

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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[CONTINUED.]

"You won't marry her," said Cherry quietly. "I don't know who she is, but I won't let you marry her."

She rose and smoothed her skirts. "It's time nice people were going now." She said it with a sneer at herself. "Take me out through this crowd. I'm living quietly, and I don't want these beasts to follow me."

As they emerged from the theater the morning air was cool and quiet, while the sun was just rising. The Franco Kid lighted a cigar as they passed, nodding silently at their greeting. His eyes followed them, while his hands were so still that the match burned through to his fingers; then when they had gone his teeth met and ground savagely through the tobacco so that the cigar fell, while he muttered:

"So that's the girl you intend to marry? We'll see, by God!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE water front had a strong attraction for Helen Chester and rarely did a fair day pass without finding her in some quiet spot from which she could watch the shifting life along its edge, the ships at anchor and the varied incidents of the surf.

This morning she sat in a dory pulled high up on the beach, bathed in the bright sunshine and staring at the rollers, while lines of concentration wrinkled her brow. The wind had blown for some days till the ocean beat heavily across the shallow bar, and now, as it became quieter, longshoremen were launching their craft, preparing to resume their traffic.

Not until the previous day had the news of her friends' misfortune come to her, and although she had heard no hint of fraud, she began to realize that they were involved in a serious tangle. To the questions which she anxiously put to her uncle he had replied that their difficulty arose from a technicality in the mining laws which another man had been shrewd enough to profit by. It was a complicated question, he said, and one requiring time to thrash out to an equitable settlement. She had undertaken to remind him of the service these men had done her, but with a smile, he interrupted. He could not allow such things to influence his judicial attitude, and she must not endeavor to prejudice him in the discharge of his duty. Recognizing the justice of this, she had desisted.

For many days the girl had caught scattered talk between the Judge and McNamara and between Struve and his associates, but it all seemed foreign and dry, and beyond the fact that it bore on the litigation over the Anvil creek mines, she understood nothing and cared less, particularly as a new interest had but recently come into her life, an interest in the form of a man—McNamara.

He had begun with quiet, half-concealed admiration of her, which had rapidly increased until his attentions had become of a singularly positive and resistless character.

Judge Stillman was openly delighted, while the court of one like Alec McNamara could but flatter any girl. In his presence Helen felt herself rebelling at his suit, yet as distance separated them she thought ever more kindly of it. This state of mind contrasted oddly with her feelings toward the other man she had met, for in this country there were but two. When Glenister was with her she saw his love lying nakedly in his eyes, and it exercised some spell which drew her to him in spite of herself, but when he had gone back came the distrust, the terror of the brute she felt was there behind it all. The one appealed to her while present; the other pleaded strongest while away. Now she was attempting to analyze her feelings and face the future squarely, for she realized that her affairs neared a crisis, and this, too, not a month after meeting the men. She wondered if she would come to love her uncle's friend. She did not know. Of the other she was sure—she never could.

Busied with these reflections, she noticed the familiar figure of Dextery wandering aimlessly. He was not unkind, and yet his air gave her the impression of prolonged sleeplessness. Spying her, he approached and seated himself in the sand against the boat, while at her greeting he broke into talk as if he was needful only of her friendly presence to stir his confidential chords into active vibration.

"We're in terrible shape, miss," he said. "Our mine's jammed. Somebody

run in and talked the boy out of it while I was gone, and now we can't get 'em off. He's been tryin' this here new law game that you all brought in this summer. I've been drunk. That's what makes me look so ornery."

He said the last not in the spirit of apology, for rarely does your frontiersman consider that his self-indulgences require palliation, but rather after the manner of one purveying news of mild interest, as he would inform you that

his sure-thing had broken or that he had witnessed a lynching.

"What made them jump your claim?" "I don't know. I don't know nothin' about it, because, as I remarked previous, I ain't follered the totterin' footsteps of the law none too close. Nor do I intend to. I simply draws out of the game for a spell and lets the youngster have his fling. Then if he can't make good I'll take the cards and finish it for him."

"It's like the time I was ranchin' with an Englishman up in Montana. This here party claimed the misfortune of bein' a younger son, whatever that is, and is grubstaked to a ranch by his people back home. Havin' acquired an intimate knowledge of the west by readin' Bret Harte and havin' assimilated the secrets of ranchin' by correspondence school, he is fitted ample to teach us natives a thing or two, and he does it. I am workin' his outfit as foreman, and it don't take long to show me that he's a good hearted feller in spite of his ridin' bloomers an' penechle eyeglass. He ain't never had no actual experience, but he's got a Henry Thompson Seton book that tells him all about everything from field mice to gorrillys.

"We're troubled a heap with coyotes them days, and finally this party sends home for some Rooshian wolfhounds. I'm fer pizenin' a sheep carcass, but he says:

"No, no, me deah man; that's not sportsmanlike. We'll hunt 'em—aye, hunt 'em. Only fawncy the sport we'll have ridin' to hounds!"

"We will not," says I. "I ain't goin' to do no Simon Legree stunts. It ain't man's size. Bein' English, you don't count, but I'm growed up."

"Nothin' would do him but those 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' dogs, however, and he had 'em imported clean from Berkshire or Silbere or thereabouts, four of 'em, great big blue ones. They was as handsome and imposin' as a set of solid gold teeth, but somehow they didn't seem to savvy our play none. One day the cook rolled a rain bar'l downhill from the kitchen, and when them blooded critters saw it comin' they throwed down their tails and tore out like rabbits. After that I couldn't see no good in 'em with a spyglass.

"They ain't got no grit. What makes you think they can fight?" I asked one day.

"Fight?" says H'English. "My deah man, they're full blooded. Cost seventy pun each. They're dreadful creatures when they're roused. They'll tear a wolf to pieces like a rag, kill bears, anything. Oh, rully, perfectly dreadful!"

"Well, it wasn't a week later that he went over to the east line with me to mend a barb wire. I had my pliers and a hatchet and some staples. About a mile from the house we jumped up a little brown bear that scampered off when he seen us, but, bein' agin a bluff where he couldn't get away, he climbed a cottonwood. H'English was simply frothin' with excitement.

"What a misfortune! Neyther gun nor hounds!"

"I'll scratch his back and talk pretty to him," says I, "while you run back and get a Winchester and them ferocious bulldogs."

"Wolf hounds," says he, with dignity, "full blooded, seventy pun each. They'll rend the poor beast limb from limb. I hate to do it, but it'll be good practice for them."

"They may be good renders," says I, "but don't forgit the gun."

"Well, I throwed sticks at the critter when he tried to unclimb the tree till finally the boss got back with his dogs. They set up an awful holler when they see the bear—first one they'd ever smelled, I reckon—and the little feller crawled up in some forks and watched things, cautious, while they leaped about, bayin' most fierce and blood curdlin'."

"How you goin' to get him down?" says I.

"I'll shoot him in the lower jaw," says the Britisher, "so he cawn't bite the dogs. I'll give 'em cawnfidence."

"He takes aim at Mr. Bear's chin and misses it three times runnin', he's that excited."

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