

The MICHIGAN KID.

by Rex Beach



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FINAL INSTALMENT
Hiram Morris was too sick to be moved. The doctor pronounced it pneumonia and for Rose and Jim there commenced a period of sleepless anxiety. He moved her into his cabin and tried to force her to take some rest, but as for him he did not remove his clothes and scarcely closed his eyes for nearly a week.

Then Mr. Morris died. He had muttered almost constantly; the last words they heard him whisper were those of his favorite prophecy, "Some day I'll land in the pay."

There followed the customary melancholy preparation and formalities. There were still a few women left on the creeks near by and these did what they could for Rose.

It was Rose who selected a burial place, upon the north "rim" of the creek—a high bench that paralleled

the bottom and that looked out across the tundra towards the open sea. It was a spot that in winter was sheltered from the icy blasts; in summer it was brilliant with wildflowers, lush with tender grasses, and fragrant with blooms—a pleasant place for a gentle, broken old man to sleep. Other hands were ready to dig the grave, but this was a labor that Jim Rowan reserved for his own.

In due time he began it. Fortunately, the rim was well drained and, once he had picked through the thin crust of autumn frost, the gravel was dry and he made good progress. He had finished his melancholy task and was about to climb out of the pit, when he noticed a peculiar reddish tinge to the gravel beneath his feet. He took a heaping shovelful of it and, descending to the creek, he stamped a hole through the ice and idly "panned" it on the shovel blade.

He was engaged thus when young Hayward and two of his men approached. Jim rose and leaned upon his shovel handle. He supposed these were the first arrivals for the funeral, but Hayward explained:

"I came up early to have a word with you, Rowan."

"I thought you said about everything, the other night," Jim told him. "I'm not in any humor to—"

"Oh, I was drunk! I made a fool of myself. Now that I know who you are, I've come prepared."

Jim stared incredulously at the speaker; harshly he inquired: "You don't mean to say you intend to start something today?"

"Certainly not. I came up to serve notice on you. I've learned how you met Mr. Morris and came out here, and I understand why you came. But Rose doesn't understand. She doesn't know you're The Michigan Kid; she thinks you're just the old friend of the

family, her little playmate from the home town. She doesn't know it was you that offered forty thousand dollars for this claim."

"Right. She doesn't know any of those things. I suppose you intend to tell her."

"I do. Unless you have enough decency left to behave like a man."

"How do you figure a man would behave?" Jim asked. "Of course it's all hearsay with you, but I'm curious to know."

Hayward flushed. "Never mind that line of talk. I came to give you a quiet word of warning but if you want to get nasty, why, just write your own ticket. I'm ready to take you on now, or later."

"I see. That's why you brought help."

The speaker's color deepened. "Listen Rowan! I know what happened to that Englishman, Thompson. He didn't have any friends with him; the witnesses were all your friends. I've heard about a lot of your other fights, too—if you can call 'em that—and I've had a dozen warnings to lay off of you, so I provided my own witnesses. Now here's what I've got to say—after the ceremony, you duck!"

"And what will happen to Rose?"

"I'll attend to that. She has friends enough to see her through."

"If I don't duck, I suppose you'll tell her I'm a gambler and that I offered to buy her father's claim for ten times what it's worth. That'll certainly shock her."

"Oh, you had a reason for that offer—more of your 'Michigan's' luck, probably! I understand you did most of the panning. Funny about that luck of yours, isn't it? Funny how everybody loses when they play you. You were crooked in Dawson and you couldn't even play straight with

Rose and her father. It's perfectly obvious why you came out here in the first place. Hell! Men like you ought to be shot for looking at a girl like her!"

"Well, Hayward, I'm not going until I get ready."

It was a dismal travesty of a funeral that occurred late that afternoon. A clergyman and a half dozen of Mr. Morris's acquaintances had driven out from town, but even including them, there were not twenty people who flowed the pine box as it was carried across the thin autumn snow and up to its resting place. Rose was a brave but a pitiful



He stamped a hole through the ice and idly "panned" the shovel of dirt.

figure. During the final depressing rites Jim Rowan's heart bled for her. He it was who let fall the first shovelful of earth. When the grave had been filled in he saw that Hayward and the clergyman had taken her back down to the cabin.

Jim had secured a team with which to drive the girl in to town, and while the visitors were bidding her good-by he went to his own shack and began putting his few belongings together.

He was mystified when he could not lay his hand upon the little leather case with the old newspap-

er portrait of Rose, for that was about all that he really cared to take with him. He looked everywhere for it before he finally gave up the search.

Rowan had refused Hayward's warning to leave, not because he expected Rose to reconcile herself to his past, not because he now retained the faintest hope of ever realizing his dream, but because there was something yet to be done, and moreover, because it was not his nature to come or to go at any man's bidding.

He was interrupted in his talk by the girl herself. She came to his door and with her she brought Hayward.

"Jim," she began, "Mr. Hayward has been trying to tell me something—"

"What? Already?" A flame leaped into Rowan's eyes as he turned them upon the Bonanza foreman.

"Yes, already! It's best to have it out and over with," the latter declared, doggedly.

"I asked him to say it before you, Jim—if he insists upon saying it at all."

"I merely started to tell her why she couldn't afford to have anything further to do with you," the visitor announced. "I tried to tell her that I love her and want

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to marry her; that'll give her a home and end all of her troubles—"

"What was it you said about Jim?" the girl insisted quietly.

Hayward told her; frankly, brutally he repeated what he had previously said. Jim listened in silence.

"Is it true?" Rose turned a strained, white face upon The Michigan Kid.

"Most of it is. Not that about the killing of Thompson, of course. He shot himself because he had lost company money."

"Rose, will you let me take you to town?" Hayward asked, earnestly.

Slowly the girl shook her head. "Jim has arranged to drive me in. I'm sorry you didn't wait a while before—I've had a good deal to bear." When the young man scowled at Rowan and opened his lips to protest, she smiled faintly. "I'll be perfectly safe with him. The Michigan Kid hasn't been accused of killing women, has he?"

"Very well. I'm sorry, too, that it had to come at a time like this. But I thought it best. I'll see you tomorrow, Rose. Forgive me if I've been rough. It's only because—"

The speaker stammered, choked, then he turned and went out into the chill twilight.

When the crunch of his footsteps had died out Rose inquired, simply:

"Why did you do it Jim?"

Rowan answered carelessly: "Oh, I'm just naturally a bad sort, I guess! No great amount of character. I wanted money, and gambling was the easiest way to get it."

"I don't mean that. Why did you come out here with father, the way you did?"

"Well now, I'm not sure that I can explain unless it was because of that hunch I told you about," Jim managed a splendid assumption of sincerity. "We gamblers play hunches, you know. And say, it just proves there's something in them."

"A mighty queer thing happened today, Rose. I didn't mean to tell you yet, but your father was right. There's pay on this claim!" said Rowan.

"Please don't let's talk about that."

"But, Rose, listen! While I was digging up there on the rim the gravel looked good. I took some of it down to the creek and tested it. I can't begin to guess what was in it, but it was rich. You're a rich woman. There's no mistake. It wasn't a 'prospect,' it was big pay, coarse gold!"

For a while the girl sat silent, then abruptly she hid her face in her hands.

"Oh! The pity of it!" she cried. "After he had worked so long and endured so much! Poor father! So patient, so gentle, so old—!" Tears stole through her fingers.

"He told us he would land in the pay and we wouldn't believe him. But I know he's glad, for it was you he wanted it for, not himself, and everything has come out just the way he would have had it. I—I'll bet he's happy at last."

"Michigan's luck still holds good, doesn't it? Half the claim is yours, Jim."

"Pshaw! That 'partnership' arrangement was a joke. I've got money, lots of it. I could have made things a good deal easier for him and for you, but I didn't dare. No, Rose, it's all yours and you have nothing to worry about any more. You needn't pay any attention to what Hayward said, unless you want to. I know you like him and—he's a mighty nice boy. He has courage and he loves you. "But, Jim, I don't love him. I don't even like him any more."

"Then that's that!" Rowan declared, heartily.

"I love somebody else." The girl lifted her tear-stained face. "I'm in love with a boy from our old town. I think I must have cared for him ever since I was a little girl. And I've been in his

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So it was that luck held through.

thoughts, too. He has carried my picture constantly—"

"Well, well! That's certainly nice," Jim could think of nothing else to say.

"He's an unselfish boy. He did a great deal for father. I think he'd give his life for me. And yet he has never said that he loves me. I had to find it out by chance."

"Rose!" All the reserve, all the counterfeit cheerfulness of The Michigan Kid, fell away. It was Jim Rowan, the Dover boy, who stared at her with working face, and exclaimed in a voice suddenly grown hoarse, "You—found that picture!"

"Yes; that night when I was looking for medicine. How long have you had it, Jim?"

"Ever since the day you graduated. I've always loved you, ever since I was a ragged kid and you drove by in your wicker pony cart. Rose dear, it was because of you that I gambled. I wanted money. I think I'd have killed to get it—almost. I went through hell. Then when I had my money and had found you I went through hell again because—well, because of the hell I'd been through. I—I'm not much of a man. I'm afraid you've made a mistake—"

Jim did not finish, for the girl held up her arms to him and said, quaveringly, like a weary child: "Take me, Jim. Please! I'm—so tired!"

So it was that The Michigan Kid's luck held through to the finish.

THE END.

Sunday School Teacher: "What do you understand by the phrase 'suffering for righteousness sake?'"
Little Girl: "It means having to come to Sunday School."

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