The Spoilers. By REX E. BEACH. . Copyright, 1905, by Rex B. Besch. "+

Tew stood still, staring at the rolling smoke bank as it was revealed by the explosion, their eyes gleaming white, while others buried their faces in their hollowed arms as if to shut out the hellish glare, or to shield themselves from a blow.

Out in the heart of the chaos rang wolce loud and clear:

"Beware the next blast!" At the same instant the girdle of sharpshooters rose up smiting the air with their cries and charged in like madmen through the rain of detritus. They fired as they came, but it was unnecessary, for there was no longer a fight. It was a rout. The defenders, feeling they had escaped destruction. only by a happy chance in leaving the bunk house the instant they did, were not minded to tarry here where the beavens fell upon their heads. To augment their consternation, the Borses had broken from their stalls and were plunging through the confusion. Fear swept over the men, blind, unreasoning, contagious, and they rushed out into the night, col-Ilding with their enemies, overrunning them in the panie to quit this spot. Some dashed off the bluff and fell among the pits and sluices. Others ran up the mountain side, and cowered In the brush like quail.

As the "Stranglers" assembled their prisoners near the ruins, they heard wounded men moaning in the darkness, so lit torches and searched out the stricken ones. Glenister came running through the smoke pall, revolver

hand, crying: "Has any one seen McNamara?" No one had, and when they were later assembled to take stock of their injuries the was greeted by Dextry's gleeful announcement:

"That's the deuce of a fight. We tain't got so much as a cold sore among chance. As for me-I gave up the old

"We have captured fourteen," another announced, "and there may be : more out yonder in the brush." Glenister noted with growing sur-

prise that not one of the pris-

"Beware the next blast!" storches were the army blue. They were miners all, or thugs and ruffians

wondered, were the soldiers. "Didn't you have troops from the Charracks to help you?" he asked. "Not a troop. We haven't seen a sol-

dier since we went to work." At this the young leader became alarmed. Had this whole attack miscarried? Had this been no clash with the United States forces, after all? If so, the news would never reach Washington, and instead of accomplishing his end, he and his friends had thrust themselves into the realms of outlawry, where the soldiers could be employed against them with impunity, where prices would rest upon their heads. Innecent blood had been shed, court property destroyed. Mc-Namara had them where he wanted

them at last. They were at bay. The unwounded prisoners were taken to the coundaries of the Midas and released with such warnings as the imagination of Dextey could conjure mp. Then Glenister assembled his men, speaking to them plainly:

"Boys, this is no victory. In fact, we're worse off than we were before, and our biggest fight is coming. There's a chance to get away now before daylight and before we're recognized, but if we're seen here at sunup we'll have to stay and fight. Soldiers will be sent against us, but if we hold out, and the struggle is fierce enough, it may reach to Washington. This will be a different kind of fighting now, though. It will be warfare more and simple. How many of you will stick?"

"All of us," said they in unison, and, accordingly, preparations for a siege were begun. Barricades were built, ruins removed, buildings transformed into blockhouses, and all through the turbulent night the tired men labored un ready to drop, led always by the young giant, who seemed without fa-

tigue. It was perhaps four hours after midnight when a man sought him out,

"Somebody's callin' you on the assay office telephone says it's life or death." Glenister hurried to the building, which had escaped the shock of the explosions, and, taking down the receiver, was answered by Cherry Malotte.

"Thank God, you're safe!" she began. "The men have just come in and the whole town is awake over the riot. They say you've killed ten people, in the fight . Is it true ?

He explained to her briefly that all

was well, but she broke in: "Wait, wait! McNamara has called for troops and you'll all be shot. Oh, what a terrible night it has been! maven't been to bed. I'm going mad. Now, listen carefully: Yesterday Helen went with Struve to the Sign of the "Sled and she hasn't come back."

The man at the end of the wire cried out at this, then choked back his words to hear what followed. His free hand began making strange, futile motions as though he traced patterns in the air. "I can't raise the roadhouse on the wire and-something dreadful has hap-

pened I know."

"What made her go?" he shouted. "To save you," came Cherry's faint reply. "If you love her, ride fast to the Sign of the Sled or you'll be too late. The Bronco Kid has gone there"-At that name Roy crashed the instrument to its hook and burst out of the shanty, calling loudly to his men.

"What's up?" "Where are you going?"

"To the Sign of the Sled," he panted. "We've stood by you, Glenister, and you can't quit us like this," said one angrily. "The trail to town is good, and we'll take it if you do." Roy saw they feared he was deserting, feared that he had heard some alarming rumor of which they did not know.

"We'll let the mine go, boys, for can't ask you to do what I refuse to do myself, and yet it's not fear that's sending me. There's a woman in danger, and I must go. She courted ruin to save us all, risked her honor to try and right a wrong-and-I'm afraid of what, has happened while we were fighting here. I don't ask you to stay till I come back-it wouldn't be square, and you'd better go while you have a claim once-I can do it again." He swung himself to the horse's back, settled into the saddle and rode out through the lane of belted men.

CHAPTER XX.

AS Helen and her companion ascended the mountain, scaced and swept by the tempest of the previous night, they heard, far below, the swollen torrent brawling in its bowlder ridden bed, while behind them the angry ocean spread southward to a blood red horizon. Ahead, the bleak mountains brooded over forbidding valleys; to the west a suffused sun glared sullenly, painting the high piled clouds with the gorgeous hues of a stormy sunset. To Helen, the wild scene seemed dyed with the colors of flame and blood and steel.

"That rain raised the deuce with the trails," said Struve, as they picked their way past an unsightly "slip" whence a part of the overhanging mountain, loosened by the deluge, had slid into the gulch. "Another storm like that would wash out these roads

completely." Even in the daylight it was no easy task to avoid these danger spots, for the horses floundered on the muddy soil. Vaguely the girl wondered how she would find her way back in the darkness, as she had planned. She said little as they approached the road house, for the thoughts within her brain gathered from the camp. Where, he had begun to clamor too wildly, but Struve, more arrogant than ever before, more terrifyingly sure of himself, was loudly garrulous. As they drew nearer and nearer, the dread that possessed the girl became of paralyzing intensity. If she should failbut she vowed she would not, could

> They rounded a bend and saw the Sign of the Sled cradled below them where the trail dipped to a stream which tumbled from the comb above into the river twisting like a silver thread through the distant valley. peeled flagpole topped by a spruce bough stood in front of the tavern, while over the door hung a sled suspended from a beam. The house itself was a quaint structure, rambling and amorphous, from whose sod roof sprang blooming flowers and whose high banked walls were pierced here and there with sleepy windows. It had been built by a homesick foreigner of unknown nationality whom the army of "mushers" who paid for his clean and orderly hospitality had dubbed duly and as a matter of course "Swede." When travel had changed to the river trail, leaving the house lone some and high as though left by a receding wave. Struve had taken it over on a debt and now ran it for the con venience of a slender traffic, mainly stampeders, who chose the higher route toward the interior. His hireling

spent the idle hours in prospecting a hungry quartz lead and in doing assessment work on nearby claims. teave the onice without plereing some part of this mystery. His manner strengthened her suspicion that there

swayed by her efforts, he remained chained by caution. She leaned forward and smiled at him. "You're just like the others, aren" nou? You won't give me any satisfac-

was something behind it all. This dis-

sipated, brilliant creature knew the sit-

uation thoroughly, and yet, though

"Tive, give, give," said Strave cynically. "That's always the woman's cry. Give me this-give me that. Selfish sex! Why don't you offer something in return? Men are traders; women usurers. You are curious; hence miserable. I can help you, therefore I should do it for a smile. You ask me to break my promises and risk my honor on your caprice. Well, that's that of the stranger raised itself in

marine, and I'll do at Phiput my self in year power, but I won't do it gratis. No; we'll trade." "It isn't curiosity," she denied in dignantly; "it is my due." "No; you've heard the common talk

and grown suspicious, that's all. You think I know something that will throw a new light or a new shadow on everything you have in the world, and you're worked up to such a condition that you can't take your own people's word; and, on the other hand, you can't go to strangers, so you come to me. Suppose I tell you I had the papers you brought to me last spring in that safe and that they told the whole story-whether your uncle is unimpeachable or whether he deserved benging by that mob-what would you de, eh? What would you give to see them? Well, they're there and ready to speak for themselves. If you're a woman you won't rest till you've seen them. Will you trade?"

"Yes, yes! Give them to me," she cried eagerly, at which a wave of crimson rushed up to his eyes and he rose abruptly from his chair. He made toward her, but she retreated to the wall, pale and wide eyed.

"Can't you see," she flung at him, "that I must know?"

He paused. "Of course I can, but I want a kiss to bind the bargain-to apply on account" He reached for her hand with his own hot one, but she pushed him away and slipped past him toward the door.

"Suit yourself," said he, "but if I'm not mistaken you'll never rest till you've seen those papers. I've studied you, and I'll place a bet that you can't marry McNamara or look your uncle in the eye till you know the truth. You might do either if you knew them to be crooks, but you couldn't if you only suspected it-that's the woman. When you come back. I'll show you prod because I don't claim to be anything but what I am-Wilton Struve, bargainer of some mean ability. When they come to inscribe my headstone I hope they can carve thereon with truth, 'He got value received."

"You're a panther," she said loath-

"Graceful and elegant brute, that," he laughed. "Affectionate and full of play, but with sharp teeth and sharper claws. To follow out the idea, which pleases me, I believe the creature owes no loyalty to its fellows, and hunts alone. Now, when you've followed this conspiracy out and placed the blame where it belongs, won't you come and tell me about it? That door leads into an outer hall which opens into the street. No one will see you come or

As she hurried along she wondered dazedly why she had stayed to listen so long. What a monster he was! His meaning was plain, had always been so from the first day he laid eyes on her, and he was utterly conscienceless. She had known all this; and yet, in her proud, youthful confidence, and in her need, every hour more desperate and urgent, to know the truth, she had dared risk herself with him. Withal, the man was shrewd and observant and had divined her mental condition with remarkable sagacity. She had failed with him; but the kirl now knew that she could never rest till she found an answer to her questions. She must kill this suspicion that ate into her so.

Shortz took the horses and answered

his employer's questions curtly, flash-

ing a curious look at Helen. Under other conditions the girl would have been delighted with the place, for this was the quintest spot she had found in the nor a country. The main room held bar and gold scales, a rude table and a huge fron heater, while its walls and ceiling were sheeted with white cloth so cunningly stitched and tacked that it seemed a cavern hollowed from chalk. It was filled with trophies of the hills-stuffed birds and animals, skins and antlers-from which depended in careless confusion dog harness, snowshoes, guns and articles of clothing. A door to the left led into the bunk room, where travelers had been wont to sleep in tiers three deep. To the rear was a kitchen and cache. to the right a compartment which Struve called the art gallery. Here free reign had been allowed the original owner's artistic fancies, and he had covered the place with pictures clipped from gazettes of questionable repute till it was a bewildering arrangement of pink ladies in tights, pugilists in scanty trunks, prize bulldogs and other less moral characters of the

sporting world. "This is probably the worst company you were ever in." Struve observed to Helen, with a forced attempt at

"Are there no guests here?" she asked him, her anxiety very near the sur-

"Travel is light at this time of the year. They'll come in later perhaps." A fire was burning in this pink room where the landlord had begun spreading the table for two, and its warmth was grateful to the girl. Her companion, thoroughly at his ease, stretched himself on a fur covered couch and smoked.

"Let me see the papers now, Mr. Struve," she began, but he put her off. "No. not now. Business must wait on our dinner. Don't spoil our little party, for there's time enough and to

She arose and went to the window, unable to sit still. Looking down the narrow gulch, she saw that the mountains beyond were indistinct, for it was growing dark rapidly. Dense clouds had rolled up from the east. A raindrop struck the glass before her eyes then another and another, and the lifts grew misty behind the coming shower. A traveler with a pack on his back hurried around the corner of the building and past her to the door At his knock Struve, who had beer watching Helen through half shut arose and went into the other

"hank heaven, some one has come!" she thought. The voices were deadene to a hum by the sod walls till Wh indignant protest that she distin-

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guished his words. "Gh. I've got money to pay my way I'm no deadhead."

Shortz mumbled something back,

"I don't care if you are closed. I'm tired, and there's a storm coming." This time she heard the landlord's refusal and the miner's angry profanity. A moment later she saw the traveler plodding up the traff toward town. "What does that mean?" she inquir-

ed as the lawyer re-entered. "Oh, that fellow is a tough, and Shortz wouldn't let him in. He's careful whom he entertains, there are so many bad men roaming the hills."

The German came in shortly to light

the lamp, and, although she asked no further questions, Helen's uneasiness increased. She half listened to the stories with which Struve tried to entertain her and ate little of the excellent meal that was shortly served to them. Struve meanwhile ate and drank almost greedily, and the shadowy, sinister evening crept along. A strange cowardice had suddenly overtaken the girl, and if at this late hour she could have withdrawn she would have done so gladly and gone forth to meet the violence of the tempest. But she had gone too far for retreat, and, realizing that for the present apparent compliance was her wisest resource, she sat quiet, answering the man with cool words while his eyes grew brighter, his skin more flushed, his speech more rapid. He talked incessantly and with feverish gayety, smoking numberless cigarettes and apparently unconscious of the flight of time. At last he broke off suddenly and consulted his watch, while Helen remembered that she had not heard Shortz in the kitchen for a long time. Suddenly Struve smiled on her peculiarly, with confident cunning. As he leered at her over the disorder between them he took from his pocket a flat bundle, which he tossed to her.

"Now for the bargain, eh?" "Ask the man to remove these dish-.es," she said as she undid the parcel with clumsy fingers.

"I sent him away two hours ago," said Struve, arising as if to come to her. She shrank back, but he only leaned across, gathered up the four corners of the tablecloth and, twisting them together, carried the whole thing out, the dishes crashing and jangling as he threw his burden recklessly into the kitchen. Then he returned and stood with his back to the stove. as it to ward off a blow. Framed in the window was the pallid visage of a man. The air rocked, the lamp flared and Struve whirled completely around, falling back against the wall. His eyes filled with horror and shifted down where his hand had clutched at his breast, plucking at one spot as if tearing a barb from his bosom. He jerked his head toward the door at his elbow in quest of a retreat, a shudder ran over him, his knees buckled and he plunged forward upon his face, his named fast and immovable, but seizing one of the little stools beside the stove she thrust it through the glass, letting in a smother of wind and water. Before she could escape Struve bounded ger, his voice boarse and furious.

into the room, his face livid with an-But as he began to denounce her he paused in amazement, for the girl had drawn Cherry's weapon and leveled it at him. She was very pale, and her breast heaved as from a swift run. while her wondrous gray eyes were lit with a light no man had ever seen there before, glowing like two jewels whose hearts contained the pent up passion of centuries. She had altered as though under the deft hand of a master sculptor, her nostrils growing thin and arched, her lips tight pressed and pitiless, her head poised proudly. The rain drove in through the shattired window, over and past her, while the cheap red curtain lashed and whipped her as though in gleeful applause. Her bitter abhorrence of the man made her voice sound strangely unnatural

as she commanded: "Don't dare to stop me!" She moved toward the door, motioning him to retreat before her and he obeyed rec-

gnizing the canger or per coomess. She did not note the calculating treachery of his glance, however, not fathom the purposes he had in mind. Out on the rain swept mountain the prostrate rider had regained his senses and now was crawling painfully toward the roadhouse. Seen through the dark be would have resembled some misshapen, creeping monster, for he dragged himself, reptile-like, close to the ground. But as he came closer the man heard a cry which the wind seemed guarding from his ear, and, hearing A, he rose and rushed blindly forward,

Helen watched her captive closely as be backed through the door before ber, for she dared not lose sight of him tatil free. The middle room was lighted by a glass lamp on the bar, and its rays showed that the front door was secured by a large iron bolt. She thanked heaven there was no lock and

Struve had retreated until his back

was to the counter, offering no word,

making no move, but the darting brightness of his eyes showed that he was alert and planning. But when the door behind Helen, urged by the wind through the broken casement, banged to the man made his first lightning-like sign. He dashed the lamp to the floor, where it burst like an eggshell, and darkness leaped into the room as an animal pounces. Had she been calmer or had time for an instant's thought Helen would have hastened back to the light, but she was midway to her liberty and actuated by the sole desire to break out into the open air, so plunged forward. Without warning she was hurled from her feet by a body which came out of the darkness upon her. She fired the little gun, but Struve's arms closed about her. weapon was wrenched from her hand, and she found herself fighting against him, breast to breast, with the fury of desperation. His wine burdened breath beat into her face, and she felt herself bound to him as though by hoops, while the touch of his cheek against hers turned her into a terrified, insensate animal which fought with every ounce of its strength and every nerve of its body. She screamed once, but it was not like the cry of a woman. Then the struggle went on in silence and utter blackness, Struve holding her like a gorilla till she grew faint and her head began to whirl, while darting lights drove past her eyes, and there was the roar of a cataract in her ears. She was a strong girl, and her ripe young body, untried until this moment, answered in every fiber, so that she wrestled with almost a man's strength and he had hard shift to hold her. But so violent an encounter could not last. Helen felt herself drifting free from the earth and losing grip of all things tangible, when at last they tripped and fell against the inner door. This gave way, and at the same moment the man's strength departed as though it were a thing of darkness and dared not face the light that streamed over them. She tore herself from his clutch and staggered into the supper room.

her again, gasping: "I'll show you who's master here!" Then he ceased abruptly, cringingly, and threw up an arm before his face arm still doubled under him.

her loosened hair falling in a gleaming

torrent about her shoulders, while he

arose from his knees and came toward

It had happened like a flash of light, and although Helen felt, rather than heard, the shot and saw her assailant fall, she did not realize the meaning of | 1 it till a drift of powder smoke assailed her nostrils. Even so, she experienced no shock or horror of the sight. On T the contrary, a savage joy at the spectacle seized her and she stood still, leaning slightly forward, staring at it almost gloatingly, stood so till she heard her name called, "Helen, little sister!" and turning, saw her brother in the window.

That which he witnessed in her face he had seen before in the faces of men locked close with a hateful death and from whom all but the most elemental passions had departed, but he had wever seen a woman bear the marks till now. No artifice nor falsity was there, nothing but the crudest, intensest feeling, which many people live and die without knowing. There are few who come to know the great primitive, passionate longings. But in this black night, fighting in defense of her most sacred self, this girl's nature had been stripped to its purely savage elements. As Glenister had predicted, Helen at last had felt and yielded to irresistibly powerful impulse.

Giancing backward at the creature sprawled by the door, Helen went to

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