

# WINDS OF CHANGE

by Rex Beach

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**CHAPTER XV. (Continued)**

"Miser!" The French Canadian's face flushed, he raised his head and met the gaze of the two men. "There was an air of dignity about him as he said: 'There's a thing in this world we don't get pay for. You didn't expect no pay yesterday when you run de White Horse for save dis girl an' her papa, did you? No, Wal, I'm woodman, riverman, I ain't dam' stamperer. Dis is my country, we're ripin' together long time. I love it an' I love me. I love de birds an' hants, mals, an' de fowls, friend's wit' me also. 'Bout spring-time, wen de grub she's short, de Canada boys dey come to visit me, an' I feed dem, sometain' I fin' dere's groun', squarrel's nest onder my tent, an' mebbe mister squarer even out of his hole, 'Chink' summer is come. Dat feller he's hungry, he ain't no food an' he set 'longside my stove for eat him. You think I hurt dem 'peoples' in 'tine? You s'pose I mak' dem pay for wat dey eat?"

"Poleon was soaring as only his free soul could soar; he indicated the tent at his back, whence issued the sound of Touletta Kirby's ceaseless murmuring.

"His girl—she's they snowbird with broken wing. 'Bout I fix her wing de best I can. I mak' her well an' I teach her to fly again, Dat's all." Broad and Bridges had listened attentively, their faces impassive, Lucky was the first to speak.

"Let's a good girl, s'understand. She's different to these others—"

"Poleon interrupted with a gesture of impatience. "It ain't mak' no difference if she's good or bad, she's seek."

"Ain't de kid had done some heavy thinkin', an' we'd about decided to get a high stool and take turns lookin' out Lerty's game, just to see that her bets went as they laid, but I got a hunch you're a square guy. What d'you think, Kid?"

Mr. Bridges nodded his head slowly. "I got the same hunch. The point is this," he explained. "We can't very well throw the Countess—we got some of her outfit—and, anyhow, we'd be about as handy around an invalid as a couple cub bears. I think we'll bow out. But, Frenchy—if ever we hear a knock from that gal we'll tell you, you like a truck. Won't we, Lucky?"

"We'll teller him to hell!" Mr. Bridges feelingly declared.

Gravely, ceremoniously, the callers shook hands with Loret, then they returned whence they had come. They went their way; Loret's delicious continued; Loret's problem increased daily; meanwhile, however, the life of the North did not slacken a single pulse-beat.

Never since their earliest associations had Tom Linton and Jerry Quirk found themselves in such complete harmony of understanding, as during the days that immediately followed their reconciliation. Each man undertook to outdo the other in politeness; each man forced himself to be considerate, and strive at whatever extent to himself to lighten the other's burdens; all of their relations were characterized by an elaborate, an almost mid-Victorian courtesy. A friendly rivalry in self-sacrifice existed between them; they quarreled good-naturedly over the dishwashing, that disgusting rite which tests the patience of every grown man; when there was word to be cut, they battled with each other for the ax.

But there is a limit to politeness; unobtrusive sunshine grows tedious, and so does a monotonous exercise of magnanimity.

While it had been an easy matter for to cut their ruyboat in two, the process of splicing it together again had required patience and ingenuity; and it had resulted in delay. By the time they arrived at Miles Canon, therefore, the season was far advanced and both men, without knowing it, were in a condition of mind to welcome any sort of a squall that would serve to freshen the unbearably stagnant atmosphere of amiability in which they were slowly suffocating.

Here for the first time the results of their quarrel arose to embarrass them; they could find no pilot who would risk his life in a craft so badly put together as theirs. After repeated discouragements the partners took counsel with each other; reluctantly they agreed that they were up against it.

"Seems like I've about ruined us," Mr. Quirk acknowledged, ruefully.

"Don't worry, Jerry, it was my fault we cut the old ship in two," Mr. Linton declared.

The former speaker remonstrated, gently. "Now, Tom, it's just like you to take the blame, but it was my doin's. I insisted that frigid air strike."

Swiftly but firmly Linton interposed with his partner. "It ain't open that you're wrong, Jerry, and Jerry—It ain't more than mine or yours in a lifetime—but you're wrong now. You the guilty wretch and I ought to hang for it. My rotten temper—"

"Fellow! You got one of the nicest dispositions I ever see—in a man. You're sweeter n' a prestimmon. I looked at you till your corn was exposed. I'm a thorn in the flesh, Tom and folks wouldn't criticize you none for min' away with me."

"You're wery eff. I lembered you with my spurs—"

"Now, Tom!" As Jerry Quirk wagged his gray head, "I don't often argue with anybody, especially with you, but the damnable idea

of dividin' our spoils originated in my evil mind and I'm goin' to pay the penalty. I'll ride this white pine outfit through by myself. You see him down till I get both feet in the stirrups, then turn him loose; I'll finish settin' up and I won't pull neither."

"How you talk! Bosta ain't like horses; it'll take a good oarsman to navigate these rapids—"

"Well! I'm a good oarsman," there was a momentary pause. "Ain't I?"

Mr. Linton hastily smoothed his shirt at the tangens. "You're a bear!" he asserted with feeling. "I don't know as I ever saw a better boatman than you, for your weight and experience, but—there's a few things about boats that you never had the chance to pick up, you being sort of a census and alkali sailor. For instance, when you want to head to go home you have to pull on the 'off' oar. It's plumb the opposite to the way you steer a horn—"

"Sure! Didn't I rigger that out for the both of us? We 'most had a runaway till I doped it out."

Now this was a plain perversion of fact, for it was Tom who had made the discovery. Mr. Linton was about to state the matter when he recalled that doubtless Jerry's intentions were honest and that his failing memory was to blame for the misstatement. It was annoying to be robbed of the credit for an important discovery, of course, but Tom swallowed his resentment.

"The point is this," he said, with a resumption of geniality. "You'd get all wet in them rapids, Jerry, and—you know what that means, I'd rather take a chance on drownin' myself rather than to mirror you through another bad cold."

It was a perfectly sincere speech—an ardent expression of deep concern that reflected no little credit upon the speaker's generosity. Tom was exasperated, therefore, when Jerry, by some characteristic process of crooked reasoning, managed to misinterpret it. Plainly the latter said:

"I s'pose I am a handicap to you, Tom. You're mighty considerate of my feelin's, not to throw it up to me any offense than you do."

"I don't throw it up to you none. I never did. No, Jerry, I'll row the boat. You go overland and keep your feet dry."

"A lot of good that would do," Mr. Quirk spoke bitterly. "I'd starve to death walkin' around if you lost the grub."

"This struck Tom Linton as a very narrow, a very selfish way of looking at the matter. He had taken no such view of Jerry's offer; he had thought less about the grub than about his partner's safety. It was an inconsiderate and unfeeling remark. After a moment he said:

"You know I don't throw things up to you, Jerry. I ain't that kind."

Mr. Quirk stirred uneasily. "You didn't mean to say that, did you?" What Jerry would have answered is uncertain, for his attention at the moment was attracted by a stranger who strode down the bank and now accented him and his partner jointly.

"Honour, mister's!" said the newcomer. "I'm looking for buy some lemon." Mr. Quirk spoke irritably. "Sure, we've got a few, but they ain't for sale."

The stranger—Quirk remembered him as the Frenchman, Darsi, whom he had seen at Sheep Camp—smiled confidently.

"Oh, you! Everything is for sale if you pay 'nough for 'em," said he. Now this fellow had broken the thread of a conversation into which a vague undertone of acrimony was creeping—a conversation that gave every indication of developing into an agreeable and somewhat satisfying difference of opinion, if not even into a loud and free-spoken argument of the old familiar sort. To have the troubles of an inveterate quarrel frustrated by an idiotic diversion concerning lemons caused both old men to turn their pent-up exasperation upon the speaker.

"We've got use for our lemons and we're going to keep 'em," said Tom. "We're lemon-sellers—full of hell—that's us."

"We wouldn't give lemon aid to nobody," Jerry primed in malicious enjoyment of his own wit.

"You got how many?" Poleon prodded.

"Oh, 'bout enough! Mebbe a dozen or two."

"I buy 'em. Dere's poor meek lady—"

Tom cut in brusquely. "You

won't buy anything here. Don't tell us your troubles. We've got enough of our own, and poverty ain't among the number."

"What trouble you got, eh? Me, I'm de trouble man, Mebbe I fit a 'em."

Sourly the partners explained their difficulty. When Poleon understood he smiled again, more widely.

"Good! I mak' bargain wit' you, quack, Me, I'm pull de be an' I tak' your boat 'trough for dose lemon."

The elderly man sat up; they exchanged startled glances.

"If you mean it?"

"I'm goin' have dose lemon?"

"Can't you buy any in the saloons?"

"No, Wal, w'at you say?"

Tom inquired of his partner, "Can you get along without 'em, Jerry?"

"Why, I been savin' 'em for you."

"Then it's a go!"

"One 'tine you do for me, eh?" Poleon hesitated momentarily. "It's goin' tak' time for 'em, dat fool to help me row dat lagoon, 'tine—I fit him. Maybe you set up wit' 'em week and while I'm gone. What? In a few words he made known the condition of affairs at his camp, and the old men agreed readily enough. With un-

disguised relief they clambered stiffly out of their boat and followed the French Canadian up the trail. As they topped up the slope Poleon explained:

"De doctor he's go to Dawson, an' 'tine day dis not been leavin' seesh—erosee in de boat. Every hour medicine, all de time fin in de stove 'sappre! I'm half 'sleep."

"We'll set up with her as long as you want," Tom volunteered. "Being a family man myself, I'm a regular nurse."

"Mr. too," Jerry exclaimed. "I never had no family, but I alius been handy around horses, and horses in the same as people, only bigger—"

Mr. Linton stifled a laugh at this remark. "That'll show you!" said he. "You leave it to me, Jerry."

"Well, aim they?"

"No."

"They are, too."

"Tumb different."

The argument ceased hot; it had reached its height when Poleon laid a finger upon his lips, commanding silence. On Linton he led the two men into his tent. When he had issued instructions and left in search of a boatman the partners seated themselves awkwardly, their caps in their hands. Curiously, apprehensively, they studied the

fever-flushed face of the delirious girl.

"Farty, ain't she?" Jerry whispered.

Tom nodded. "She's sick, all right, too," he said in a similar tone; then after a moment, "I've been thinking about them lemons. We're getting about a hundred dollars a dozen for 'em. Kind of a rotten trick, under the circumstances. I'm sorry you put it up to that feller the way you did."

Mr. Quirk affirmed, his eyes wide in astonishment.

"Me? I didn't put it up to him. You done it. They're your lemons."

"How d'you figure they're mine?"

"You bought 'em, didn't you?"

"I paid for 'em, if that's what you mean, but I bought that liquor, you, same as I bought that liquor. You're at most of 'em, and you've drank most of the whiskey. You needed it worse than I did, Jerry, and I've always considered—"

Now any reference, any reflection upon his physical limitations, however remote or indirect, aroused Jerry's instant ire. "At it again, ain't you?" he cried, testily. "I s'pose you'll forget about that whiskey in four or five years. I hope so—"

"Sh-h!" Tom made a gesture commanding silence, for Jerry had unconsciously raised his voice.

"What ails you?" he inquired, anxiously.

"Nothin' ails me," Jerry muttered under his breath. "That's the trouble. You're alius talkin' like it did—like I had one foot in the grave and was gaspin' my last. I'm hard as a Hickory nut. I could throw you down and get on you."

"Did you ever give lemons to sick folks?" Tom inquired, in his turn.

"Sure! Thousands!"

Now this was such an outrageous exaggeration that Linton was impelled to exclaim:

"Hats! You never saw a thousand and sick folks?"

"I didn't say so. I said I'd given thousands of lemons—"

"Oh!" Tom filled his pipe and lit it, whereupon his partner breathed a sudden scornful:

"Put out that smudge! If you ain't so strangle the girl?"

With a golly start the offender quenched the fire with his thumb.

"The idea of lightin' sheep-dip in a sick-room!" Mr. Quirk went on. With his cap he fanned violently at the fumes.

"You don't have to blow her out of bed," Tom growled. "Usually

he drew the blankets closer beneath the sick girl's chin, but in so doing he again excited his companion's opposition.

"Here!" Jerry protested. "She's burnin' up with fever. You blanchet 'em when they've got chills. Gently he removed the covers from Rouletta's throat."

(To be continued)

**SIDETRACKS TO BE LAID**

EUGENE, Ore.—Work on the sidetracks on the new terminal site of the Southern Pacific company, recently given by the city of Eugene, will be started within two weeks, according to announcement here today by E. L. King, superintendent of the lines in Oregon. Following the installation of the tracks, work will be started on the re-erecting plant to cost \$550,000, the superintendent said.

They will be treated here for all the lines in Oregon and a large number of men will be employed. Work on the shops for the trains on the new Klamath Falls line and on the Coos Bay branch, as well as for this division of the valley lines, is expected to be started later.

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