WINDS of CHANCE by Rex Beach

Published by Arrangement with First National Pictures, Inc., and Frank Lloyd Productions, Inc.

CHAPTER XIII. (Continued)

The girl took no offense; she maintained her curious observation of him; she appeared genuinely interested in acquainting herself with a man who could master such a phenomenal quantity of liquor. There was mystification in her tone when she said:

"But—I saw you come in alone. And now you're drinking alone."

"Is that a reproach? I beg your pardon." Pierce swept her a mocking bow. "What will you have?"

Without removing her chin from its resting place, the stranger shook her head silently, so he downed his beverage as before. The girl watched him interestedly as he paid for it.

"That's more money than I've seen in a month," she said. "I wouldn't be so free and easy with it, if I were you."

"No? Why not?"

She merely shrugged, and continued to study him with that same disconcerting inquisitiveness — she reminded him of a frank and curious child.

Pierce noticed now that she was a very pretty girl, and quite appropriately dressed, under the circumstances. She wore a boys suit, with a short skirt over her knickerbockers, and, since she was slim, the garments added to her appearance of immaturity. Her face was oval in outline, and it was of a perfectly uniform olive tint; her eyes were large and black and velvety, their lashes were long, their lids were faintly smudged with a shadowy under-coloring that magnified their size and intensified their brilliance. Her hair was almost black, nevertheless it was of fine texture; a few unruly strands had escaped from beneath her fur cap and they clouded her brow and temples. At first sight she appeared to be foreign, and of that smoky type commonly associated with the Russian idea of beauty but she was not foreign, not Russian; nor were her features predominantly racial.

"What's your name?" she asked, suddenly.

Pierce told her. "And yours?" he inquired.

"Laure."

"Laure what?"

"Just Laure—for the present."

"Humph! You're one of this—theatrical company, I presume." He indicated the shapes across the room.

"Yes. Morris Best hired us to work in his place at Dawson."

"I remember your outfit at Sheep Camp. Best was nearly crazy—"

"He's crazier than ever." Laure smiled for the first time and her face lit up with mischief. "Poor Morris! We lead him around by his big nose. He's deathly afraid he'll lose us and we know it, so we make his life miserable." She turned serious abruptly, and with a candor quite startling said, "I like you."

"Indeed!" Pierce was nonpulsed.

The girl nodded. "You looked good to me when you came in. Are you going to Dawson?"

"Of course. Everybody's going to Dawson."

"I suppose you have partners?"

"No!" Pierce's face darkened. "I'm alone—very much alone." He undertook to speak in a hollow, hopeless tone.

"Big outfit?"

"None at all. But I have enough money for my needs and—I'll probably hook up with somebody." Now there was a leave but cheerless resignation in his words.

Laure pondered for a moment; even more carefully than before she studied her companion. That the result satisfied her she made plain by saying:

"Morris wants men. I can get him to hire you. Would you want to hook up with us?"

"I don't know. It doesn't much matter. Will you have something to drink now?"

"Why should I? They don't give any percentage here. Wait! I'll see Morris and tell you what he says." Leaning Pierce, the speaker hurried to a harrassed little man of Hebraic countenance who was engaged in the difficult task of chaperoning this unruly aggregation of talent. To him she said:

"I've found a man for you, Morris."

"Man?"

"To go to Dawson with us. That tall, good-looking fellow at the bar."

Mr. Best was bewildered. "What ails you?" he queried. "I don't want any men, and you know it."

"You want this fellow, and you're going to hire him."

"Am I? What makes you think so?"

"Because it's — him or me," Laure said, calmly.

Mr. Best was both surprised and angered at this cool announcement. "You mean, I s'pose, that you'll quit," he said, belligerently.

"I mean that very thing. The man has money—"

Best's anger disappeared as if by magic; his tone became apologetic. "Oh! Why didn't you say so? If he'll pay enough, and if you want him, why, of course—"

Laure interrupted with an unexpected dash of temper. "He isn't going to pay you anything; you're going to pay him—top wages, too. Understand?"

The unhappy recipient of this ultimatum raised his hands in a gesture of despair. "Himmel! There's no understanding you girls! There's no getting on with you, either. What's on your mind, eh? Are you after him or his coin?"

"I—don't know." Laure was gazing at Phillips with a peculiar expression. "I'm not sure. Maybe I'm after both. Will you be good and hire him, or—"

"Oh, you've got me!" Best declared, with frank resentment. "If you want him, I s'pose I'll have to get him for you, but"—he muttered an oath under his breath—"you'll ruin me. Oy! Oy! I'll be glad when you're all at Dawson and at work."

After some further talk the manager approached Phillips and made himself known. "Laure tells me you want to join our troupe," he began.

"I'll see that he pays you well," the girl urged. "Come on."

Phillips thoughts were not quite clear, but, even so, the situation struck him so grotesquely amusing. "I'm no song-and-dance man," he said, with a smile. "What would you expect me to do? Play a mandolin?"

"I don't know exactly," Best replied, "Maybe you could help me ride herd on these Hornbacks." He ran a hand through his thin black hair, thinner now by half than when he left the States. "If you could do that, why—you could save my reason."

"He wants you to be a Simon Legree," Laure explained.

The manager seconded this statement by a nod of his head. "Sure! Crack the whip over 'em. Keep 'em in line. Don't let 'em get married. I thought I was wise to hire good-lookers, but—I vas crazy. They smile and they make eyes and the men fight for 'em. They steal 'em away. I've had a dozen battles and every time I've been licked. Already four of my girls are gone. If I lose four more I can't open; I'll be ruined. Oy! Such a country! Every day a new love-affair; every day more trouble—"

Laure threw back her dark head and laughed in mischievous delight. "It's a fact," she told Pierce. "The best Best gets is the worst of it. He's not our manager, he's our slave; we have lots of fun with him." Stepping closer to the young man, she slipped her arm within his and, looking up into his face, said, in a low voice: "I know I could fix it, for I always have my way. Will you go?" When he hesitated she repeated: "Will you go with me or—shall I go with you?"

Phillips started. His brain was fogged and he had difficulty in focusing his gaze upon the eager, upturned face of the girl; nevertheless, he appreciated the significance of this audacious inquiry and there came to him the memory of his recent conversation with the Countess Courteau. "Why do you say that?" he queried, after a moment. "Why do you want me to go?"

Laure's eyes searched his; there was an odd light in them, and a peculiar intensity which he dimly felt but scarcely understood. "I don't know," she confessed. She was no longer smiling, and, although her gaze remained hypnotically fixedr upon his she seemed to be searching her own soul. "I don't know," she said again, "but you have a—call."

In spite of the young woman's charms, and they were numerous enough, Phillips was not strongly drawn to her; resentment, anger, his rankling sense of injury, all these left no room for other emotions. That she was interested in him he still had sense enough to perceive; her amazing proposal, her unmistakable air of proprietorship, showed that much, and in consequence a sort of malacious triumph arose within him. Here, right at hand, was an agency of forgetfulness, more potent by far than the one to which he had first turned. Dangerous? Yes. But his life was ruined. What difference, then, whether oblivion came from alcohol or from the drug of the poppy? Deliberately he shut his ears to inner warnings; he raised his head defiantly.

"I'll go," said he.

"We leave at daylight," Best told him.

CHAPTER XIV

With 'Poleon Doret to be busy was to be contented and these were busy times for him. His daily routine, with trap and gun, had made of him an early riser and had bred in him a habit of greeting the sun with a song. It was no hardship for him, therefore, to cook his breakfast by candle light, especially now that the days were growing short. On the morning after his rescue of Sam Kirby and his daughter 'Poleon washed his dishes and cut his wood; then, finding that there was still an hour to spare before the light would be sufficient to run Miles Canon, he lit his pipe and strolled up to the village. The ground was now white, for considerable snow had fallen during the night; the day promised to be extremely short and uncomfortable. 'Poleon, however, was impervious to weather of any sort; his good humor was not dampened in the least.

The fellow held the girl for an instant and helped her to regain her equilibrium, exclaiming, with a laugh, "Say! What's the matter with you, sister? Can't you see where you're going?" When Rouletta made no response the man continued in an even friendlier tone: "Well, I can see; my eyesight's good, and it tells me you're about the best looking dame I've run into tonight." Still laughing, he bent his head as if to catch the girl's answer. "Eh? I don't get you. Who d'you say you're looking for?"

'Poleon was frankly puzzled. He resented this man's tone of easy familiarity and, about to interfere, he was restrained by Rouletta's apparent indifference. What ailed the girl? It was too dark to make out her face, but her voice, oddly changed and unnatural, gave him cause for wonderment. Could it be—'Poleon's half-formed question was answered by the stranger who cried, in mock reproach: "Naughty! Naughty! You've had a little too much, that's what's the matter with you. Why, you need a guardeen." Taking Rouletta by the shoulders, the speaker turned her about so that the dim half-light that filtered through the canvas wall of the tent saloon shone full upon her face.

'Poleon saw now that the girl was indeed not herself; there was a childish, vacuous expression upon her face; she appeared to be dazed and to comprehend little of what the man was saying. This was proved by her blank acceptance of his next insinuating words: "Say, it's lucky I stumbled on to you. I been up all night and so have you. S'pose we get better acquainted. What?"

Rouletta offered no objection to this proposal; the fellow slipped an arm about her and led her away, meanwhile pouring a confidential murmur into her ear. They had proceeded but a few steps when 'Poleon, Doret strode out of the gloom and laid a heavy hand upon the man.

"My frien'," he demanded, brusquely, "w'ere you takin' dis lady?"

"Eh?" The fellow wheeled sharply. "What's the idea? What is she to you?"

"She ain't not'in to me. But I seen you plenty tams an'—you ain't no good."

Rouletta spoke intelligibly for the first time: "I've no place to go—no place to sleep. I'm very tired."

"There you've got it," the girl's self-appointed protector grinned. "Well, I happen to have room for her in my tent." As Doret's fingers sank deeper into his flesh the man's anger rose; he undertook to shake off the unwelcome grasp. "You leggo! You mind your own business—"

"Dis goin' be my blanesse," 'Poleon announced. "Dere's somet'ing fonny 'bout dis—"

"Don't get funny with me. I got as much right to her as you have—"

'Poleon jerked the man off his feet, then flung him aside as if he were unclean. His voice was hoarse with disgust when he cried:

"Get out! Beat it! By Gar! You ain't fit for touch decent gal. You spik wit' her again, I tear you in two piece!"

Turning to Rouletta he said: "Mam'selle, you lookin' for your papa, eh?"

Miss Kirby was clasping and unclasping her fingers, her face was strained, her response came in a mutter so low that 'Poleon barely caught it:

"Danny's gone — gone —. Dad, he's— No use fighting it— It's the drink—and there's nothing I can do."

It was 'Poleon's turn to take the girl by the shoulders and wheel her about for a better look at her face. A moment later he led her back into the saloon. She was so oddly obedient, so docile, so unquestioning, that he realized something was greatly amiss. He laid his hand against her flushed cheek and found it to be burning hot, whereupon he hastily consulted the nearest bystanders. They agreed with him that the girl was indeed ill—more than that, she was half delirious.

"Sacre! W'at's she doin' roun' a saloon lak dis?" he indignantly demanded. "How come she's gettin' up diffore daylight, eh?"

It was the bartender who made plain the facts: "She ain't been to bed at all, Frenchy. She's been up all night, ridin' herd on old Sam Kirby. He's drinkin', understand? He tried to get some place for her to stay, along about midnight, but there wasn't any. She's been settin' there alongside of the stove for the last few hours and I been sort of keepin' an eye on her for Sam's sake."

Doret breathed an oath. "Dat's nice fader she's got! I wish I let 'im drown."

"Oh, he ain't exactly to blame. He's on a bender—like to of killed a feller in here. Somebody'd ought to take care of this girl till he sobers up."

(To be continued)

Suit Costs $250

Here is the new flying suit for airmail pilots and army aviators attempting altitude flights. Tests at McCook Field, Dayton, O., have proved that a lining of fawn reindeer fur makes the warmest suit. The hides of 15 to 22 young reindeer are required to make one suit, the total cost being $250.

WE SHOUT

From the housetops for the same reason that a circus has a parade—

TO TELL THE WORLD THAT WE'RE HERE

UNITED STATES NATIONAL BANK

Berry Area Increased

ALBANY, Ore.—Large acreages of strawberries are reported as being set out near Lacomb, in the Cascade mountain foothills. Several hundred acres are being set out this fall. One new planting contains 41 acres. The prices are good, contractors on the job in that vicinity bidding up the prices far above last year's quotations. Some of the berries have been contracted for as high as 8 cents.

CASCADE LOCKS JOYFUL

CASCADE LOCKS, Ore.—President George A. Sears of the Union Bridge company of Portland caused general rejoicing in Stevenson and Cascade Locks this week by the definite statement, that the "Bridge of the Gods," which will span the Columbia and connect these two towns, will be started within a month, or just as soon as the crew engaged to build it has completed a bridge job on the coast. The bridge will cost half a million dollars and will be completed by early summer of next year.

The plan calls for several cement piers on the Washington side and an elaborate approach in conjunction with the pier already built on the Oregon side. The administration buildings and a modern five-room house for the toll keeper will be built on the Washington side, and grounds including Wauna park are to be improved and beautified, making it an extremely attractive spot, which tourists will appreciate.

Look for the "Check Seal" on all electrical appliances. We sell them.

H. & S. ELECTRIC

"Check Seal"

Electrical Appliances ARE better. See Us.

La Grande Electric Co.

Before Investing Your Savings in a Home

Make sure of the Electrical Installation
Insist on "Check" Seal Electrical Wiring

A home is an important investment—one step you can take to safeguard that investment is the selection of a "Check" Seal contractor to make the electrical installation.

The "Check" Seal identifies *qualified* electrical contractors who put in convenient connections for electrical appliances, who use good workmanship and install only standard wiring devices. Before you build or buy, insist that the wiring be done by a "Check" Seal contractor. Also remember that "Check" Seal retailers sell *quality* electrical merchandise.

PACIFIC STATES ELECTRIC COMPANY

SAN FRANCISCO LOS ANGELES LONG BEACH OAKLAND PORTLAND SEATTLE SPOKANE

Distributors for General Electric

Before you build, buy or rent—get "The Electrical How for Homebuilders." This booklet can be had free from any electrical contractor or retailer who displays the "Check" Seal or by writing our nearest office.

STARTS TOMORROW

THE ORIGINAL REXALL

ONE 1¢ CENT SALE!

Klenzo Tooth Paste
50c ..... Two For 51c

Stationery
1 Box 50c ..... Two For 51c

Hot Water Bottles
One for $2.00 ..... Two For $2.01

Fountain Syringes
One for $2.00 ..... Two For $2.01

Georgia Rose Toilet Water
One Bottle for $1.00 ..... Two For $1.01

Georgia Rose Talc
One Can 25c ..... Two For 26c

And dozens of other Quality Items.

The Rexall Store

GLASS DRUGS INC.

"Check" Seal Appliances Carried By Eastern Oregon Light & Power Co.