

The MICHIGAN KID



by Rex Beach



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IN FOUR INSTALMENTS
SYNOPSIS . . . Jimmy Rowan was hopelessly in love with Rose Morris, the prettiest girl in Dover, Michigan. Of course, that was years ago, in early school days . . . but it was hopeless for Jimmy because he was just "that Bowan kid," desperately poor, while Rose's family was rich. While Jimmy was working his way through college, Rose Morris moved away and the home sold for barely enough to pay the mortgage. . . Jimmy vowed to himself he'd get rich . . . and find Rose. Easier vowed than done and years passed before Jim Rowan finally landed in the Klondike . . . there to gain wide reputation as a gambler, known as "The Michigan Kid." . . . An ugly story of a 20 hour card game with Col. Campbell, engineer, with stakes no limit . . . and suicide of Campbell at the end . . . caused The Michigan Kid to sell his saloon and start "out." . . . At Nome, Rowan came upon meeting of Michigan folks scheduled so he attended. As an old man was leaving the meeting Jim stated, leaned forward, his eyes fixed upon the stranger's bearded cheek . . . NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY.

THIRD INSTALMENT
 Rowan opened his lips to speak, then closed them.
 "You see?" The girl laid her hand upon his arm. "Poor Don Quixote! Won't you think better of it and go out to God's country? You've earned it, Jim, and you'll find your opportunity there. Father is enthusiastic, he really believes in this claim, but I know it's no good, and, besides, we're unlucky. Everything has gone badly since we lost our money back there in Dover. He's a feeble old man and disappointment has made him almost childish. All he has left is that conviction that some day he'll land in the pay. There are hundreds like him."
 "And what would you do?" Rowan inquired.
 Wearily Rose shrugged. "What I have always done — remain at his side. I love him. He gave me everything when he had it to give. I'm the staff he leans upon and without me he'd fall. We can get along, Jim."
 "How?"
 "I was offered a job waiting on tables at the Bonanza."
 The man uttered an exclamation. Roughly he said, "I'd sooner see you in a dance hall."
 "I could even get married!" Rose smiled faintly.
 Jim's hands twitched, but his face was impassive as he said: "No. I'm going to stick. I made a few dollars in Dawson and I left there looking for one more chance — one big chance to win or lose, make or break. I play hunches, and when your father offered to go fifty-fifty with me I had a hunch that my number was due. Have you ever heard of 'Michigan's luck'?"
 "Yes, of course, Aladdin's lamp, too, but I never expect to have either."
 "Who knows? I have a feeling that your troubles are over and that your father is really going to land in the pay. Let's hope so, anyhow. I believe in hoping for things until you get them."
 It was in this manner that Jim Rowan became a miner, a pick-and-shovel man. He put up a cabin for himself and he did his own cooking — a thing any man abhors. Although he and Hiram began to prospect the claim it was Jim who did most of the actual work. His flabby muscles rebelled at first; blisters grew upon his white palms; they burst, then turned into callouses. Slowly, painfully he hardened himself. It was an ordeal,

but as his body grew strong so did his determination to win the love of Rose Morris.

Every day he had to fight the desire to voice his love, but the better he came to know Rose, the more fearful he became that somehow the grave of The Michigan Kid would be disturbed and that she would behold the skeleton it concealed — grass was slow in growing over it — hence he showed his devotion only in the things he did.

Autumn came and Jim put into effect a plan he had worked out. He "salted" the panning from their ground just enough to make a showing, this being necessary to his scheme; then he interested a purchaser in buying the claim. He instructed the man to offer twenty thousand dollars for it, supposing, of course, that Mr. Morris would leap at the chance to sell.

But this was the first gold the old man had ever found and those few yellow flakes strengthened his senile conviction that the property was rich. He refused the offer. He refused again and again, even when Jim's man raised the bid to forty thousand dollars. He did more than refuse; he boasted about the offer in town and said he had struck regular "Michigan's luck." This caused quite a flurry of excitement and reluctantly Jim was forced to call off his bidder.

Jim's effort had an effect other than he had expected; a forty-thousand-dollar offer for a wild-cat claim on Friday Creek centered interest there, and promptly the Bonanza crowd sent an outfit over and began work on some property they owned below old Hiram's.

This outfit was in charge of a young fellow by the name of Hayward, and once he had become acquainted with Rose he took such an interest in Friday Creek that he spent all of his time there.

This Hayward was a fine-looking, upstanding youth and he undoubtedly had a way with him. But his way with women was more agreeable than his way with men: towards Jim Rowan, for instance, he displayed the same air of contemptuous superiority that he reserved for his employees.

Rose liked him, however — perhaps that was the real reason why Jim did not. In any event the two men were so different in character that a clash was inevitable.

Jim had made it a practice never to go into town for fear of recognition, hence it was Hiram who made the weekly trips for the necessary purchases. One day while he was in town it began to snow and during the afternoon this snow turned to rain and sleet. The old man returned about dark, quite wet and chilly. He was a long while getting warmed through and later in the evening he complained of feeling badly and went to bed.

Jim was awakened during the night by a knock on his door. It was Rose. In a tone that instantly brought him to his feet she told him that her father was ill and that she was frightened. Throwing on his clothes, he hurried to the larger cabin. Hiram was burning up with fever, he coughed almost continuously; he was in pain. Jim announced at once that he would go for a doctor.

"I'll send somebody up from the Bonanza camp," he told the girl, "because I won't be able to get back before morning."

Rose turned eyes dark with apprehension upon him. "He's very ill, isn't he? He woke me up muttering. Hear him? — It's all about 'landing in the pay.'"
 "I'm afraid he's a pretty sick man. There's a medicine case somewhere

among my things. Look until you find it. And don't allow yourself to become panicky. Be a brave girl, Rose." He laid a hand upon Rose's shoulder — it was the first time he had ever touched her except by inadvertence — and there was such sympathy, such comfort in his gesture that tears wet her lashes.

"Oh, Jim," she cried. "You're a dear. I don't know what I'd do without you."

Young Hayward was in Nome, but Jim got one of the Bonanza men to go to Rose's assistance and also he borrowed a horse for himself. It was not many miles to town, but it was a wretched night and he was glad when the animal walloped out of the icy mud and he felt the plank pavements under its feet. The first doctor he found was ill; another had been called to Fort Davis; the third was engaged on a confinement case, but promised to accompany Jim in perhaps two hours. There was nothing to do but wait.

Jim was wet and cold. He stabled his horse, returned to the main street, and entered the first saloon he came to. It was late; there was nobody at the bar, but some of the games were still running and there were a few figures at the lunch counter in the rear. Thither Jim made his way in search of a cup of coffee.

There was a stage at the end of the place, where in the earlier hours of the night a vaudeville show was given, and at the piano were gathered several weary women of the dance hall type. One of them saw Jim and spoke to her companions, whereupon they turned and stared curiously at his back.

Young Hayward rose from the faro table and approached the lunch counter. He had been drinking some and losing considerably. There was an unpleasant curl to his lips. Jim had hitched himself upon one of the high stools; he had raised his mug to drink when Hayward pushed it away from his lips and called to the white-aproned waiter, saying:

"Here! Give this fellow a square meal." At the same time he crashed a twenty-dollar gold piece upon the counter.

"Thanks," said Jim. "I'm not hungry."

"Ham and eggs for a friend of mine," Hayward cried. "And give him the change."
 Jim eyed the speaker coldly, as if from behind a mask, but he appeared to take no notice of the tone Hayward had used. Still in an even voice he said:

"Nice of you. I've seen the time I'd take it." He lifted his cup for a second time; again Hayward took his wrist.

"Look here, Rowan. I've been wanting to ask you something. It's about that offer for old man Morris' claim. D'you know what I think?"
 "I don't believe you're capable of thinking, right now. If I were you, Hayward, I'd go home and go to bed."
 "Is that so?" Hayward's disagreeable smile became more pronounced. "I'll tell you what I think; I think it was a phony. I think you tried to put something over — tried to grab something."
 "Well? You can't arrest a man for trying."
 "I'll tell you something else; old man Morris is honest, but I think he's in partners with a damned crook."

The men eyed each other. Very quietly Jim said: "So! You're just spolling for trouble, aren't you?"
 "With you, yes."
 "I'm sorry, but I can't oblige you to-night."

Ha! Nor any other night. I've discovered something else about you, Rowan. You haven't got the guts of a guinea pig." Hayward had not lowered his voice during this colloquy. Those people in the rear of the room had heard most of what he said, and they were looking on now in mingled curiosity and apprehension. The dance-hall girl who had pointed out Jim whispered excitedly to her companions.

"Funny what a fool a man can make of himself," Jim told the foreman. Some day you'll realize how badly up against it a fellow can get without knowing it."
 "Bah! You rat! There's only one way to treat a—" Hayward raised his open hand to slap this object of contempt, but the blow did not descend; he didn't finish his sentence, for suddenly his face was deluged by the blinding, scalding contents of Jim's coffee cup. With an exclamation he reeled backward, almost into the arms of the women at the piano. He dashed the liquid from his face; with his sleeve he wiped his eyes, cleared them; he gathered himself to rush upon the figure still sitting motionless upon the high stool. But one of the girls flung herself upon him and in a voice high-pitched, vibrant with warning, she cried:

"Don't touch him, Hayward! He'll kill you! God, man, that's 'The Michigan Kid!'"
 Hayward's struggle died suddenly. It came still-born. Into his purple face crept a look of astonishment, then incredulity.

(CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK)

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