was prevented from lending any active help with the barge's passive part. That it was not to his liking any one could have seen, for, once the moorings were slipped, he did not open his lips; he merely stood beside Rouletta, with the fingers of his right hand sunk into her shoulder, his eyes fixed gravely on her. Together they swayed as the deck beneath them reeled and pitched.

"Look! We're nearly through!" the girl cried in his ear, after what seemed an interminable time.

Kirby nodded. Ahead he could see the end of the canon and what appeared to be freer water; out into this open space the torrent flung itself. The scow was riding the bore, that ridge of water up-thrust by reason of the pressure from above; between it and the exit from the chute was a rapidly dwindling expanse of tossing waves. Kirby was greatly relieved, but he could not understand why those rollers at the mouth of the gorge should rear themselves so high and should foam so savagely.

The bluffs ended, the narrow throat vomited the river out, and the scow galloped from shadow into pale sunlight.

The owner of the outfit drew a deep breath, his clutched fingers relaxed their nervous hold. He saw that Danny was trying to make himself heard and he leaned forward to catch the fellow's words when suddenly the impossible happened. The deck beneath his feet was jerked backward and he was flung to his knees. Simultaneously there came a crash, the sound of rending, splintering wood, and over the stern of the barge poured an icy deluge that all but swept father and daughter away. Rouletta screamed, then she called the name of Royal.

"Danny! Danny!" she cried, far both she and old Sam had seen a terrible thing.

The blade of Royal's sweep had been submerged at the instant of the collision, and, as a consequence, the force of that rushing

current had borne it forward, catapulting the man on the other end overboard as cleanly, as easily as a school-boy snags a paper pellet from the end of a pencil. Before their very eyes the Kirbys saw their lieutenant, their lifelong friend and servant, picked up and hurled into the flood.

"Danny!" shrieked the girl. The voice of the rapids had changed its tone now, for a cataclysm was drumming upon the after-deck and there was a crashing and a smashing as the piles of boxes came tumbling down. The scow drove higher upon the reef, its bow rose until it stood at a sharp incline, and meanwhile waves after wave cut like a brooch over the stern, which steadily sank deeper. Then the deck tilted drunkenly and an avalanche of case-goods was spilled over the side.

(To be Continued.)

HUNTINGTON SPAN NEAR BAKER, Ore.—A new bridge over the Snake river, near Huntington, is virtually a certainty and the contract for it may be let this fall, Judge Dodson said today following his return from the Snake river where a party of state and county officials met with Idaho representatives and began work on an estimate of the cost of the structure, for which \$50,000 has been appropriated.

Three possible sites were examined. The engineers will work this week gathering data for an estimate of the cost. The expense will approximate \$70,000.

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