

HANDS OF CHANCE

by Rex Beach

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CHAPTER XVII (Continued)

The tents were up, a big campfire was blazing brightly, when Pierce Phillips, burdened with a huge armful of spruce boughs and blinded by the illumination, stepped too close to the river's rim and fell the soft beneath him crumbling away. Down he plunged, amid an avalanche of earth and gravel; the last sound he heard before the icy waters received him was Laura's affrighted scream. An instant later he had seized a "swamp" to which he clung until help arrived. He was wet to the skin, of course; his teeth were chattering by the time he had regained the campfire. Of the entire party, Laura alone had no comment to make upon the accident. She stood motionless, leaning for support against a tent-pole, her face hidden in her hands. Best's about birds were noisily twittering about Pierce; Best himself was congratulating the young man upon his ability to swim when Laura spoke, sharply, imperiously:

"Somebody find his dry things, quickly. And you, Morris, get your whiskey."

While one of the men ran for Pierce's duffel-bag, Best came hurrying with a bottle which he proffered to Pierce. The latter refused it, asserting that he was quite all right, but Laura exclaimed:

"Drink! Take a good one, then go into our tent and change as fast as you can."

"Sure!" the manager urged. "Don't be afraid of good liquor. There isn't much left. Drink it all."

A short time later, when Pierce reappeared, clad in dry garments, he felt none the worse for his mishap, but when he undertook to aid in the preparations for the night he suspected that he had taken his employer's orders too literally, for his brain was whirling. Soon he discovered that his movements were awkward and his hands uncertain, and when his camp-mates began to joke with him, he was filled with a confusion that he had hitherto not known.

Laura drew him out of hearing, then inquired, anxiously, "Are you all right again?"

"Sure! I feel great."

"I thought I'd die when I saw you disappear," she shuddered and hid her face in her hands for a second time. It was quite dark where they stood; they were sheltered from observation.

"Served me right," he declared. "Next time I'll look where—" He halted in amazement. "Why, Laura, I believe you're crying!"

"She lifted her face and nodded. "I'm frightened," she said, trembling, exploratory hands upon him, as if to reassure herself of his safety. "Pierce?" she exclaimed brokenly.

Suddenly Phillips discovered that this girl's concern affected him deeply, for it was genuine—it was not in the least put on. All at once she seemed very near to him, very much a part of himself. His head was spinning now and something within him had quickened magically. There was a new note in his voice when he undertook to reassure his companion. At his first word Laura looked up, startled; into her dark eyes, still moist with tears, there flamed a

light of wonder and of gladness. She swayed closer; she took the lapels of his coat between her gloved fingers and drew his head down to hers; then she kissed him full upon the lips. Slowly, resolutely, his arms encircled her. On the following morning Laura asked Morris Best for a bottle of whiskey. The evenings were growing cold and some of the girls needed a stimulant while camp was being pitched, she explained. The bottle she gave to Pierce, with a request to stow it in his baggage for safekeeping, and that night as they landed, cramped and chilly, she prevailed upon him to open it and to drink. The experiment worked. Laura began to understand that when Pierce Phillips' blood flowed warmly then he saw her with the eyes of a lover. It was not a flattering discovery, but the girl contented herself, for by now she was desperate enough to snatch at straws. Thereafter she counted upon strong drink as her ally.

The closing scenes of the great autumn stampede to Dawson were picturesque, for the rushing river was crowded with boats all racing with one another. "Neath lowering skies, past ghostly shores seen dimly through a luscious curtain of sitting snowflakes, except the great, they went by ones and by twos, in groups and in flotillas; hourly the swirling current gave them along, and as the miles grew steadily less the spirits of the crews mounted. Loud laughter, songs, yells of greeting and encouragement, ran back and forth; a triumphant joyfulness, a jovial blarney, characterized the men of brass; for they had met the North and they had bested her. Restraint had dropped away by now, and they revelled in a new-found freedom. There was license in the air, for Adventure was afoot and the unknown beckoned.

Urged on by ear and sweep, propelled by favoring breezes, the Argonauts pressed forward exultantly. At night their roaring campfires winked at one another like beacon lights along some friendly channel. Enrolling before them was an endless panorama of spruce and birch and cottonwood, of high hills white with snow, of unexplored valleys dark with promise. As the Yukon increased in volume it became muddy, singing, a low, hissing song, as if the falling particles of snow melted on its surface and turned to steam.

Out of all the traffic that flowed past the dance-hall party, among all the boats they overhauled and left behind, Pierce Phillips nowhere recognized the Countess Courtesan's outfit. Whether she was ahead or whether they had outdistanced her he did not know and inquiry rewarded him with no hint.

During this journey a significant change gradually came over the young man. Familiarity, a certain intimacy with his companions, taught him much, and in time he forgot to look upon them as parasites. Best, for instance, proved to be an irritable but good-hearted little Hebrew; he developed a genuine fondness for Pierce, which he took every occasion to show, and Pierce grew to like him. The girls, too, opened their hearts and made him feel their friendship. For the most part, they were warm, impulsive creatures, and Pierce was amazed to discover how little they differed from the girls he had known at home. Among their faults he discovered minimal traits of character; there was not a little kindness, generosity, and of course much cheerfulness. They

were free-handed with what they had; they were ready with a smile, a word of encouragement or of sympathy; they were absurdly grateful, too, for the smallest favor or the least act of kindness. Moreover, they behaved themselves extremely well.

They were an education to Phillips; he acknowledged that he had gravely misjudged them, and he began to suspect that they had taught him something of charity. As for Laura, he knew her very well by now and she knew him— even better. This knowledge had come to them not without cost— wisdom is never cheap—but precisely what each of them had paid or was destined to pay for their better understanding of each other they had not the slightest idea. One thing the girl by this time had made sure of, viz., when Pierce was just natural sets he felt her appeal only faintly. On the other hand, the moment he was not his natural self, the moment his pitch was raised, he saw affirmations in her, and at such times they met on common ground. She made the most of this fact.

Pierce longed for some one to whom he could confide his feeling of triumph, but nowhere did he recognize a face. Finally he strove into one of the narrow alleys and ambling homeward, and was contentedly eyeing the scene when he felt a gaze fixed upon him. He turned his head, opened his lips to speak, then stiffened in his tracks. He could not credit his senses, for there, lounging at ease against the bar, his face distorted into an evil grin, stood Joe McCauley!

Pierce blinked; he found that his jaw had dropped in amazement. McCauley enjoyed the sensation he had created; he leered at his former camp-mate, and in his expression was a hint of that same venom he had displayed when he had run the gauntlet at Sheep Camp after his flogging. He broke the spell of Pierce's amazement and proved himself to be indeed a reality by uttering a greeting.

Pierce was inclined to ignore the salutation, but curiosity got the better of him and he answered: "Well! This is a surprise. Do you own a pair of seven-league boots or—what?"

McCauley bared his teeth forthrightly. In triumph he said: "Thought you'd lost me, didn't you? But I fooled all of you. I jumped out to the States and caught the last boat for St. Michael, made connections there with the last up-river packet, and—here I am. I don't quit! I'm a finisher."

Pierce noted the emphasis with which Joe's last words were delivered, but as yet his curiosity was unsatisfied. He wondered if the fellow was sufficiently calloused to disregard his humiliating experience or if he proposed in some way to conceal it. Certainly he had not evaded recognition, nor had he made the slightest attempt to alter his appearance. From his bold insolence it seemed evident that he was totally indifferent as to who recognized him. Either the man possessed moral courage of the extreme sort or else an unbelievable effrontery.

As for Pierce, he was deeply resentful of Joe's false accusation—the memory of that was irrevocable—nevertheless, in view of the outcome of that cowardly attempt, he had no desire for further revenge. It seemed to him that the fellow had been sufficiently punished for his misdeed; in fact, he could have found it easy to feel sorry for him had it not been for the ill-concealed malice in Joe's

present tone and attitude. It was upon the point of answering Joe's indirect threat with a warning when his attention was attracted to a short, thick-set, nervous man at his elbow. The latter had edged close and was staring curiously at him. He spoke now, saying:

"So you're Phillips, eh?"

It was Joe who replied: "Sure. This is him."

There was no need of an introduction. Pierce recognized the stranger as another McCauley, for the family likeness was stamped upon his features. During an awkward moment the two men eyed each other, and Joe McCauley appeared to gloat as their glances clashed.

"This is Frank," the latter explained, with a malicious grin. "He and Jim was pals. And, say! Here's another guy you ought to meet." He laid a hand upon a second stranger, a man leaning across the bar in conversation with a white-aproned attendant. "Count, here's that fellow I told you about."

The man addressed turned, exposing a handsome, smiling countenance ornamented with a well-cared-for mustache. "I beg pardon?" he exclaimed, vacuously.

"Meet Phillips. He can give you some dope on your wife," Joe chuckled. Phillips flushed; then he paled; his face hardened.

"Ah! To be sure," Count Courtesan bowed, but he did not extend his hand. "Phillips? Yes, yes, I remember. You will understand that I'm distracted for news of him. She is with you, perhaps?"

"I left her empty-handed, White Horse. If she's not here, she'll probably arrive soon."

"Excellent! I shall surprise her," Joe spoke dryly. "I'm afraid it won't be so much of a surprise as you think. She rather expects you." With a short nod and with what pretense of carelessness he could assume he moved on toward the rear of the building, whence came the sounds of music and the voice of a dance-hall caller.

For some time he looked on blindly at the whirling figures. Joe McCauley here! And Count Courtesan! What an astonishing coincidence! And yet there was nothing so remarkable about it; doubtless the same ship had brought them north, in which event they could not well have avoided a meeting. Pierce remembered Hill-dale's prophecy that her indigent husband would turn up, like a bad penny. His presence was significant—for that matter, so was the presence of Joe McCauley's brother Frank, as yet an unknown quantity. This he was an enemy was certain; together, he and Joe made an evil team, and Pierce was at a loss just how to meet them.

CHAPTER XVIII

Rouletta Kirby was awakened by the sound of chopping; in the still, frosty morning the blows of the ax rang out loudly. For a moment she lay staring upward at the sloping tent-roof over her head, studying with sleepy interest the frost-frames formed by her breath during the night. This fringe was of intricate design; it resembled tatters of filmy lace and certain fragments of it hung down at least a foot, a warning that the day was to be extremely cold. But Rouletta needed no proof of that fact beyond the evidence of her nose, the tip of which was like ice and so stiff that she could barely wrinkle it. She covered it now with a warm palm and manipulated it gently, solicitously.

The chopping abruptly ceased. "Poison's voice greeted her gaily: "Bon jour, ma soeur! By golly! You gettin' to be real lazy gal! I expect you sleep all day only I snuck big nose."

"Good morning!" Rouletta's voice was muffled. As if repenting a lesson, she ran on: "Yes, I feel fine. I had a dandy sleep; didn't cough and my lungs don't hurt. And no bad dreams. So I want to get up. There! I'm well."

"You honny, too, I feel, ah?" "Oh, I'm dying. And my nose—it won't work."

Duret shouted his laughter. "You wait, I snuck five quack an' cook de breakfast, den—your nose gain!"

Pity the Poor School Teachers



No wonder school teachers think they are underpaid. Just think of trying to roll these triplets every day of the school year. They are, from left to right, Casimir, Harry and Stanley Kowalski of Milwaukee.

work all right. I got been surprise for dat it's now today."

The top of Rouletta's head, her eyes, then her mouth, came cautiously out from hiding.

"What is it, 'Poison? Something to eat?"

"Sapre! What I tol' you? Every minute eat, eat! You worse day harmy of Swede. I ain't got no' for you wat is dis 'prise—himby you smell him cookin'."

"Moose meat!" Rouletta cried. "No!" "Poison vigorously resumed his labor; every stroke of the ax was accompanied by a loud "Huh!" "I tol' you notin'!" he declared; then after a moment he

voiced one word, "Caribou!"

Again Rouletta uttered a familiar cry.

(To Be Continued.)

Hawaiian Fruits Prove Ideal for Syrup Production

HONOLULU (AP)—The high sugar content of Hawaiian fruits makes it possible to produce syrups at a less cost than synthetic syrups are produced on the mainland. It has been revealed by experiments conducted by Dr. E. S. Oliver, chemist, who is experimenting at the Hawaiian homes settlement on the island of Mota-kai. He announced the successful extraction of syrups of varying degrees of concentration through a freezing process on which he has been working several years. The experiments here were confined principally to guavas, which contain an average of 14 per cent of sugar, but he said he was able to extract a syrup of triple that strength.

Tired of Being a Steno. So She Entered Man's Field

LONDON (AP)—Kathleen Britter has become London's first woman copywriter. And she does not see why any capable woman could not do her part of work if she was interested in it.

"The trouble with so many girls is that they get into a groove and stay there," she said. "I got tired of being a stenographer, studied real property and persuaded a firm that was advertising for a male copywriter that a woman who handled that sort of work for solicitors for years could fill the place as well."

Miss Britter is 24 and has been a business woman for about five years. Her mother was housekeeper for the late Lord Leverhulme, who took an interest in the ambitions of the young stenographer, and encouraged her to study law.

Study of Case of Insane Ant Recorded by Nerve Specialist

ZURICH (AP)—The story of a demented ant is recorded in the Swiss Archive for Neurology and Psychiatry with due scientific seriousness by Dr. Rudolph Brun, widely known nerve specialist.

The ant was discovered in one of the artificial constructed nests for scientific observation. The insect ran about incessantly while others remained quietly in the corners of the nest, apparently shunning the demented one. The momentum of the wildy tramping ant was such that it was unable to stop when anything in its path was encountered.

After six days the ant was dissected and, under a microscope, it was found to have suffered a tumor in the left lobe of the brain, which had destroyed several of the most important centers.

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The undersigned will sell at public sale, at his ranch three miles up the Grande Ronde River from Hilgard, Oregon, commencing at 10 o'clock A. M. on

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