

Rex Beach Short Stories



When the Mail Came In

By REX BEACH

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WE didn't like Montague Prosser at first—he was too clean. He wore his virtue like a bathrobe and flapped it in our faces. It was Whitewater Kelly that undertook to mitigate him one day, but, being as the nuisance stood an even fathom high and had a double action football motion about him, Whitewater's endeavors kind of broke through the ice and he languished around in his bunk the next week while we sat up nights and changed his bandages.

Yes, Monty was equally active at repartee or rough house, and he knocked Whitewater out from under his cap, slick and clean, just the way you snap a playing card out from under a coin, which phenomenon terminated our tendencies to scoff and carp.

Personally, I didn't care. If a man wants to wallow about in a disgusting daily debauch of cleanliness it is his privilege. If he squanders the fleeting moments brushing teeth, cleaning finger nails and such technicalities it stands to reason he won't have much time left to attend to his work and at the same time cultivate the essentials of life, like smoking, drinking and the proper valuation of a three card draw. But, as I say, it's up to him, and outsiders who don't see merit in such a system shouldn't try to bust up his game unless they've got good footwork and a knockout punch.

It wasn't so much these physical refinements that riled us as the rarefied atmosphere of his general mental and moral attitudes. To me there's eloquence and sentiment and romance and spiritual uplift in a real, full grown, black whiskered cuss word. It's a great help in a mountainous country. Profanity is like steam in a locomotive—takes more to run you up hill than on the level, and, inasmuch as there's only a few men on the level, a violent vocabulary is a necessary and appeals to me like a certificate of good character and general capability.

Prosser had left a widowed mother and come north on the main chance, like the rest of us, only he originated farther east. What made the particular ten strike with us was the pride he took in that same mother. He gloried in her and talked about her in that hushed and nervous way a man speaks about a real mother or a regular sweet-heart. We men folks liked him all the better for it. I say we men, for he was a "shine" with the women—all nine of them. The camp was 1,500 strong that winter, over and above which was the aforesaid galaxy of nine, stranded on their way up the river to a Dawson dance hall. The Yukon froze up, and they had to winter with us. Of course there were three married ladies, too, living with their husbands back on the Birch ridge, but we never saw them, and they didn't count. The others went to work at Eckert's theater.

Monty would have been right popular at Eckert's—he was a handsome lad—but he couldn't see those people with a fieldglass. They simply scandalized him to death.

Of course, when the actresses found out how he felt they came back at him strong, but he wrapped himself up in his dignity and held himself aloof when he came to town, so he didn't seem to mind it.

It was one afternoon in January, cold and sharp, that Ollie Marceau's team went through the ice just below our camp. She was a great dog puncher and had the best team in camp—seven fine malamutes—which she drove every day. When the animals smelled our place they ran away and dragged her into the open water below the hot springs. She was wet ten minutes, and by the time she had got out and stumbled to our bunk house she was all in. Another ten minutes with the "quack" at 30 below would have finished her, but we rushed her in by the fire and made her drink a glass of the "hootch." Martin got her parka off somehow while I slashed the strings to her minkies and had her little feet rubbed red as berries before she's quit apologizing for the trouble she'd made. A fellow learns to watch toes pretty close in the winter.

"Lord, stop your talk," we said. "This is the first chance we have had to do anything for a lady in two years. It's a downright pleasure for us to take you in this way."

"Indeed," she chattered. "Well, it isn't mutual"—and we all laughed.

We roused up a good fire and made her take off all the wet clothes she felt she could afford to, then wrung them out and hung them up to dry. We made her gulp down another whisky, too, after which I gave her some foot-gear and she slipped into one of Martin's Mackinaw shirts. We knew just how faint and shaky she felt, but she was dead game and joked with us about it.

I never realized what a cute trick she was till I saw her in that great, coarse, blue shirt with her feet to beaded moccasins, her yellow hair tousled and the sparkle of adventure in her bright eyes. She stood out like a nugget by candle light, backed, as she was, by the dingy bark walls of our cabin.

I suppose it was a bad instant for Prosser to appear. He certainly ended in wrong and found the slight shocking to his Plymouth Rock propertics.

The raw liquor we had forced on her had gone to her head a bit, as it will when you're fresh from the cold and your stomach is empty, so her face was flushed and had a pretty, reckless, daring look to it. She had her feet high up on a chair, too—not so very high, either—where they were thawing out under the warmth of the eyes, and we were all laughing at her story of the mishap.

Monty stopped on recognizing who she was, while the surprise in his face gave way to disapproval. We could see it as plain as if it was blazoned there in printer's ink, and it sobered us. The girl removed her feet and stood up.

"Miss Marceau has just had an accident," I began, but I saw his eyes fastened on the bottle on the table, and I saw also that he knew what caused the fever in her cheeks.

"Too bad," he said coldly. "If I can be of any assistance you'll find me down at the shaft house." And out he walked. I knew he didn't intend to be inhospitable, that it was just his in-



"Miss Marceau has just had an accident," I began.

fernal notions of decency and that he refused to be a party to anything as devilish as this looked—but it wasn't according to the Alaska code, and it was like a slap in the girl's face.

"I am quite dry," she said. "I'll be going now."

"You will not. You'll stay to supper and drive home by moonlight," says we. "Why, you'd freeze in a mile." She stayed. Prosser returned shortly.

During the meal Prosser never opened his mouth except to put something into it, but his manner was as full of language as an oration. He didn't thaw out the way a man should when he sees strangers wading into the grub he's paid a dollar a pound for, and when we'd finally sent the young woman off Martin turned on him.

"Young feller," said he—and his eyes were black—"I've rattled around for thirty years and seen many a good and many a bad man, but I never before seen such an intelligent fool as you are."

"What do you mean?" said the boy.

"You've broke about the only law that this here country boasts of—the law of hospitality."

"He didn't mean it that way," I spoke up. "Did you, Monty?"

"Certainly not. I'd help anybody out of trouble—man or woman—but I refuse to mix with that kind of people socially."

"That kind of people?" yelled the old man. "And what's the matter with that kind of people? You come creeping out of the milk and water east, all pink and perfumed up, and when you

get into a bacon and beans country where people sweat instead of perspiring you wrinkle your nose like a calf and while about the kind of people you find."

"And you've never been downright buggy, either, where you didn't know if you'd ever eat again, have you? Then what license have you got to blame people for the condition you find them in? How do you know what brought this girl where she is?"

"Oh, I pity any woman who is adrift on the world, if that's what you mean, but I won't make a pet out of her just because she is friendless. She must expect that when she chooses her life. Her kind are bad—bad all through. They must be."

"Not on your life! Decency runs deeper than the liver."

"Trouble with you," said I. "You've got a juvenile standard—things are all good or all bad in your eyes—and you can't like a person unless the one over balances the other. When you are older you'll find that people are like gold mines, with a thin streak of pay gold on bedrock and lots of hard digging above."

"I don't mean to be discourteous," our man continued, "but I'll never change my feelings about such things. Mind you, I'm not preaching nor asking you to change your bits—all I want is a chance to live my own life clean."

The mail came in during March, 500 pounds of it, and the camp went daffy.

Monty had the dogs harnessed ten minutes after we got the news, and drove the four miles in seventeen minutes. I've known men with sweet hearts outside, but I've never known one to act gladder than Monty did at the thought of hearing from his mother.

"You must come and see us when you make your pile," he told me. "or what's better—we'll go east together next spring and surprise her. Won't that be great? We'll walk in on her in the summer twilight while she is working in her flower garden. Can't you just see the green trees and smell the good old smells of home? The catbirds will be calling, and the grass will be clean and sweet. Why, I'm so tired of the cold and the snow and the white, white mountains that I can hardly stand it."

He ran on in that vein all the way to town, glad and hopeful and boyish—and I wondered why, with his earnestness and loyalty and broad shoulders, he had never loved any woman but his mother. When I was twenty-three my whole romantic system had been mangled and shredded from heart to gizzard. Still, some men get their age all in a lump; they're boys up till the last minute, then they get the Rip Van Winkle while you wait.

"This morning was bitter, but the 'sour doughs' were lined up outside the store waiting their turns like a crowd of first nighters, so we fell in with the rest, whipping our arms and stamping our moccasins till the chill ate into our very bones. It took hours to sort the letters, but not a man whimpered. When you wait for vital news a tension comes that chokes complaint. There was no joking here nor the elephantine persiflage which marks rough men when they foregather in the wilderness. They were the fellows who blazed the trail, bearded, shaggy and not pretty to look at, for they all knew hardship and went out strong hearted into this silent land, jesting with danger and singing in the solitudes. Here, in the presence of the mail, they laid aside their cloaks of carelessness and saw each other bared to the quick, timid with hunger for the wives and little ones behind.

There were a few like Prosser in whom there was still the glamor of the northland and the mystery of the unknown, but they were scattered, and in their eyes the anxious light was growing also.

Five months is a wearying time, and silent suspense will sap the courage. If only one could banish worry, but the long, unbearable night, when the mind leaps and scurries out into the voids of conjecture like sparks from a chimney—well, it's then you roll in your bunk and your sigh aint from the snowshoe pain.

A half frozen man in an ice clogged dory had brought us our last news, one October day, just before the river stopped, and now, after five months, the curtain parted again.

I saw McGill, the lawyer, in the line ahead of me and noted the grayness of his cheeks, the nervous way his lips worked and the futile, wandering, uselessness of his hands. Then I remembered. When his letter came the fall before it said the wife was very low, that the crisis was near and that they would write again in a few days. He had lived this endless time with fear stalking at his shoulder. He had lain down with it nightly and risen with it grinning at him in the slow, cold dawn. The boys had told me how well he fought it back week after week, but now, edging inch by inch toward the door behind which lay his message, it got the best of him.

I wrung his hand and tried to say something.

"I want to run away," he quavered. "But I'm afraid to."

When we got in at last we met men coming out, and in some faces we saw the marks of tragedy. Others smiled and these put heart into us.

Old man Tomlinson had four little girls back in Idaho. He got two letters. One was a six-month-old tax receipt, the other a laundry bill. That meant three months more of silence.

When my turn came and I saw the writing of the little woman, something gripped me by the throat, while I saw my hands shake as if they belonged to somebody else. My news was good, though, and I read it slowly—some parts twice; then at last, when I looked up, I found McGill near me.

(To Be Continued.)

OREGON NEWS NOTES

A movement is on foot in eastern Linn county to have the county court change the road district in that county so as to make a single road project in one district rather than to have the same road in several districts with as many systems of road building as there are districts.

Secretary of State Olcott has given out a complete list of candidates nominated at the May primary election for state and district offices, who have filed acceptances or who have filed as independents. All will be voted on at the election November 7. Names included in the list total 310.

For two carloads of chromium ores recently shipped to the Illinois Steel company at Chicago, the Ore-on Nickel Mining company at Riddle received a check for \$3868.95. There was less than 100 tons of ore shipped which shows that the rock was worth more than \$30 per ton at Chicago.

Girls at O. A. C. will have an opportunity this year to do real housekeeping in a real house. Governor Withcombe's old home at Corvallis has been fully equipped with modern appointments, and will be used as a practice house for students in the home economics department.

The total pear shipments from Medford of last year have already been doubled and many cars of Winter Nellis have not been forwarded. Last year 219 cars were shipped. This year 470 cars have already been billed out. The entire fruit crop promises to come up to the early estimate of 1000 cars.

Official pamphlets containing the proposed constitutional amendments and measures to be voted on at the general election, which cannot be delivered because of a change in address of the registered voters to whom they were sent, will be distributed among the high schools of the state for use by students.

With the opening of the threshing season 20 cars of grain are stored at Baker and at Haines waiting for freight cars to haul it east. More grain is constantly coming, so that warehousemen expect that everything will be filled within a short time unless there is relief from the shortage on the O-W. R. & N.

Medford townspeople have raised \$16,000 by solicitation for the construction of a \$25,000 sawmill in the Jacksonville timber belt, on the proposed line of the Medford-Blue Ledge railway. If the present campaign is reasonably successful, an attempt to raise \$75,000 for a box factory at the same place will be made.

Sloan's Liniment for Neuralgia Aches

The dull throb of neuralgia is quickly relieved by Sloan's Liniment, the universal remedy for pain. Easy to apply; it quickly penetrates without rubbing and soothes the sore muscles. Cleaner and more promptly effective than musky plasters or ointment; does not stain the skin or clog the pores. For stiff muscles, chronic rheumatism, gout, lumbago, sprains and strains it gives quick relief. Sloan's Liniment relieves the pain and inflammation and insect bites, bruises, bumps and other minor injuries to children. Get a bottle today at your Druggist, 25c.

COME TO the new Tin Shop in Lents 91 and Foster STOVEPIPE ELBOWS STOVE and FURNACE REPAIRING

We make all kinds of chicken supplies, champion Sanitary Fountains, Grit and Shell Boxes, Dry and Wet Mash Hoppers and Troughs.

We will Make Anything You Want out of Sheet Metal GUTTERING and ROOFING Bring in Your Repairing, No Job too Small A. PEARCE

The Herald is Only \$1.00 Per Year DO IT NOW!

PATENTS
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Patent Lawyers, Estab. 1889
307 Seventh St., Washington, D. C.

308 X YES IS A VOTE FOR YOUR CHILDREN

ONE NORMAL NOT ENOUGH!
Oregon has but one Normal School. This school is located at Monmouth. Excellent as is the work of this school it is utterly unable to supply but a small part of the need for trained teachers for the State.
Of more than 6,000 school teachers in the public schools of Oregon, but 13 per cent have been trained for their profession of teaching in Normal Schools.
It is a well established fact that our one Normal School cannot supply the needs of the entire state. That is why we ask for your work and vote for the proposed Eastern Oregon State Normal School at Pendleton, Oregon.

GIVE EASTERN OREGON SQUARE DEAL
Eight counties in the Willamette Valley have employed during the past five years, 203 teachers who have graduated from the Monmouth Normal as against 39 Monmouth Normal School graduates for the eight leading counties of Eastern Oregon.
During the past five years the attendance of students from nine Willamette Valley counties was 877 students as against 91 students from nine of the leading counties of Eastern Oregon.
Owing to the crowded condition of our one Normal at Monmouth and also the distance and expense of attending, students from Eastern Oregon are compelled to go to neighboring states to secure their training as teachers.

ONLY COSTS 4 CENTS PER \$1,000
The annual maintenance cost of the proposed State Normal School in Eastern Oregon amounts to but one cent of a mill or 4 cents on a thousand dollars of taxable property, isn't it worth this to have your children trained to become useful and productive citizens?

STRONG ENDORSEMENTS
Among those who strongly endorse the establishment of the proposed Eastern Oregon Normal School are Governor Withycombe, J. H. Ackerman, President of the Monmouth State Normal; W. J. Kerr, President of the Oregon Agricultural College; P. L. Campbell, President of the State University; Robert C. French, former President of the Weston Normal, and practically all of the leading educators of the State. J. A. Churchill, Superintendent of Public Instruction, voices the sentiments of those who are most familiar with the need of more adequate Normal facilities when he says:

"Oregon's greatest need for its rural schools is the teacher who has had full preparation to do her work. Such preparation can best come through Normal School training.
"I trust that the voters of the state will assist in raising the standard of our schools by establishing a State Normal School at Pendleton. The location is central, the interest of the people of Pendleton in education most excellent, and the large number of pupils in the public schools will give ample opportunity to students to get the amount of teaching practice required in a standard normal school."
All the grove educators insist that a Standard Normal School must be located in a town of 5000 or more population and having enough grade pupils for teaching practice.

VOTE RIGHT
By voting YES for No. 308 you will help to give to the school children of Oregon the same advantages enjoyed by the school children of our neighboring states.
Vote YES for No. 308
Eastern Oregon State Normal School Committee
By J. H. Gwinn, Secy., Pendleton, Ore.

(Paid advertisement)

At The Churches

Arleta Baptist Church
9:45 a. m. Bible School.
11 a. m. Preaching services.
8:00 p. m. Evening services.
7:00 p. m. B. Y. P. U. meeting.
8:00 Thursday Prayer meeting.
Everybody welcome to any and all of these services.
W. T. S. Spriggs, pastor.

Millard Avenue Presbyterian Church
10 a. m. Sabbath School.
11 a. m. Morning worship.
7:30 p. m. Y. P. S. C. E.
7:45 p. m. Evening worship.
7:30 p. m. Thursday, midweek service.
8 p. m. Thursday, choir practice.
Rev. Wm. H. Amos, Pastor.

St. Peter's Catholic Church
Sundays:
8 a. m. Low Mass.
10:30 a. m. High Mass.
8:30 a. m. Sunday School.
12 M. Choir rehearsal.
Week days: Mass at 8 a. m.

Seventh Day Adventist Church
10 a. m. Saturday Sabbath School.
11 a. m. Saturday preaching.
7:30 p. m. Wednesday, Prayer meeting.
7:45 p. m. Sunday preaching.

Kern Park Christian Church
Corner 69th St. and 46th Ave. S. E.
10 a. m. Bible School.
11 a. m. and 7:30 p. m. preaching service.
6:30 p. m. Christain Endeavor.
7:30 p. m. Thursday, mid-week prayer meeting.
A cordial welcome to all.
Rev. G. K. Berry, Pastor.

St. Pauls Episcopal Church
One block south of Woodmere station. Holy Communion the first Sunday of each month at 8 p. m. No other services that day.
Every other Sunday the regular services will be as usual.
Evening Prayer and sermon at 4 p. m. Sunday School meets at 3 p. m. B. Boatwright, Supt., L. Maffett, Sec. Rev. O. W. Taylor Rector.

Lents Evangelical Church
Sermon by the Pastor, 11 a. m. and 7:15 p. m.
Sunday School 9:45 a. m., Albert Fankhauser, Superintendent.
Y. P. A. 8:45 p. m. Paul Bradford, President.
Prayer meeting Thursday 8 p. m.
A cordial welcome to all.
T. R. Hornschuch, Pastor.

Lents Friend's Church
9:45 a. m. Bible School, Clifford Barker Superintendent.
11:00 a. m. Preaching services.
6:25 p. m. Christian Endeavor.
7:30 p. m. Preaching Services.
8:00 p. m. Thursday, mid-week prayer meeting.
A cordial welcome to all these services.
John Riley, Pastor.

Lents Baptist Church
Lord's Day, Bible School 9:45 a. m. Morning worship, 11 a. m. Elmo Heights Sunday School, 2:30 p. m.
B. Y. P. U., 6:30 p. m.
Evening worship, 7:30 p. m.
A cordial welcome to these services.
J. M. Nelson, Pastor.

Fifth Church of Christ
Fifth Church of Christ, Scientist of Portland, Ore. Myrtle Park Hall, Myrtle Park.
Services Sunday 11 a. m.
Sunday School 9:30 and 11 a. m.
Wednesday evening testimonial meeting 8 p. m.

Lents M. E. Church
Sunday School 9:45 a. m.
Preaching 11:00 a. m.
Services at Bennett Chapel at 3 p. m. Epworth League 6:30 p. m.
Preaching 7:30 p. m.
Prayer meeting Thursday evening at 7:30.
W. R. F. Browne, pastor.
Residence 5703 8th St.

Laurelwood M. E. Church
9:45 a. m. Sunday school.
11:00 a. m. preaching.
12:30 p. m. class meeting.
6:30 p. m. Epworth League.
7:30 p. m. preaching.
The pastor is assisted by a chorus choir and the Amphion Male Quartette.
8:00 p. m. Thursday evening, prayer service.
Dr. C. R. Carlos, pastor.

German Evangelical Reformed Church
Corner Woodstock Ave., and 57th St. Rev. W. G. Lienkaemper, pastor.
Sunday School 10 a. m.
Morning Worship, 11 a. m.
Y. P. S. at 7:30 p. m.
German School and Catechetical Class Saturday 10 a. m.

Third United Brethren Church
10 a. m. Sunday School.
11 a. m. Preaching.
3 p. m. Junior Christian Endeavor.
6:30 p. m. Senior Christian Endeavor.
7:30 p. m. Preaching.

Brentwood M. E. Church
10 a. m. Sunday School.
11 a. m. Preaching service.
Rev. W. L. Wilson, Pastor.

LODGE DIRECTORY
Magnolia Camp No. 4123, Royal Neighbors, meets regular Second and Fourth Wednesdays of each month at I. O. O. F. Hall, Second Wednesday social meeting. Neighbors bring your families and friends. Fourth Wednesday, business. All Neighbors requested to come. By order of the Camp.