

REX BEACH ADVENTURE STORIES

The Shyness of Shorty

By REX BEACH

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PROLOGUE.

As a teller of adventure tales Rex Beach is without an equal in America. Years of experience as a miner in Alaska made him familiar with a little known quarter of the globe where life flows at full tide; consequently his stories are not only intensely interesting, but they are absolutely true to nature. Most of his characters are real people, changed somewhat to suit the motives of the particular story in which they appear. He has been in many an Alaskan gold rush and has had many narrow escapes. One of the stories in this series describes a frightful experience in a blizzard in an Alaskan pass. Beach participated in a trip of this very character and barely escaped being frozen to death. One of the Indians who accompanied him died of exposure. Beach made his first great hit with "The Spoilers," a remarkably interesting tale of life near the arctic circle, and this was followed by "The Barrier" and "The Silver Horde." His Adventure Stories are varied in character and full of thrilling incidents and humorous episodes. In appearance he resembles a college football player, being six feet two inches tall and weighing 200 pounds.

B AILEY smoked morosely as he scanned the dusty trail leading down across the "bottom" and away over the dry, gray prairie toward the hazy mountains in the west.

He called gruffly into the silence of the house, and his speech held the seriousness of his attitude.

"Hot Joy! Bar X outfit coming. Git supper."

A Chinaman appeared in the door and gazed at the six mule team descending the distant gully to the ford.

"Jesse one man, hey? All right," and he slid quietly back to the kitchen.

Whatever might be said, or rather, whatever might be suspected, of Bailey's roadhouse for people did not run to wordy conjecture in this country—it was known that it boasted a good cook, and this atoned for a catalogue of shortcomings. So it was popular among the hands of the big cattle ranges near by. Those given to idle talk held that Bailey acted strangely at times, and rumor painted occasional black dots at the

facade, squatting vulture-like above the ford, but it was nobody's business, and he kept a good cook.

Bailey did not recall the face that greeted him from above the three spans as they swung in front of his corral, but the brand on their flanks was the Bar X, so he nodded with as near an approach to hospitality as he permitted.



Titan, the body of a whisky barrel, rolling ludicrously on the tiny limbs of a bug, presented so startling a sight that even Hot Joy, appearing around the corner, cackled shrilly. His laugh rose to a shriek of dismay, however, as the little man made at him with the rush and roar of a cannon ball. In Bailey's amazed eyes he seemed to bounce galvanically, landing on Joy's back with such vicious suddenness that the breath fled from him in a squawk of terror. Then, seizing his cue, he kicked and belabored the prostrate Celestial in feverish silence. He desisted and rolled across the porch to Bailey. Staring truculently up at the landlord, he spoke for the first time.

"Was I right in supposing that something amused ye?"

"No, sir; I reckon you're mistaken I ain't observed anything frivolous yet."

"Glad of it," said the little man. "I don't like a feller to hog a joke all by himself. Some of the Bar X boys took to absorbing humor out of my shape when I first went to work, but they're sort of educated out of it now I got an eye from one and a finger off of another. The last one donated a ear."

Bailey readily conceived this man as a bad antagonist, for the heavy corded neck had split buttons from the blue shirt, and he glimpsed a chest hairy and round as a drum, while the brown arms showed knotty and hardened.

"Let's liquor," he said and led the way into the big, low room serving as bar, dining and living room. From the rear came vicious clatterings and slammings of pots, mingled with oriental lamentations, indicating an aching body rather than a chastened spirit.

"Don't see ye often," he continued, with a touch of implied curiosity.

"No, the old man don't lemme get away much. He knows that dwelling close to the ground, as I do, I pine for spiritual elevation," with a melting glance at the bottles behind the bar, doing much to explain the size of his first drink.

"Like it, do ye?" questioned Bailey, indicating the shelf.

a bride. "Mr. Bailey, this is my wife, since 10 o'clock a. m." He introduced a blushing, happy girl, evidently in the grasp of many emotions. "We'll stay all night, I guess."

"Sure," said Bailey. "I'll show ye a room, and he ad them up beneath the low roof where an unusual cleanliness betrayed the industry of Joy.

The two men returned and drank to the bride. Turney with the reckless lightness that distinguished him, Bailey sullen and watchful.

"Got another outfit here, haven't you?" questioned the bridegroom. "Who is it?"

Before answer could be made, from the kitchen arose a tortured howl and the smashing of dishes, mingled with stormy rumblings. The door burst inward, and an agonized Joy fled, flapping out into the night, while behind him rolled the caricature from Bar X.

"I just stopped for a drink of water," boomed the dwarf, then paused at the twitching face of the sheriff.

He swelled ominously, like a great pigeon, purple and congested with rage. Strutting to the newcomer, he glared insolently up into his smiling face.

"What are ye laughing at, ye shavetail?" His hands were clenched till his arms showed tense and rigid, and the cords in his neck were thickly swollen.

"Lemme in on it! I'm strong on humor. What in h—l ails ye?" he yelled, in a fury, as the tall young man gazed fixedly, and the glasses rattled at the below from the barred-up lugs.

"I'm not laughing at you," said the sheriff.

"Oh, ain't ye?" mocked the man of peace. "Well, take care that ye don't, ye big wart, or I'll trample them new clothes and browse around on some of yer features. I'll take ye apart till ye look like cut feed. Guess ye don't know who I am, do ye?"

"Who is this man, Ross?" came the anxious voice of the bride, descending the stairs.

The little man spun like a dancer and, spying the girl, blushed to the color of a prickly pear, then stammered painfully, while the sweet stood out under the labor of his discomfort.

to the bunk before it works," he thought, and the darkness veiled the measure of his sensations.

He started at a noise on the stairway. His senses, not yet dulled, detected a stealthy tread—not the careless step of a man unafraid, but the cautious rustle and halt of a marauder. Every nerve bristled to keenest alertness as the faint occasional sounds approached, passed the open end of the bar where he crouched, leading on to the window. Then a match flared, and the darkness rushed out as a candle-wick sputtered.

Shorty stretched on tiptoe, brought his eye to the level of the bar and gazed upon the horrid head of Bailey. He sighed thankfully, but watched with interest his strange behavior.

Bailey moved the light across the window from left to right three times, paused, then wiggled some code out into the night.

"He's signaling," mused Shorty. "Hope he gets through quick. I'm getting full." The fumes of the liquor were beating at his senses, and he knew that soon he would move with difficulty.

The man, however, showed no intention of leaving, for his signals completed, he blew out the light, first listening for any sound from above; then his figure loomed black and immobile against the dim starlight of the window.

"Oh, Lord, I got to set down!" and the watcher squatted upon the floor, bracing against the wall. His dulling perceptions were sufficiently acute to detect snuffling footsteps on the porch and the cautious unbarring of the door.

"Getting late for visitors," he thought as he entered a blissful doze. "When they're a-bed I'll turn in."

It seemed much later that a shot startled him. To his dizzy hearing came the sound of curses overhead, the stamp and shift of feet, the clashing fall of struggling men and, what

brought him unsteadily to his legs, the agonized scream of a woman. It echoed through the house, chilling him, and dwindled to an aching moan.

Something was wrong, he knew that, but it was hard to tell just what. He must think. What hard work it was to think too! He'd never noticed before what a laborious process it was. Probably that sheriff had got into trouble. He was a fresh guy, anyhow, and he'd laughed when he first saw Shorty. That settled it. He could get out of it himself. Evidently it was nothing serious, for there was no more disturbance above, only confused murmurings. Then a light showed in the stairs, and again the shuffling of feet came as four strange men descended. They were lithe by the sardonic Bailey, and they dragged a sixth between them, bound and helpless. It was the sheriff.

Now, what had he been doing to get into such a fix?

The prisoner stood against the wall, white and defiant. He strained at his bonds silently, while his captors watched his futile struggles. There was something terrible and menacing in the quietness with which they gloated—a suggestion of some horror to come. At last he desisted and burst forth:

who had broken down into his rage again and struggled madly while words ran from him.

"Let me go, you! Let me free! I want to fight the coward that struck my wife. You've killed her! Who was it? Let me get at him!"

Shorty stiffened as though a douche of ice water had struck him. "Killed her! Struck his wife!" My God! Not that sweet creature of his dreams who had talked and smiled at him without noting his deformity!

An awful anger rose in him, and he moved out into the light.

"Han's up!"

Whatever of weakness may have dragged at his legs, none sounded in the great bellowing command that flooded the room. At the compelling volume of the sound every man whirled and eight empty hands shot skyward. Their startled eyes beheld a man's squat body weaving uncertainly on the limbs of an insect, while in each hand shone a blue-black Colt that waved and circled in maddening, erratic orbits.

At the command Marsh Tremper's mind had leaped to the fact that behind him was one man, one against five, and he took a gambler's chance.

As he whirled he drew and fired. None but the dwarf of Bar X could have lived, for he was the deadliest hip shot in the territory. His bullet crashed into the wall a hand's breadth over Shorty's cowl. It was a clean heart shot, the practiced whirl and flip of the finished gun fighter, but the roar of his explosion was echoed by another, and the elder Tremper spun unsteadily against the table with a broken shoulder.

"Too high," moaned the big voice. "Deru the liquor!"

He swayed drunkenly, but at the slightest shift of his quarry the aimless wanderings of a black muzzle stopped on the spot and the body behind the guns was congested with deadly menace.

"Face the wall!" he cried. "Quick! Keep 'em up higher!" They sullenly obeyed, their wounded leader reaching with his uninjured member.

To the complacent Shorty it seemed that things were working nicely, though he was disturbingly conscious of his alcoholic lack of balance and tortured by the fear that he might suddenly lose the iron grip of his faculties.

Then, for the second time that night, from the stairs came the voice that threw him into the dreadful confusion of his modesty.

MUTINY FOLLOWS SING SING FIRE

New Warden Quickly Stops Trouble in Prison.

DAMAGE REACHES \$200,000

One of the Convicts Told Clancy That Fellow Prisoner Started Fire Out of "Pure Devilishness"—Leaders of Riot Transferred to Another Prison.

Ossining, N. Y.—Following a fire in Sing Sing prison, the old structure in which many New York state prisoners are now confined, serious rioting and mutiny occurred among the convicts prior to the removal of the leaders of the disturbances to Auburn prison, a new state institution. The total damage caused by two fires, one of which beyond doubt was of incendiary origin, amounts to \$200,000.

The trouble at the prison followed close after the appointment of John N. Clancy as warden to succeed ex-Warden Kennedy, who has been indicted since his removal from office. The new warden, however, was quick to act, and the trouble was soon quelled, although several hundred convicts were confined in their cells for several days and kept on a diet of bread and water.

Efforts were made during an investigation which followed to ascertain the names of the convicts who were responsible for starting the fire in the prison. Several of the convicts were called in as witnesses. One of the men



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WARDEN JOHN N. CLANCY

stated that he heard that the fire was started out of "pure devilishness" by one of the prisoners.

It was learned that cocaine has come into the prison in considerable quantities in the sheets purchased for their cots by the convicts. These sheets are soaked in cocaine, and so are the leaves of books brought in to the prisoners. The prisoners suck the sheets or the leaves of the books to get the drug. Since the fire, it was said, much cocaine had come into the prison in spite of the vigilance of the warden and keepers. It was said that this had been responsible for much of the trouble.

It was learned also that the leaders of the disturbance were locked up in the so called "coolers." There are ten of these coolers, and they were all full. They are outside of the cell block, on a level with the Hudson river, and are dark, damp cells seven feet long, six feet seven inches in height and three feet three inches wide. They have two doors, the first of wire and the outside one of wood. In the doors there are two little holes for ventilation, but they do not admit any light. These coolers figured in the presentments returned by the grand jury last June, and in view of this some surprise was expressed that Warden Clancy had made use of them.

BANK FOR NEEDY POETS.

Genius Can Draw Checks Without Making Deposit.

Paris.—All Paris knows that many struggling French poets, authors and artists have come to the capital only to succumb in the struggle to exist on the meager incomes of their early days. Starvation and illness have done for them before they could earn enough to live. But the path to artistic fame will in the future be made easier. A poet in need will be able to apply to the "poets' bank" and have his immediate wants relieved.

The bank is the idea of a number of young writers who have been successful. It will extend financial aid to needy poets and authors during their period of woeful fame.

Lightning Moves House.

Fort Smith, Ark.—In an electrical storm the home of J. W. Baxter of Fayetteville, a member of the state legislature, was struck by lightning five times within an hour. The first bolt knocked off a chimney. The second entered through a telephone and knocked Baxter unconscious. He had hardly been revived before the third knocked his wife senseless. The fourth stunned his mother, and the fifth knocked the house from its foundations.



"Han's up!"