

The Spoilers

by REX E. BEACH



Herewith The Sunday Call presents the first installment of "The Spoilers," the great story by Rex Beach, whose plot is the famous Nome conspiracy cases, which were tried in San Francisco, and in which Francis J. Heney figured. On succeeding Sundays the other chapters of this absorbing story out of life will be published.

CHAPTER I The Encounter

GLENISTER gazed out over the harbor, agleam with the lights of anchored ships, then up at the crenelated mountains, black against the sky. He drank the cool air burdened with its taints 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 Dexty. "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 esthetics ain't honed 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 Unalaska, quaint, antique and Russian, rusting amid the fogs of Bering sea. Where, a week before, mild eyed natives had dried their cod among the old bronze cannon, 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 fleece—from Nome the new, where men found fortune in a night. The mossy hills back of the village were ridged with graves of those who had died on the out trip the fall before, when a plague had gripped the land—but what of that? Gold glittered in the sands, so said the survivors; therefore men came in armies. Glenister and Dexty had left Nome in the autumn previous, the young man raging 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 ag'in the center. Also he wore di'mon's fit to handle with icetongs."

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

"Prosperity, politics, an' the Waldorf Astorier," says he. "It seems Mex hadn't forgot old days. He claws don't forgot old days. He claws don't."

"He claws don't let 'em jump your ground, that's all."

"I can't tell you nothin' more. I'm puttin' a string on my own neck, sayin' this much. You're a square man, Bill, an' I'm a gambler, but you saved my life onct, an' I wouldn't steer you wrong. For God's sake, don't let 'em jump your ground, that's all."

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forms and with the sound of fist on flesh, then the blot split up and forms plunged outward, falling heavily. Again the sailors rushed, attempting to clinch. They massed upon Dexty only to grasp the empty air, for he shifted with remarkable agility, striking bitterly, as an old wolf snaps. It was baffling work, however, for in the darkness his blows fell short or overreached.

Glenister, on the other hand, stood carelessly, beating the men off as they came to him. He laughed gloatingly, deep in his throat, as though the encounter was 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.

Dexty 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 'im, Bill," the man panted hoarsely. "Le' me fix 'im." He swung his heavy shoe and Bill cursed with stirring eloquence.

"Ow! You're kickin' me! I've got 'im safe enough. 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 sailor'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 entwined 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. Prignt 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. Then 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 Dexty's voice.

"Are ye hurt? No? Come on, then, or we'll get left." He spoke quietly, though his breath was loud, and, (Continued on Next Page.)

the mate, making up the bank for the shore end of the wharf.

"You'd better pull your freight, miss," Dexty remarked; "they'll be here in a minute."

"Yes, yes! Let us go! I must get aboard the Santa Maria. She's leaving 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 Dexty, removing his inack-inaw, "but I allow I ain't too old for a little diversion in the way of a rough house when it comes nosin' 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 30 days on ship-board and were praying 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 a space of whirling

"Let who jump it? Congress has give us judges an' courts an' marshals."

"That's just it. How you goin' to buck that hand? Them's the best cards in the deck. There's a man comin' by the name of McNamara. Watch him close. I can't tell you no more. But don't never let 'em get a grip on your ground. That's all he'll say."

"Bah! He's crazy! I wish somebody would try to jump the Midas; we'd enjoy the exercise."

The siren of the Santa Maria interrupted, its hoarse warning throbbing up the mountain.

"We'll have to get aboard," said Dexty.

"Sh-h! What's that?" the other whispered.

At first the only sound they heard was a stir from the deck of the steamer. Then from the water below them came the rattle of rowlocks and a voice cautiously muffled.

"Stop! Stop there!"

A skiff burst from the darkness, grounding on the beach beneath. A figure scrambled out and up the ladder leading to the wharf. Immediately a second boat, plainly in pursuit of the first one, struck on the beach behind it.

As the escaping figure mounted to

their level the watchers perceived with amazement that it was a young woman. Breath sobbed from her lungs, and, stumbling, she would have fallen but for Glenister, who ran forward and helped her to her feet.

"Don't let them get me," she panted.

He turned to his partner in puzzled inquiry, but found that the old man had crossed to the head of the landing ladder up which the pursuers were climbing.

"Just a minute—you there! Back up, or I'll kick your face in." Dexty's voice was sharp and unexpected, and in the darkness he loomed tall and menacing to those below.

"Get out of the way. That woman's a runaway," came from the one highest on the ladder.

"So I judge."

"She broke qu—"

"Shut up!" broke in another. "Do you want to advertise it? Get out of the way there, ye damn fool! Climb up, Thorsen." He spoke like a bucko mate, and his words stirred the bile of Dexty.

Thorsen grasped the dock floor, trying to climb up, but the old miner stamped on his fingers and the sailor loosened his hold with a yell, carrying the under men with him to the beach in his fall.

"This way! Follow me!" shouted beats there was a space of whirling