

# HANDS OF CHANCE

## Rex Beach

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CHAPTER XX. (Continued)  
The La Grande gambler looked at his luck, but the bank continued to win, and meanwhile new arrivals dropped in. Two, three hours the play went on, to which time all Dawson knew that a big game was running and that a girl was in the dealer's chair. Few of the visitors got close enough to verify the fact, however, without receiving a sotto voce warning that rough talk was taboo—Miller's usually clear saw to that—and on the whole the warning was heeded. Only once was it disregarded, then a heavy loser breathed a toothless oath. Disapproval was marked, punishment was pending, the lookout hurriedly descended from his eyrie and floor of the offender with a blow from his fist.

When the resulting disturbance had quieted down the defender of decorum announced with inflexible firmness, but with a total lack of heat:

"Gentle, this is a sort of game which we're going to maintain. The limit is off, except on counting, but it's mighty live on that. Them of you that are indisposed to await your end of revivals will have to knock out of you."

"Good!" shouted Big Lars. He pointed the tube with the flat of his hand. "My dingoo! I'll make that unanimous. If anybody has to come let him take ten paces to the rear and take the stove."

It was well along in the afternoon when Roulette Kirby pushed back her hair and rose. She was very white, she passed an uncertain hand over her face, then gazed blindly at the table for support. At these signs of distress a chorus of alarm arose.

"It's nothing," she smiled. "I'm just—hungry. I've been pretty ill and I'm not very strong yet."  
Lars Anderson was dumbfounded. "Hungry? My God! To his companions he shouted: "Dixon beat that boy! She's starved out!"  
The boys had heard; already they had begun to scramble. Some ran for the lunch counter in the adjoining room, others dashed out to the nearest restaurant. The thought of no tip forgot his response. Phillips set to abandon the roulette wheel and shove its bank roll unguarded while he scurried to the bar also demanded a drink, a tray of assorted drinks for a fainting lady. The game lying back yellowing "Gambler's" and scattering the crowd ahead of him, he ordered brandy, whiskey, creme de menthe, Scotch, absinthe and biters to Roulette, all of which she declined. He was still arguing the medicinal value of these beverages when the sliding doors from the street swung open and in rushed the Mocha Kid, in his usual band. Other tables and drinkable apparatus in his magic, the far-table was soon spread with the fruits of a half-dozen busy and hysterical forays.

Roulette stared at the apprehensive faces about her, and what she read "horror" caused her lips to quiver and her voice to break when she tried to express her thanks.

"Gosh! Don't cry!" begged the Mocha Kid. With a counterfeit assumption of juvenile hilarity he exclaimed: "Oh, look at the pretty

girls on their lips, ain't they? Un-sunt! Rich and juicy! I stuck up the baker and stole his whole stock, but I slipped and spilled 'em F. O. B.—flat on the boardwalk."  
Roulette laughed. "Let's end the game and all have lunch," she suggested, and her invitation was accepted.

Big Lars spoke up with his mouth full of pastry: "We don't allow anybody to go hungry in this camp," said he. "We're all your friends, miss, and if there's anything you want and can't afford, charge it to me."  
Roulette stopped to speak with Miller on her way out. "Do I get the position?" she inquired.

"Say! You know you get it!" he told her. "You go on at night and come off at midnight."  
"What is the pay?"  
"I pay my dealers an ounce a shift, but—you can write your own ticket. How is two ounces?"  
"I'll take regular wages," Roulette smiled.

Miller nodded his approval of this attitude; then his face clouded. "You've been wondering how you're going to protect your bank roll. Things won't always be like they were today. I s'pose I'll have to put a man on—"

"I'll protect it," the girl asserted. "Agree and I will do that."  
The proprietor was interested. "Agree? Holy Moses! Is there two for you. Have you got a sister? Who's Agnes?"  
"She's an old friend of my father's."

Miller shrugged. "Bring her along if you want to," he said doubtfully, "but those old dames are trouble makers."  
"Yes, Agnes is all of that, but"—Roulette's eyes danced—she missed her own business and she'd guard the bank roll."  
Lucky Broad and Kid Bridges had found employment at the table soon after it opened. As they passed the gold scales on their way to work Pierre Phillips halted them.

"I've some good news for you, Lucky," he announced. "You've lost your job."  
"Who, me?" Broad was incredulous.  
"Miller has hired a new faro-dealer, and you don't go on until midnight." Briefly Pierre retold the story that had come to his ears when he reported for duty that evening.

Broad and Bridges listened without comment, but they exchanged glances. They put their heads together and began a low-pitched conversation. They were still murmuring when Roulette appeared, in company with "Polon Dorset."  
"Polon's" face lighted at sight of the two gamblers. He strode forward, crying: "Hallo! I'm glad for see you some more." To the girl he said: "You 'member dear feller, boy he's save you in de rapids."

Roulette impulsively extended her hands. "Of course! Could I forget?" She saw Pierre Phillips behind the scales and nodded to him. "Why, we're all here, aren't we? I'm so glad. Everywhere I go I meet friends."

Lucky and the Kid inquired respectfully regarding her health, her journey down the river, her reasons for being here; then when they had drawn her aside the former interrupted her flow of explanations to say:

"Listen, Letty. We got just one real question to ask and we'd like a straight answer. Have you got any kick against this Frenchman?"  
"Any kick of any kind?" queried Bridges. "We're your friends; you can tip us off."  
The sudden change in the tone of their voices caused the girl to start and stare at them. She saw that both men were in sober earnest; the question behind their solicitude she apprehended.

She laid a hand upon the arm of each. Her eyes were very bright when she began: "Polon told me how you came to his tent that morning after—you know, and he told me what you said. Well, it wasn't necessary. He's the dearest thing that ever lived!"  
"Why'd he put you to work in a place like this?" Bridges roughly demanded.

"He didn't. He begged me not to try it. He offered me all he has—his last dollar. He—"  
Briefly, earnestly, Roulette told how the big woodsman had cared for her, how tenderly, faithfully, he had nursed her back to health and strength; how he had cast all his plans to the wind, and in order to bring her down the river, "the best, the kindest, the most generous man I ever knew," she concluded. "His heart is clean and—his soul is full of music."

"Sta hush!" cried Latchy Broad, in genuine rapture. "We had a hunch he was right, but—you can't always trust these Yankee rascals."  
Then Miller stepped forward, warily eyed his new employees. "Heard up, eh? Well, it's going to be a big night. Where's Agnes—the other one? Has she got cold feet?"  
"No, I'll a cold nose. Here she is." From a small bag on her arm Roulette drew a small, shiny, .38-caliber shooter. "Agnes was my father's friend. Nobody ever ran out on her."

Miller blinked, he uttered a feeble exclamation, then he burst into a mighty laugh. He was still shaking his face was purple, there were tears of mirth in his eyes, when he followed Broad, Bridges, and Roulette into the gambling room.

There were several players at the faro table when the girl took her place. Removing her gloves, she stowed them away in her bag.

From this bag she extracted the heavy Colt's revolver, then opened the drawer before her and laid it inside. She breathed upon her fingers, rubbing the circulation back into them, and began to shuffle the cards. Slipping them into the box, the girl settled herself in her chair and looked up into a circle of grinning faces. Before her level gaze eyes that had been focused queerly upon her fell. The customer's lips were twitching, but he bit down upon them. Gravely he said:

"Well, boys, let's go!"

CHAPTER XXI.  
In taking charge of a sick girl, a helpless, hopeless stranger, Polon Dorset had assumed a responsibility far greater than he had anticipated, and that responsibility had grown heavier every day. Having, at last, successfully discharged it, he breathed freely, his first relaxation in a long time; he rejoiced in the consciousness of a difficult duty well performed. So far as he could see there was nothing at all extraordinary, nothing in the least improper, about Roulette's engagement at the table. Any suggestion of impropriety, in fact, would have greatly surprised him, for saloons and gambling halls filled a recognized place in the every-day social life of the Northland. Customs were free, standards were liberal in the early days; no one, Polon least of all, would have dreamed that they were destined to change in a night. Had he been told that soon the country would be dry, and gambling games and dance halls be prohibited by law, he would have considered the idea too utterly fantastic for belief; the mere contemplation of such a dreary prospect would have proved extremely dispiriting. He—and other pioneers of his kind—would have been tempted immediately to pack up and move on to some freer locality where a man could retain his personal liberty and pursue his happiness in a manner as noisy, as irresponsible, and as undignified as suited his individual taste.

In justice to the astute, he it said, they were more than drinking places; they were the pivots about which revolved the business life of the North country. They were meeting places, social centers, fairs of trade; looked upon as evidences of enterprise and general prosperity, they were considered desirable assets to any community. Everybody patronized them, the men who ran them were, on the whole, as reputable as the men engaged in other pursuits. No particular stigma attached either to the places themselves or to the people connected with them.

These gold camps had a very simple code. Work of any sort was respectable and honorable, idleness or unproductivity was reprehensible. Mining, stock-raising, liquor selling, gambling, steam-boating, all were occupations which men followed as necessity or convenience prompted. A citizen gained repute by the manner in which he departed himself, not by reason of the nature of the commodity in which he dealt. Such, at least, was the attitude of the "old-timers."

Roulette's instant success, the fact that she had fallen among friends, delighted a woodsman like Polon, and, now that he was his own master again, he straightway surrendered himself to the selfish enjoyment of his surroundings. His nature and his training prescribed the limits of those pleasures; they were quite as simple as his everyday habits of life; he danced, he gambled, and he drank.

"Tonight he did all three, in the reverse order. To him Dawson was a dream city; its lights were dazzling, its music heavenly, its games of chance enticing, and its liquor was the finest, the smoothest, the most inviting his tongue had ever tasted. Old friends were everywhere, and new ones, too, for that matter. Among them were alluring women who smiled and sparkled. Each place Polon entered was the home of carnival.

By midnight he was gloriously drunk. Ere daylight came he had sung himself hoarse, he had danced two hours in his noisiness, and had consumed three fat-ights to a satisfactory if not a successful conclusion. It had been a celebration that was to live in his memory. He strode blindly off to bed, shouting his complete satisfaction with himself and with the world, retired without unexpressed and then sang himself to sleep, regardless of the protests of the other lodgers.

"Say! That Frenchman is a riot," Kid Bridges declared while he and Lucky Broad were at breakfast. "He's old General Rough-houser, and he set an altogether new mark in disorderly conduct last night. Letty 'most cried about it."  
"Yeah! Them Yankee are all alike—one drink and they declare a dividend. Lucky was only mildly concerned. 'I s'pose the vultures picked him clean."

"Nothin' like it," Bridges shook his head. "He gnawed 'em naked, then done a war-dance with their feathers in his hat. He left 'em broiled an' broiled."

For a time the two friends sat in silence, then Broad mused aloud: "Letty 'most cried, eh? Say, I wonder what she really thinks of him?"  
"I don't know. Miller told me she was all broke up, and I was going to take her home and see if I could get her true feelin's, but—Phillips beat me to it."

"Phillips! He'll have to throw out the life-line if Lattie gets out to that. She'll take to Letty just

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like a lone timber-wolf."  
"Looks like she'd been kiddin' us, don't it? She calls him her 'brother' and she says she's his masseur—you heard him, didn't you?" There was another pause. "What's a masseur, anyhow?"  
"A masseur," said Mr. Broad, "is one of those women in a barber shop that fixes your finger nails. Yes, I heard him, and I'm here to say that I didn't like the sound of it. I don't yet. He may mean all right, but—them foreigners have got queer ideas about their women. Letty's a swell kid and she's got a swell job. What's more, she's got a who gang riding herd on her. It's just like she was in a church—no danger, no annoyance, nothing. If Dorset figures to start a barber shop with her for his masseur, why, we'll have to lay him low with one of his own razors."

Broad and Bridges pondered the matter during the day, and that evening they confided their apprehensions to their fellow workers. The other Hatto employees agreed that things did not look right, and after a consultation it was decided to keep a watch upon the girl. It was done.

(To be continued.)  
SAYS COLLEGE ENTRANCE TESTS ARE TOO FOIBAL CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP)—The present head of the university founded by Thomas Jefferson says that entrance requirements in American colleges are "too wooden and too formal."  
Dr. Edwin A. Alderman, president of the University of Virginia, who is not at all satisfied with the present scheme of entrance requirements, thinks that in a quarter of a century an utter change will come over the system. He believes this change will be based upon intelligence tests and psychological study of each entering candidate.  
Washington and Lee University instituted intelligence test requirements at the beginning of the present session.  
Five out of every eight applicants to the British army recruiting office in 1924 were rejected on account of mental or physical defects.

Japan Accepts Number 13 TOKYO (AP)—The Japanese are not superstitious regarding the number 13. It was announced that 13-cent stamps would be issued to cover the need created by the increase in the registration fee to 10 sen in addition to the three sen for ordinary postage.

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