

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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[CONTINUED.]

tribe. Unconsciously she approached him, drawn by the spell of his strength. "My pleasures are violent, and my hate is mighty bitter in my mouth. What I want, I take. That's been my way in the old life, and I'm too selfish to give it up."

He was gazing out upon the dimly lighted miles of ice, but now he turned toward her and, doing so, touched her warm hand next his on the rail.

She was staring up at him unaffectedly, so close that the faint odor from her hair reached him. Her expression was simply one of wonder and curiosity of this type, so different from any she had known. But the man's eyes were hot and blinded with the sight of her, and he felt only her beauty heightened in the dim light, the brush of her garments and the small, soft hand beneath his. The thrill from the touch of it surged over him, mastered him.

"What I want, I take," he repeated, and then suddenly he reached forth



"What I want, I take."

and, taking her in his arms, crushed her to him, kissing her softly, fiercely, full upon the lips. For an instant she lay gasping and stunned against his breast; then she tore her fist free and with all her force struck him full in the face.

It was as though she beat upon a stone. With one movement he forced her arm to her side, smiling into her terrified eyes; then, holding her like iron, he kissed her again and again upon the mouth, the eyes, the hair—and released her.

"I am going to love you, Helen," said he. "And may God strike me dead if I ever stop hating you!" she cried, her voice coming thick and hoarse with passion.

Turning, she walked proudly forward toward her cabin, a trim, straight, haughty figure, and he did not know that her knees were shaking and weak.

CHAPTER IV.

FOR four days the Santa Maria felt blindly through the white fields, drifting north with the spring tide that sets through Foring strait, till on the morning of the fifth open water showed to the east. Creeping through, she broke out into the last stage of the long race, amid the cheers of her weary passengers, and the dull jar of her engines made welcome music to the girl in the deck stateroom.

Soon they picked up a mountainous coast which rose steadily into majestic, barren ranges, still white with the melting snows, and at 10 in the evening, under a golden sunset, amid screaming whistles, they anchored in the roadstead of Nome. Before the rattle of her chains had ceased or the echo from the fleet's salute had died from the shoreward hills the ship was surrounded by a swarm of tiny craft clamoring about her iron sides, while an officer in cap and gilt climbed the bridge and greeted Captain Stephens. Tags with trailing lights circled discreetly about, awaiting the completion of certain formalities. These over, the uniformed gentlemen dropped back into his skiff and rowed away.

"A clean bill of health, captain!" he shouted, saluting the commander.

"Thank ye, sir," roared the sailor, and with that the rowboats swarmed toward the steamer, boarding the steamer from all quarters.

As the master turned he looked down from his bridge to the deck below full into the face of Dextery, who had been an intent witness of the meeting. With unbending dignity Captain Stephens let his left eyelid droop slowly, while a boyish grin spread widely over his

face. Simultaneously orders rang sharp and fast from the bridge, the

crew broke into feverish life, the creak of booms and the clank of donkey hoists arose.

"We're here, Miss Stowaway," said Glenister, entering the girl's cabin. "The inspector passed us, and it's time for you to see the magic city. Come, it's a wonderful sight."

This was the first time they had been alone since the scene on the after deck, for, besides ignoring Glenister, she had managed that he should not even see her except in Dextery's presence. Although he had ever since been courteous and considerate, she felt the leaping emotions that were hidden within him and longed to leave the ship, to fly from the spell of his personality. Thoughts of him made her writhe, and yet when he was near she could not hate him as she willed. He overpowered her; he would not be hated; he paid no heed to her slights. This very quality reminded her how willingly and unquestioningly he had fought off the sailors from the Ohio at a word from her. She knew he would do so again, and more, and it is hard to be bitter to one who would lay down his life for you even though he has offended, particularly when he has the magnetism that sweeps you away from your moorings.

"There's no danger of being seen," he continued. "The crowd's crazy, and, besides, we'll go ashore right away. You must be mad with the confinement. It's on my nerves too."

As they stepped outside the door of an adjacent cabin opened, framing an angular, sharp featured woman, who, catching sight of the girl emerging from Glenister's stateroom, paused, with shrewdly narrowed eyes flashing quick, malicious glances from one to the other. They came later to remember with regret this chance encounter, for it was fraught with grave results for them both.

"Good evening, Mr. Glenister," the lady said, with acid cordiality.

"Howdy, Mrs. Champian?" He moved away.

She followed a step, staring at Helen. "Are you going ashore tonight or wait for morning?"

"Don't know yet, I'm sure." Then aside to the girl he muttered, "Shake her; she's spying on us."

"Who is she?" asked Miss Chester a moment later.

"Her husband manages one of the big companies. She's an old cat."

Gaining her first view of the land, the girl cried out sharply. They rode on an oily sea tinted like burnished copper, while on all sides, amid the faint rattle and rumble of machinery, scores of ships were belching cargoes out upon living swarms of scows, tugs, stern wheelers and dories. Here and there Eskimo oomiaks, fat, walrus hide boats, slid about like huge, many legged water bugs. An endless, antlike stream of tenders, piled high with freight, plied to and from the shore. A mile distant lay the city, stretched like a white ribbon between the gold of the ocean sand and the dun of the moss covered tundra. It was like no other in the world. At first glance it seemed all made of new white canvas. In a week its population had swelled from 3,000 to 30,000. It now wandered in a slender, sinuous line along the coast for miles, because only the beach afforded dry camping ground. Mounting to the bank behind, one sank knee deep in moss and water and, treading twice in the same tracks, found a bog of ooziug, icy mud. Therefore as the town doubled daily in size, it grew endwise like a string of dominoes till the shore from Cape Nome to Penny river was a long reach of white, glinting in the low rays of the arctic sunset like foamy breakers on a tropic island.

"That's Anvil creek up yonder," said Glenister. "There's where the Midas lies. See!" He indicated a gap in the buttress of mountains rolling back from the coast. "It's the greatest creek in the world. You'll see gold by the mule load and hillocks of nuggets. Oh, I'm glad to get back. This is life. That stretch of beach is full of gold. These hills are seamed with quartz. The bedrock of that creek is yellow. There's gold, gold, gold everywhere—more than ever was in old Solomon's mines—and there's mystery and peril and things unknown."

"Let us make haste," said the girl. "I have something I must do tonight. After that I can learn to know these things."

Securing a small boat, they were rowed ashore, the partners plying their ferryman with eager questions. Having arrived five days before, he was exploding with information and volunteered the fruits of his ripe experience

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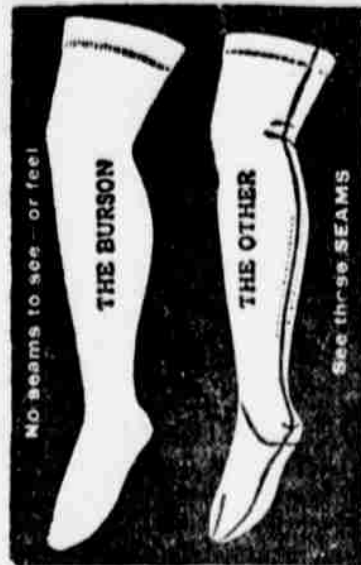
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