

# The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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(Continued from Page Three.)

"If you make a fuss you'll ruin us all." For some moments they watched him breathlessly as he frowned in indecision, then:

"You'll have to look out for the steward," he said, and the girl sank to a stool while two great tears rolled down her cheeks. The captain's eyes softened, and his voice was gentle as he laid his hand on her head.

"Don't feel hurt over what I said, miss. You see, appearances don't tell much hereabouts—most of the pretty ones are no good. They've fooled me many a time, and I made a mistake. These men will help you through. I can't. Then when you get to Nome, make your sweetheart marry you the day you land. You are two far north to be alone."

He stepped out into the passage and closed the door carefully.

## CHAPTER III.

"Well, bein' as me an' Glenister is goug'n' into the bowels of Anvil creek all last summer, we don't really get the fresh grub habit fastened on us none. You see, the gamblers downtown cop out the few signs an' green vegetables that stray off the ships, so they never get out as far as the creek none, except maybe in the shape of anecdotes.

"We don't get intimate with no nutriment except hog boosum an' brown beans, of which luxuries we have unskipped measure, an' bein' as this is our third year in the country, we hanker for bony fido grub somethin' scannous. Yes, ma'am, three years without a taste of fresh fruit nor meat nor nuthin' except pork an' beans. Why, I've et bacon till my immortal soul has growed a rind.

"When it comes time to close down the claim, the boy is sick with the fever, an' the only ship in port is a Point Barrow whaler, bound for Seattle. After I hook our passage I find they have nothin' aboard to eat except canned salmon, it bein' the end of a two years' cruise, so when I land in the States after seventeen days of a fish diet I am what you might call sated with canned grub and have added salmon to the list of things concernin' which I am goin' to economize.

"Soon's ever I got the boy into a hospital I sallup up to the best restaurant in town an' prepare for the huge potlatch. This here, I determine, is to be a gormandizin' jag which shall live in hist'ry an' wharf in later years the natives of Puget sound shall speak with bated breath.

"First I call for \$5 worth of pork an' beans an' then a full grown platter of canned salmon. When the waiter lays 'em out in front of me, I look them vittles coldly in their disgustin' visages an' say in sarcastic accents:

"Set there, d— you, an' watch me eat real grub, which I proceed to do, cleanin' the menu from soda to hock. When I have done my worst, I pile bones an' olive seeds an' peelin's all over them articles of nourishment, stick toothpicks into 'em, an' havin' offered 'em what other indignities occur to me, I leave the place."

Dextry and the girl were leaning over the stern rail, chatting idly in the darkness. It was the second night out, and the ship lay dead in the ice pack. All about there was a flat, floc clogged sea, leprous and mottled in the deep twilight that midnight brought in this latitude. They had threaded into the ice field as long as the light lasted, following the lanes of blue water till they closed, then drifting idly till others appeared; worming out into leagues of open sea, again creeping into the shifting labyrinth till darkness rendered progress perilous.

Occasionally they had passed herds of walrus huddled sociably upon ice pans, their wet hides glistening in the sunlight. The air had been clear and pleasant, while away on all quarters they had seen the smoke of other ships tolling through the barrier. The spring fleet was knocking at the door of the golden north.

Chafing at her imprisonment, the girl had asked the old man to take her out on deck under the shelter of darkness; then she had led him to speak of his own past experiences and of Glenister's, which he had done freely. She was frankly curious about them, and she wondered at their apparent lack of interest in her own identity and her secret mission. She even construed their silence as indifference, not realizing that these northmen were offering her the truest evidence of camaraderie.

The frontier is capable of no finer compliment than this utter disregard of one's folded pages. It betokens that highest faith in one's fellow man, the belief that he should be measured by his present deeds, not by his past. It

says, translated: "This is God's free country, where a man is a man, nothing more. Our land is new and pure, our faces are to the front. If you have been square, so much the better; if not, leave behind the taints of artificial things and start again on the level. That's all."

It had happened, therefore, that, since the men had asked her no questions, she had allowed the hours to pass and still hesitated to explain further than she had explained to Captain Stephens. It was much easier to let things continue as they were, and there was, after all, so little that she was at liberty to tell them.

In the short time since meeting them the girl had grown to like Dextry, with his blunt chivalry and boyish, whimsical philosophy, but she avoided Glenister, feeling a shuddering, hidden terror of him, ever since her eavesdropping of the previous night. At the memory of that scene she grew hot, then cold—hot with anger, icy at the sinister power and sureness which had vibrated in his voice. What kind of life was she entering where men spoke of strange women with this assurance and hinted thus of ownership? That he was handsome and unconscious of it she acknowledged, and had she met him in her accustomed circle of friends, garbed in the conventionalities, she would perhaps have thought of him as a striking man, vigorous and intelligent, but here he seemed naturally to take on the attributes of his surroundings, acquiring a picturesque negligence of dress and morals and suggesting rugged, elemental, chilling potentialities. While with him—and he had sought her repeatedly that day—she was uneasily aware of his strong personality tugging at her; aware of the unbridled passionate flood of a nature unbrooking of delay and heedless of denial. This it was that antagonized her and set her every mental sinew in rigid resistance.

During Dextry's garrulous ramblings Glenister emerged from the darkness and silently took his place beside her against the rail.

"What portent do you see that makes you stare into the night so anxiously?" he inquired.

"I am wishing for a sight of the midnight sun or the aurora borealis," she replied.

"Too late for one an' too fur south for the other," Dextry interposed. "We'll see the sun further north, though."

"Have you ever heard the real origin of the northern lights?" the young man inquired.

"Naturally, I never have," she answered.

"Well, here it is. I have it from the lips of a great hunter of the Tananas. He told it to me when I was sick once in his cabin, and inasmuch as he is a wise Indian and has a reputation for truth I have no doubt that it is scrupulously correct.

"In the very old days, before the white man or corned beef had invaded this land, the greatest tribe in all the north was the Tananas. The bravest hunter of these was Itika, the second chief. He could follow a moose till it fell exhausted in the snow, and he had many belts made from the claws of the brown bear, which is deadly wicked and, as every one knows, inhabited by the spirits of 'yabla men,' or devils.

"One winter a terrible famine settled over the Tanana valley. The moose departed from the gulches, and the caribou melted from the hills like mist. The dogs grew gaunt and howled all night, the babies cried, the women became hollow eyed and peevish.

"Then it was that Itika decided to go hunting over the saw tooth range which formed the edge of the world. They tried to dissuade him, saying it was certain death because a pack of monstrous white wolves taller than the moose and swifter than the eagle was known to range these mountains, running madly in chase. Always on clear, cold nights could be seen the flashing of the moonbeams from their gleaming, hungry sides, and, although many hunters had crossed the passes in other years, they never returned, for the pack slew them.

"Nothing could deter Itika, however, so he threaded his way up through the range and, night coming, burrowed into a drift to sleep in his caribou skin. Peering out into the darkness, he saw the flashing lights a thousand times brighter than ever before. The whole heavens were ablaze with shifting streamers that raced and writhed back and forth in wild revel. Listening, he heard the hiss and whine of dry snow under the feet of the pack and a distant noise as of rushing winds, although the air was deathly still.

"With daylight he proceeded through the range till he came out above a magnificent valley. Descending the slope, he entered a forest of towering spruce, while on all sides the snow was trampled with tracks as wide as a snowshoe. There came to him a noise which as he proceeded increased till it filled the woods. It was a frightful din, as though a thousand wolves were howling with the madness of the kill. Cautiously creeping nearer, he found a monstrous white animal struggling beneath a spruce which had fallen upon it in such fashion as to pinion it securely.

"All brave men are tender hearted, so Itika set to work with his ax and cleared away the burden, regardless of the peril to himself. When he had

released it the beast arose and, instead of running away, addressed him in the most polite and polished Indian, without a trace of accent.

"You have saved my life. Now, what can I do for you?"

"I want to hunt in this valley. My people are starving," said Itika, at which the wolf was greatly pleased and rounded up the rest of the pack to help in the kill.

"Always thereafter when Itika came to the valley of the Yukon the giant drove hunted with him. To this day they run through the mountains on cold, clear night in a multitude, while the light of the moon flickers from their white sides, flashing up into the sky in weird, fantastic figures. Some people call it northern lights, but old Isaac assured me earnestly, toothlessly and with the light of ancient truth as I lay snow blind in his lodge that it is nothing more remarkable than the spirit of Itika and the great white wolves."

"What a queer legend!" she said. "There must be many of them in this country. I feel that I am going to like the north."

"Perhaps you will," Glenister replied, "although it is not a woman's land."

"Tell me what led you out here in the first place. You are an eastern man. You have had advantages, education, and yet you choose this. You must love the north."

"Indeed I do! It calls to a fellow in some strange way that a gentler country never could. When once you have lived the long, lazy June days that never end and heard geese honking under a warm, sunlit midnight, or when once you've hit the trail on a winter morning so sharp and clear that the air stings your lungs and the whole white, silent world glistens like a jewel; yes, and when you've seen the dogs romping in harness till the sled runners ring and the distant mountain ranges come out like beautiful carvings, so close you can reach them—well, there's something in it that brings you back—that's all, no matter where you've lost yourself. It means health and equality and unrestraint. That's what I like best. I dare say—the utter unrestraint.

"When I was a schoolboy I used to gaze at the map of Alaska for hours. I'd lose myself in it. It wasn't anything but a big, blank corner in the north then, with a name and mountains and mystery. The word Yukon suggested to me everything unknown and weird—hairy mastodons, golden river bars, savage Indians with bone arrowheads and sealskin trousers. When I left college, I came as fast as ever I could—the adventure, I suppose.

"The law was considered my destiny. How the shades of old Choate and Webster and Patrick Henry must have wailed when I forswore it! I'll bet Blackstone tore his whiskers."

"I think you would have made a success," said the girl, but he laughed.

"Well, anyhow, I stepped out, leaving the way to the United States supreme bench unobstructed, and came north. I found it was where I belonged. I fitted in. I'm not contented—don't think that. I'm ambitious, but I prefer these surroundings to the others—that's all. I'm realizing my desires. I've made a fortune. Now I'll see what else the world has."

He suddenly turned to her. "See here," he abruptly questioned, "what's your name?"

She started and glanced toward where Dextry had stood, only to find that the old frontiersman had slipped away during the tale.

"Helen Chester," she replied.

"Helen Chester," he repeated musingly. "What a pretty name! It seems almost a pity to change it—to marry, as you will."

"I am not going to Nome to get married."

He glanced at her quickly. "Then you won't like this country. You are two years too early. You ought to wait till there are railroads and telephones and tables d'hote and chaperons. It's a man's country yet."

"I don't see why it isn't a woman's country too. Surely we can take a part in taming it. Yonder on the Oregon is a complete railroad, which will be running from the coast to the mines in a few weeks. Another ship back there has the wire and poles and fixings for a telephone system, which will go up in a night. As to tables d'hote, I saw a real French count in Seattle with a monocle. He's bringing in a restaurant outfit, imported snails and pates de foie gras. All that's wanting is the chaperon. In my flight from the Ohio I left mine. The sailors caught her. You see, I am not far ahead of schedule."

"What part are you going to take in this taming process?" he asked.

She paused long before replying, and when she did her answer sounded like a jest.

"I herald the coming of the law," she said.

"The law! Bah! Red tape, a dead language and a horde of slysters! I'm afraid of law in this land. We're too new and too far away from things. It puts too much power in too few hands. Heretofore we men up here have had recourse to our courage and our Colts, but we'll have to unbuckle them both when the law comes. I like the court that hasn't any appeal." He laid hand upon his hip.

"The Colts may go, but the courage

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[TO BE CONTINUED.]