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The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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This is a story of that great north country of which it has been said, "There's never a law of God or man runs north of fifty-three," a tale of impetuous emotion, of brute strength and courage, of swift and passionate love and hate; a tale vigorous, forceful and absorbing, which tells itself without fine words; a story of the hunger for gold and the hunger of man for woman, brooking no interference or rivalry, going straight for its object, as did the primitive man before the time of laws and conventionalities; of civilized man turned back to savagery and losing no manhood in the turning. Larry awhile, O reader, with these rugged men of Nome, and you shall be refreshed and strengthened in their company.

CHAPTER I.
GLENISTER gazed over the harbor agleam with the lights of anchored ships, then up at the crested mountains, black against the sky. He drank the cool air burdened with its faints of the sea, while the blood of his boyhood leaped within him.

"Oh, it's fine—fine," he murmured, "and this is my country—my country, after all, Dex. It's in my veins, this hunger for the north. I grow. I expand."

"Careful you don't bust," warned Dextery. "I've seen men get plumb drunk on mountain air. Don't expand too strong in one spot." He went back abruptly to his pipe, its villainous fumes promptly averting any danger of the air's too tonic quality.

"Gad, what a smudge!" sniffed the younger man. "You ought to be in quarantine."

"I'd rather smell like a man than talk like a kid. You desecrate the hour of meditation with rhapsodies on nature when your aesthetics ain't boned up to the beauties of good tobacco."

The other laughed, inflating his deep chest. In the gloom he stretched his muscles restlessly, as though an excess of vigor filled him.

They were lounging upon the dock, while before them lay the Santa Maria ready for her midnight sailing. Behind slept Alaska, quaint, antique and Russian, resting amid the fogs of Bering sea. Where a week before mild eyed natives had dried their cod among the old bronze cannons now a frenzied horde of gold seekers paused in their rush to the new El Dorado. They had come like a locust cloud, thousands strong, settling on the edge of the Smoky sea, waiting the going of the ice that barred them from their golden fescos—from Nome the new, where men found fortune in a night of the village mossy hills back of those who had died on the out trip the fall before, when what of that? Gold glittered in the sands, so said the survivors. Therefore men came in armies. Glenister and Dextery had left Nome the autumn previous, the young man raving with fever. Now they returned to their own land.

"This air whets every animal instinct in me," Glenister broke out again. "Away from the cities I turn savage. I feel the old primitive passions, the fret for fighting."

"Mebbe you'll have a chance."

"How so?"

"Well, it's this way. I met Mexico Mullins this mornin'. You mind old Mexico, don't you—the feller that relocated Discovery claim on Anvil creek last summer?"

"You don't mean that 'tinhorn' the boys were going to lynch for claim jumping?"

"Identical! Remember me tellin' you about a good turn I done him once down Guadalupe way?"

"Greaser shooting scrape, wasn't it?"

"Yep. Well, I noticed first off that he's gettin' fat—high livin' fat, too, all in one spot, like he was playin' both ends agin the center. Also he work di'mon's fit to handle with ice tongs."

"Says I, lookin' at his side elevation, 'What's accented your middle syllable so strong, Mexico?'"

"Prosperity, politics an' the Waldorf-Astoria," says he. It seems Mex hadn't forgot old days. He claws me into a corner an' says, 'Bill, I'm goin' to pay you back for that Morale deal.'"

"It ain't comin' to me," says I.

"That's a bygone."

"Listen here," says he, an', seen' he was in earnest, I let him run on.

"How much do you value that claim of yours at?"

shore end of the wharf.

"You'd better pull your freight, niles," Dextery remarked. "They'll be here in a minute."

"Yes, yes! Let us go! I must get aboard the Santa Maria. She's leavin' now. Come, come!"

Glenister laughed as though there were a humorous touch in her remark, but did not stir.

"I'm gettin' awful old an' stiff to run," said Dextery, removing his mackinaw, "but I allow I ain't too old for a little diversion in the way of a rough house when it comes noshin' around." He moved lightly, though the girl could see in the half darkness that his hair was silvery.

"What do you mean?" she questioned sharply.

"You hurry along, miss. We'll toy with 'em till you're aboard." They stepped across to the dockhouse, backing against it. The girl followed.

Again came the warning blast from the steamer and the voice of an officer:

"Clear away that stern line!"

"Oh, we'll be left!" she breathed, and somehow it struck Glenister that she feared this more than the men whose approaching feet he heard.

"You can make it all right," he urged her roughly. "You'll get hurt if you stay here. Run along and don't mind us. We've been thirty days on ship-board and were prying for something to happen." His voice was boyishly glad, as if he exulted in the fray that was to come, and no sooner had he spoken than the sailors came out of the darkness upon them.

During the space of a few heartbeats there was only a tangle of whirling forms with the sound of fist on flesh, then the blot split up, and again plunged outward, falling heavily. Again the sailors rushed, attempting to clinch. They massed upon Dextery, only to grasp empty air, for he shifted with remarkable agility, striking bitterly, as an old wolf snags.

It was baffling work, however, for in the darkness his blows fell, or overreached.

Glenister, on the other hand, stood calmly, beating the men off as they came to him. He laughed gloatingly, deep in his throat, as though the encounter were merely some rough sport.

The girl shuddered, for the desperate silence of the attacking men terrified her more than a din, and yet she stayed, crouched against the wall.

Dextery swung at a dim target and, missing it, was whirled off his balance. Instantly his antagonist grappled with him, and they fell to the floor, while a third man shuffled about them. The girl throttled a scream.

"I'm goin' to kick 'em, Bill," the man panted hoarsely. "You see 'em fix 'im."

He swung his heavy shoe, and Bill cursed with strutting eloquence.

"Ow! You're kickin' me! I've got 'im smashed!" Tackle the big un."

Bill's ally then started toward the others, his body bent, his arms flexed, yet hanging loosely. He crouched beside the girl, ignoring her, while she heard the breath wheezing from his lungs; then silently he leaped. Glenister had hurled a man from him, then stepped back to avoid the others, when he was seized from behind and felt the man's arms wrapped about his neck, the sailor's legs locked about his thighs. Now came the girl's first knowledge of real fighting. The two spun back and forth so closely intertwined as to be indistinguishable, the others holding off. For what seemed many minutes they struggled, the young man striving to reach his adversary, till they crashed against the wall near her, and she heard her champion's breath coughing in his throat at the tightening grip of the sailor.

Fright held her paralyzed, for she had never seen men thus. A moment and Glenister would be down beneath their stamping feet—they would kick his life out with their heavy shoes. At thought of it the necessity of action smote her like a blow in the face. Her terror fell away, her shaking muscles stiffened, and before realizing what she did she had acted.

The seaman's back was to her. She reached out and gripped him by the hair, while her fingers, tense as talons, sought his eyes. When the first loud sound of the battle arose, the man yelled in sudden terror, and the others as suddenly fell back. The next instant she felt a hand upon her shoulder and heard Dextery's voice.

"Are ye hurt? No? Come on, then, or we'll get left." He spoke quietly, though his breath was loud, and glancing down, she saw the huddled form of the sailor whom he had fought.

"That's all right. He ain't hurt. It's a Jap trick I learned. Hurray up!"

They ran swiftly down the wharf, followed by Glenister and by the groans of the sailors in whom the lust for combat had been quenched. As they scrambled up the Santa Maria's gangplank a strip of water widened between the boat and the pier.

"Close shave, that," panted Glenister, feeling his throat gingerly, "but I wouldn't have missed it for a spotted pup."

"I've been through b'ler explosions and howlsides, not to mention a trinitrotoluenol delivery, but fer real sprightly diversions I don't recall nothin' more pleasin' than this." Dextery's enthusiasm was boylike.

"What kind of men are you?" the girl laughed nervously, but got no answer.

They led her to their deck cabin, where they switched on the electric light, blinking at each other and at their unknown guest.

She saw a graceful and altogether attractive figure in a trim short skirt and long tan boots. But what Glenister first saw was her eyes, large and gray, almost brown under the electric light. They were active eyes, he thought, and they flashed swift, comprehensive glances at the two men.

Her hair had fallen loose and crinkled in her waist, all agleam. Otherwise she showed no sign of her recent ordeal.

Glenister had been prepared for the type of beauty that follows the frontier—beauty that may stun, but that has the polish and chill of a new ground bowie. Instead this girl with

the calm, reposeful face struck a personal arduous scattered about the cabin, striving to derive therefrom some fresh hint of the characteristics of the owners. First, there was an elaborate copper backed toilet set, all richly ornamented and leather bound. The metal was magnificently hand marked and bore Glenister's initial. It spoke of elegant extravagance and seemed oddly out of place in an arctic mine's equipment, as did also a small set of De Mampasant.

Next she picked up Kipling's "Seven Seas," marked liberally, and felt that she had struck a scent. The roughness and brutality of the poems had always chilled her, though she had felt vaguely their splendid pulse and swing. This was the girl's first venture from a sheltered life. She had not rubbed elbows with the world enough to find that truth may be rough, unshaven and garbed in homespun. The book confirmed her analysis of the junior partner.

Pendent from a hook was a worn and blackened holster from which peeped the butt of a large Colt's revolver, showing evidence of many years' service. It spoke mutely of the white haired Dextery, who, before her inspection was over, knocked at the door, and, when she admitted him, addressed her cautiously:

"The boy's down forward, teasin' grub out of a funky. He'll be up in a minute. How'd ye sleep?"

"Very well, thank you," she lied, "but I've been thinking that I ought to explain myself to you."

"Now, see here," the old man interjected, "there ain't no explanations needed till you feel like givin' them up. You was in trouble—that's unfortunate. We help you—that's natural. No questions asked—'t that's Alaska."

"Yes, but I know you must think—" "What bothers me," the other continued irrelevantly, "is how in blazes we're goin' to keep you hid. The steward's got to make up this room, and somebody's bound to see us packin' grub in."

"I don't care who knows if they won't send me back. They wouldn't do that, would they?" She hung anxiously on his words.

"Send you back? Why, don't you savvy that this boat is bound for Nome? There ain't no turnin' back now! Stamped and this is the wildest rush the world ever saw. The captain wouldn't turn back. He couldn't. His cargo's too precious, and the company pays \$5,000 a day for this ship. No, we ain't puttin' back to land no stowaways at five thousand per. Besides, we passengers wouldn't let him—dine's too precious."

They were interrupted by the rattle of dishes outside, and Dextery was about to open the door when his hand wavered uncertainly above the knob, for he heard the hearty greeting of the ship's captain.

"Well, well, Glenister, where's all the breakfast going?"

"Oo," whispered the old man, "that's Cap' Stephens."

"Dextery isn't feeling quite up to form this mornin'," replied Glenister easily.

"Don't wonder! Why weren't you aboard sooner last night? I saw you 'Most got left, eh? Served you right if you had." Then his voice dropped to the confidential: "I'd advise you to cut out those women. Don't misunderstand me, boy, but they're a bad lot. Take my word for it, they're a bad lot. Cut 'em out. Guess I'll step inside and see what's up with Dextery."

The girl shrank into her corner, gasping apprehensively at the other listener.

"Well—er—he isn't up yet," they heard Glenister stammer. "Better come around later."

"Nonsense! It's time he was dressed." The master's voice was gruffly good natured. "Hello, Dextery! Hey! Open up for inspection." He rattled the door.

There was nothing to be done. The old miner darted an inquiring glance at his companion, then, at her nod, slipped the bolt, and the captain's blue bill filled the room.

His grizzled face bearded face was generally wrinkled till he smiled the erect gray figure in the corner, when his cap came off involuntarily. There his courtesy ended, however, and the smile died coldly from his face. His eyes narrowed, and the good fellowship fell away, leaving him the stiff and formal officer.

"Ah," he said, "not feeling well, eh? I thought I had met all of our lady To be continued.

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