

WINDS OF CHANCE

by Rex Beach

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CHAPTER XXIII. (Continued)

Rock examined the bag, then he lifted an inquiring gaze to Pierce Phillips. There was a general craning of necks, a shifting of feet, a rustle of whistles.

"Ah!" mockingly exclaimed Courteau. "I was dreaming, eh? To be sure!" He laughed disabreably.

"In this 'hoop' money?" inquired the redoubt.

Miller shook his head in some bewilderment. "We don't keep two kitties. I'll weigh it and see if it adds up with the Count's."

"Oh, it will add up!" Phillips declared, his face even whiter than before. "It's a plant, so of course it will add up."

Defiantly he met the glances that were fixed upon him. As his eyes roved over the faces turned upon him he became conscious for the first time of 'Polson's and Rouletta's presence, also that Laure had somehow appeared upon the scene. The latter was watching him with a peculiar expression of hostility frozen upon her features; her dark eyes were glowing, she was sneering faintly. Of all the bystanders, perhaps the two McCaskeys seemed the least inclined to take part in the affair. Both brothers, in fact, appeared desirous of effacing themselves as effectively as possible.

But Courteau's indignation grew, and in a burst of excitement he disclaimed the guilt implied in Pierce's words. "Bel! You plead innocence! You imply that I robbed myself, eh? Well, how did I place the gold yonder? I ask you? Am I a magician?" He waved his arms wildly, then in a tone of malice he cried: "This is not the first time you have been accused of theft. I have heard that story about Sheep Camp."

"Sheep Camp, yes!" Phillips' eyes ignored the speaker; his gaze flew to Joe McCaskey's face and to him he directed his next words: "The whole thing is plain enough to me. You tried something like this once before, Joe, and failed. I suppose your back is well enough now for the rest of those forty

lashes. Well, you'll get 'em—"

The Count came promptly to the rescue of his friend. "Hold! Again you lay your guilt upon others. Those miners at Sheep Camp let you off easy. Well, a pretty woman can do much with a miners' meeting, but here there will be no skirt to hide behind, for—"

"Courteau got so further. Ignoring Rock's previous admission, Pierre knocked the fellow down with swift, clean blow. He would have followed up his attack only for the lieutenant, who grappled with him.

"Here! Do you want me to put you in irons?"

Courteau raised himself with difficulty; he groped for the bar and supported himself dizzily thereon, snarling from the pain. With his free hand he felt his cheek where Pierre's knuckles had found lodgment; then, as a fuller realization of the indignity his privileged person had suffered came home to him, he burst into a torrent of frenzied abuse.

"Shut up!" the officer growled, unympathetically. "I know as much about that trial at Sheep Camp as you do, and if Phillips hadn't floored you I would. That's how you stand with me. You, too!" he shot at the McCaskeys. "Let me warn you if this is a frame-up you'll all go on the woodpile for the winter. D'you hear me? Of course, if you want to press this charge I'll make the arrest, but I'll just take you three fellows along so you can do some swearing before the colonel, where it'll go on the records."

"Arrest? But certainly!" screamed the Count. "The fellow is a thief, a pig. He struck me, Me! You saw him, I—"

"Sure, I saw him!" the officer grinned. "I was afraid he'd miss you. Stop yelling and come along. With a nod that included the McCaskeys as well as the tilted speaker he linked arms with Pierre Phillips and led the way out into the night.

"What fool business!" Doret indignantly exclaimed. "Dat boy I hates as church!"

He looked down at the sound of Rouletta's voice; then he started. The girl's face was strained and white and miserable; her hands were clasped over her bosom; she was staring horrified at the door through which Phillips had been taken. She swayed as if about to fall. "Polson had dragged, had carried her out into the street with his arm about her waist he helped her toward her hotel."

The walk was a silent one, for Rouletta was in a state bordering upon collapse; gradually she regained control of herself and stumbled along beside him.

"They're three to one," she said finally. "Oh, Polson! They'll swear it on him. The police are strict. They'll give him five years. I heard the colonel say so."

"There's been good deal of short-weighting, but—" Doret shook his head. "Nobody goes to believe Courteau. And McCaskey is dam' chief."

"If—only I could help him you'll go to him, Polson, won't you? Promise."

Silently the Canadian assented. They had reached the door of the hotel before he spoke again; that he said slowly, quietly:

"You been playin' heart's wit him, ma spur? You—you love him? Yes?"

"Oh—yes!" The confession came in a miserable gasp.

"Then! I never s'pect biffore. Wal, dat's all right."

"The police are swift and merciless," Rouletta persisted, fearful. "They hate the front street crowd; they'd like to make an example."

"Go in your 'll had an' sleep," he told her, gently. "Dis 'ting is comin' out all right. Polson fix it sure; he's dandy fixer."

For some time after the door had closed upon Rouletta the big fellow stood with bent head, staring at the snow beneath his feet. The cheer, the sympathy, had left his face; the smile had vanished from his lips; his features were set and stony. With an effort he shook himself, then murmured:

"Poor 'll bird! Wal, I s'pose now I got to bust dat jail!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

Although Polson had spoken with confidence, he found, upon arriving at police headquarters, that the situation was by no means as simple as it had appeared, and that something more than a mere word regarding Phillips' character would be required to offset the very definite accusation against him. Courteau, he learned, had pressed his charge with vigor, and although the two McCaskeys had maintained their outward show of reticence at being dragged into the affair, they had, nevertheless, substantiated his statements with a thoroughness and a detail that hinted more than a little at vindictiveness. Pierre, of course, had denied his guilt, but his total inability to explain how the gold-dust in dispute came to be concealed in the cashier's cage, to which no one but he had access, had left the police no alternative except to hold him. By the time Polson arrived Pierre had been locked up for the night.

Drawing Rock aside, Doret put in an earnest plea for his young friend. The lieutenant answered him with some impatience:

"I admit it looks fishy, but what is there to do? The colonel likes Pierre, as we all do, but—he had no choice."

"It's dirty frame-up."

"I imagine he believes so. And yet—how the deuce did that sack

get where it was? I was standing alongside the McCaskeys when Courteau went up to pay his check, and I'm sure they had no part in it."

"M'alen' le Conde is sore," Polson asserted. "Me, I savvy plenty. Wal, how we goin' get dat boy from out of jail, eh? By Gar! I bet I don't sleep none if I'm lock up."

"Get bail for him."

"Polson was frankly puzzled at this suggestion, but when its nature had been explained his face lit up.

"Have you got enough money?" for sure. "Come! I fix it now."

"Have you got enough money?" "I got 'bout fifty dollar, but dat ain't mak' no differ. I go to work in' somewhere. Me, I'm good for anyting."

"That won't do," Rock smiled. "You don't understand." Laboriously he made more plain the mystery of court procedure, whereupon his hearer expressed the frankest astonishment.

"Sure!" the latter exclaimed. "What for you say two, three 'ousan' dollar? Courteau ain't lose but six hundred, an' he's got it back. No! I'm thinkin' you policemen is got good sense, but I lak better a miners' meetin'. Us sour-dough mak' better law us dem feller at Ottawa."

"Morris Best was willing to go his bail," Rock informed him, but Miller wouldn't allow it. Ben is sore at having the Rialto implicated—there's been so much short-weighting going on. Understand?"

"Polson wagged his head in bewilderment. "I don't savvy dis new kin' of law you feller is bring in de country. S'pose I say, M'alen' Judge, I know dis boy long time; he don't steal dat gold. De judge he say, 'Doret, how much money you got? 'Tousand dollar?' I say, 'Sure! I got 'bout 'ousand dollar.' Den he tell me, 'Wal, dat ain't 'nough. Mebbe so you better bring two 'ousan' dollar biffore M'Believe you, Ben! I go down town an' win 'under 'ousan' on de high card, or mebbe so I stick up some feller, den I come back and M'alen' le judge he say, 'Dat's fine! Now we let Phillips go home. he don't steal nothin'.' What I think of dem proceedin's? Eh? I think de judge is dam' grafter!"

Rock laughed heartily. "Don't let Colonel Cavendish hear you," he cautioned. "Seriously now, he'd let Pierre go if he could; he told me so. He'll undoubtedly allow him the freedom of the barracks, so you'll really be on parole until his trial."

"Trial? You goin' try him agin?"

The woodsman could make little of the affair. "If you try him two time, dose crook is mak' chief of Pierre for sure. One trial is plenty. I s'pose mebbe I better kill dem 'eller off an' settle dis 'ting."

"Don't talk like that," Rock told him. "I'm not saying they don't need killing, but—nobody gets away with that nowadays."

"No?" Polson was interested and a trifle defiant. "For why? You never catch me, M'alen'. Nobody is able for doin' dat. I'm good traveler."

Rock eyed the stalwart speaker adumbratively. "I'd hate to take your trail, that's a fact, but I'd have to do it. However, that would be a poor way to help Pierre. If he's really innocent, Courteau will have a hard job to convict him. I suggest that you let matters rest as they are for a day or so. We'll treat the kid all right."

On the way to her room Rouletta met the Countess Courteau and in a few words made known the facts of Pierre's arrest. The elder woman listened in astonishment.

"Arrested? For theft? Absurd! who made the charge?"

"Count Courteau."

"Courteau? Where did he get a thousand dollars?" The speaker's face was set in an expression of utter incredulity.

"I don't know. It's all too wretched, too terrible—" Rouletta's voice broke; she hid her face in her hands. For a moment there was silence; then the elder woman exclaimed, harshly, peremptorily: "Tell me everything. Quick! There's a reason why I must know all about it."

Drawing Rouletta into her room, she forced her into a chair, then stood over her while the latter repeated the story in greater detail. "So! That's it!" the Countess cried, at last. "The McCaskeys backed him up. Of course! And

Quizzed About Mysterious Jewels



James P. Donahue and Mrs. Donahue, the former Jessie Woolworth, here are waiting in the district attorney's office in New York to testify concerning the half million dollars worth of jewels mysteriously stolen from them and as mysteriously returned.

nothing whatever to do with the case."

(To be continued)

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