

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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(Continued from page two)

story, Mr. Glenister, and show the plot in all its fitness. It's hard for me to betray my uncle, but this proof is yours by right to use as you see fit, and I can't keep it."

"Do you mean that this evidence will show all that? And you're going to give it to me because you think it is your duty?"

"It belongs to you. I have no choice. But what I came for was to plead and ask a little mercy for my uncle, who is an old, old man, and very weak. This will kill him."

He saw that her eyes were swimming, while the little chin quivered ever so slightly and her pale cheeks flushed. There rose in him the desire to take her in his arms, to lay his head on her pillow, to kiss her away the tears, to smooth with tender caress the wavy hair and bury his face deep in it till he grew drunk with the madness of her. But he knew at last for whom she really pleaded.

So he was to forswear this vengeance, which was no vengeance after all, but in verity a just punishment. They asked him—a man—a man's man—a northman—to do this, and for what? For no reward, but on the contrary to insure himself lasting bitterness. He strove to look at the proposition calmly, clearly, but it was difficult. It only by freeing this other villain as well as her uncle he would do a good to her, then he would not hesitate. Love was not the only thing. He marveled at his own attitude. This could not be his old self debating thus. He had asked for another chance to show that he was not the old Roy Glenister. Well, it had come, and he was ready.

Roy dared not look at Helen any more, for this was the hardest moment he had ever lived.

"You ask this for your uncle, but what of—the other fellow? You must know that if one goes free so will they both. They can't be separated."

"It's almost too much to ask," the kid took up uncertainly. "But don't you think the work is done? I can't help, but admire McNamara, and neither can you—the good and the enemy to you for that—and—and he loves Helen."

"I know—I know," said Glenister hastily, at the same time stopping an unintelligible protest from the girl. "You're right enough." He straightened his slightly stooping shoulders and looked at the unopened package wearily, then slipped the rubber band from it and, separating the contents, tore them up—one by one—tore them into fine bits without hurry or ostentation and tossed the fragments away, while the woman began to sob softly, the sound of her sobs alone disturbing the silence. And so he gave her his enemy, making his offer gamely according to his code.

"You're right—the work is done. And now I'm very tired."

They left him standing there, the glory of the dying day illumining his lean, brown features, the vision of a great loneliness in his weary eyes.

He did not rouse himself till the sky before him was only a curtain of steel, penciled with streaks of soot that lay close down above the darker sea. Then he sighed and said aloud:

"So this is the end, and I gave him to her with these hands." He held them out before him curiously, becoming conscious for the first time that the left one was swollen and discolored and fearfully painful. He noted it with impersonal interest, realizing its need of medical attention—so left the cabin and walked down into the city. He encountered Dexty and Stimmus on the way, and they went with him, both flowing with the gossip of the camp.

"Lord, but you're the talk of the town," they began. "The curio hunters have commenced to pull Struve's office apart for souvenirs, and the swedes want to run you for congress as soon as ever we get admitted as a state. They say that at collar an' elbow bolts you could lick any of them east-ern senators and thereby rattle out a lot of good legislation for us crippled on here."

"Speakin' of laws goes to show me that this here country is gettin' too square civilized for a white man," said Stimmus pessimistically, "and now that the fight is ended up it don't look like there would be anything done fit to stir the interest of a grown-up person for a long while. You goin' west?"

"Why, you can throw a stone and bring strait from here," said Roy, smiling.

"Oh, well, the world's round. There's a schooner outfit for Sibery—two 'em. Me an' Dex is figgerin' to go out toward the frontier for a while."

"I'm beginnin' to gettin' out toward the frontier for a while," said Dexty. "I'm beginnin' to gettin' out toward the frontier for a while."

ancies of scenery. They're puttin' a pavement on Front street, and there's a shoe shinin' parlor opened up. Why, I'd like to get where I could stretch an' holler without disturbin' the pensiveness of some dude in a dress suit. Better come along, Roy; we can sell out the Midas."

"I'll think it over," said the young man.

The night was bright with a full moon when they left the doctor's office. Roy, in no mood for the exuberance of his companions, parted from them, but had not gone far before he met Cherry Malotte. His head was low, and he did not see her till she spoke.

"Well, boy, so it's over at last."

Her words chimed so perfectly with his thoughts that he replied, "Yes; it's all over, little girl."

"You don't mind my congratulations—you know me too well for that. How does it feel to be a winner?"

"I don't know, I've lost."

"Lost what?"

"Everything—except the gold mine."

"Everything except—I see! You mean that she—that you have asked her, and she won't?" He never knew the cost at which she held her voice so steady.

"More than that. It's so now that it hurts yet, and it will continue to hurt for a long time, I suppose. But tomorrow I am going back to my hills and my valleys, back to the Midas and my work, and try to begin all over. For a time I've wandered in strange paths, seeking new gods, as it were, but the dazzle has died out of my eyes and I can see true again. She isn't for me, although I shall always love her. I'm sorry I can't forget easily, as some do. It's hard to look ahead and take an interest in things. But what about you? Where shall you go?"

"I don't know, it doesn't really matter—now." The dusk hid her white, set face, and she spoke monotonously.

"I am going to see the Bronco Kid. He sent for me. He's ill."

"He's not a bad sort," said Roy.

"And I suppose he'll make a new start too."

"Perhaps," said she, gazing far out over the gloomy ocean. "It all depends." After a moment she added, "What a pity that we can't all sponge off the state and begin afresh and—forget!"

"It's part of the game," said he. "I don't know why it's so, but it is. I'll see you sometimes, won't I?"

"No, boy; I think not."

"I believe I understand," he murmured, "and perhaps it's better so."

He took her two soft hands in his one good right and kissed them. "God bless you and keep you, dear, leave 'em the Cherry."

She stood straight and still as he melted into the shadows, and only the moonlight heard her pitiful sob and her hopeless whisper:

"Good-by, my boy, my boy."

He wandered down beside the sea, for his battle was not yet won, and until he was surer of himself he could not endure the ribaldry and rejoicing of his fellows. A welcome lay waiting for him in every public place, but no one there could know the mockery of it, no one could gauge the desolation that was his.

The sand, wet, packed and hard as a pavement, gave no sound to his careless steps, and thus it was that he came silently upon the one woman as she stood beside the silver surf. Had he seen her first he would have slunk past in the landward shadows, but recognizing his tall form, she called and he came, while it seemed that his lungs grew suddenly constricted, as though bound about with steel hoops.

The very pleasure of her sight pained him. He advanced eagerly, and yet with hesitation, standing stiffly aloof while his heart fluttered and his tongue grew dumb. At last she saw his bandages and her manner changed abruptly. Coming closer she touched them with caressing fingers.

"It's nothing—nothing at all," he said while his voice jumped out of all control.

"When are you—going away?"

"Don't you see? Won't you see, my daughter?"

"I do not know—not for some time." He had supposed she would go tomorrow with her uncle and—the other, to be with them through their travail. With warm impetuosity she began: "It was a noble thing you did today. Oh, I am glad and proud."

"I prefer you to think of me in that way, rather than as the wild beast you saw this morning, for I was mad, perfectly mad with hatred and revenge, and every wild impulse that comes to a defeated man. You see, I had played and lost, played and lost, again and again, till there was nothing left. What mischief brought you there? It was a terribly brutal thing, but you can't understand."

"But I can understand. I do. I know all about it now. I know the wild rage of desperation; I know the exultation of victory; I know what hate and fear are now. You told me once that the wilderness had made you a savage, and I laughed at it just as I did when you said that my contact with big things would teach me the truth, that we're all alike, and that those motives are in us all. I see now that you were right and I was very simple. I learned a great deal last night."

"I have learned much also," said he. "I wish you might teach me more."

"I—I—don't think I could teach you any more," she hesitated.

He moved as though to speak, but held back and tore his eyes away from her.

"Well?" she inquired, gazing at him covertly.

"Once, a long time ago, I read a lover's petition, and ever since knowing you I have made the constant prayer that I might be given the purity to be worthy the good in you and that you might be granted the patience to reach the good in me, but it's no use. But at least I'm glad we have met on common ground, as it were, and that you understand, in a measure. The prayer could not be answered; but through it I have found myself and I have known you. That last is worth more than a king's ransom to me. It is a holy thing which I shall reverence always, and when you go you will leave me lonely except for its remembrance."

"But I am not going," she said. "That is—unless—"

Something in her voice swept his gaze back from the shimmering canyon that rippled seaward to the rising moon. It brought the breath into his throat, and he shook as though seized by a great fear.

"Unless—what?"

"Unless you want me to."

"Oh, God! don't play with me!" He flung out his hand as though to stop her while his voice died out to a supplicating hoarseness. "I can't stand that."

"Don't you see? Won't you see?" she asked. "I was waiting here for you."

"Don't you see? Won't you see, my daughter?"

the courage to go to you since you have made it so very hard for me, my pagan." With which she came close to him, looking upward into his face, smiling a little, shrinking a little, yielding yet withholding, while the moonlight made of her eyes two bottomless, boundless pools, dark with love, and brimming with the promise of his dreams.

THE END.

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