

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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(Continued from Page Three.)

corner, breathlessly. "My, but you're nervous!"

Glenister dropped his gun. It was Cherry Malotte, and from her heaving breast and the flying colors in her cheeks the men saw she had been running. She did not give them time to question, but closed and locked the door while the words came tumbling from her:

"They're on to you, boys—you'd better duck out quick. They're on their way up here now."

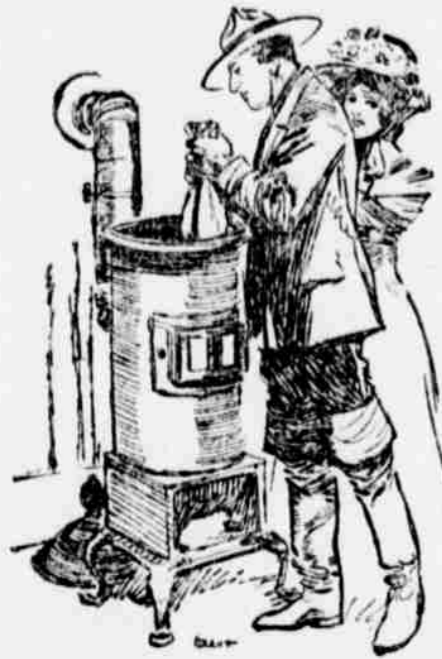
"What!"

"Who?"

"Quick! I heard McNamara and Voorhees, the marshal, talking. Somebody has spotted you for the holdups. They're on their way now. I tell you, I sneaked out by the back way and came here through the mud. Say, but I'm a sight!" She stamped her trimly booted feet and flirled her skirt.

"I don't savvy what you mean," said Dexty, glancing at his partner warningly. "We ain't done nothin'."

"Well, it's all right then. I took a long chance so you could make a get-away if you wanted to, because they've got warrants for you for that sluice



The four sacks were dropped softly into the feathery bottom.

robbery last night. Here they are now." She darted to the window, the men peering over her shoulder. Coming up the narrow walk they saw Voorhees, McNamara and three others.

The house stood somewhat isolated and well back on the tundra, so that any one approaching it by the plank had an unobstructed view of the premises. Escape was impossible, for the back door led out into the ankle deep puddles of the open prairie, and it was now apparent that a sixth man had made a circuit and was approaching from the rear.

"My God! They'll search the place," said Dexty, and the men looked grimly in each other's faces.

Then in a flash Glenister stripped back the blankets and seized the "pokes," leaping into the back room. In another instant he returned with them and faced desperately the candid bareness of the little room that they lived and slept in. Nothing could be hidden; it was folly to think of it. There was a loft overhead, he remembered hopefully, then realized that the pursuers would search there first of all.

"I told you he was a hard fighter," said Dexty as the quick footsteps grew louder. "He ain't no fool, neither. 'Stead of our beln' caught in the mountains, I reckon we'll shoot it out here. We should have cached that gold somewhere."

He spun the cylinder of his blackened Colt, while his face grew hard and culture-like.

Meanwhile Cherry Malotte watched the hunted look in Glenister's face grow wilder and then stiffen into the stubbornness of a man at bay. The posse was at the door now, knocking. The three inside stood rigid and strained. Then Glenister tossed his burden on the bed.

"Go into the back room, Cherry; there's going to be trouble."

"Who's there?" inquired Dexty through the door, to gain time. Suddenly, without a word, the girl glided to the hot blast heater, now cold and empty, which stood in a corner of the room. These stoves, used widely in the north, are vertical iron cylinders into which coal is poured from above. She lifted the lid and peered in to find it a quarter full of dead ashes, then turned with shining eyes and parted lips to Glenister. He caught the hint, and in an instant the four sacks were dropped softly into the feathery bottom and the ashes raked over. The daring maneuver was almost as quick as the flash of woman's wit that prompted it and was carried through while the answer to Dexty's

question was still unspoken.

Then Glenister opened the door carefully and admitted the group of men.

"We've got a search warrant to look through your house," said Voorhees.

"What are you looking for?"

"Gold dust from Anvil creek."

"All right—search away."

They rapidly scoured the premises, covering every inch, paying no heed to the girl, who watched them with indifferent eyes, nor to the old man, who glared at their every movement. Glenister was carelessly sarcastic, although he kept his right arm free, while beneath his sangfroid was a thoroughly trained alertness.

McNamara directed the search with a manner wholly lacking in his former mock courtesy. It was as though he had been soured by the gall of defeat. The mask had fallen off now, and his character showed—insistent, overbearing, cruel. Toward the partners he preserved a contemptuous silence.

The invaders ransacked thoroughly, while a dozen times the hearts of Cherry Malotte and her two companions stopped, then lunged onward, as McNamara or Voorhees approached, then passed the stove. At last Voorhees lifted the lid and peered into its dark interior. At the same instant the girl cried out sharply, flinging herself from her position while the marshal jerked his head back in time to see her dash upon Dexty.

"Don't! Don't!" She cried her appeal to the old man. "Keep cool. You'll be sorry, Dex—they're almost through."

The officer had not seen any movement on Dexty's part, but doubtless her quick eye had detected signs of violence. McNamara emerged, glowering, from the back room at that moment.

"Let them hunt," the girl was saying, while Dexty stared dazedly over her head. "They won't find anything. Keep cool and don't get rash."

Voorhees' duties sat uncomfortably upon him at the best, and, looking at the smoldering eyes of the two men, he became averse to further search in a powdery household whose members itched to shoot him in the back.

"It isn't here," he reported, but the politician only scowled, then spoke for the first time directly to the partners: "I've got warrants for both of you, and I'm tempted to take you in, but I won't. I'm not through yet—not by any means. I'll get you—get you both." He turned out of the door, followed by the marshal, who called off his guards, and the group filed back along the walk.

"Say, you're a jewel, Cherry. You've saved us twice. You caught Voorhees just in time. My heart hit my palate when he looked into that stove, but the next instant I wanted to laugh at Dexty's expression."

Impulsively Glenister laid his hands upon her shoulders. At his look and touch her throat swelled, her bosom heaved and the silken lids fluttered until she seemed choked by a very flood of sweet womanliness. She blushed like a little maid and laughed a timid, broken laugh. Then, pulling herself together, the merry careless tone came into her voice, and her cheeks grew cool and clear.

"You wouldn't trust me at first, eh? Some day you'll find that your old friends are the best after all."

And as she left them she added mockingly:

"Say, you're a pair of 'shine desperadoes. You need a governness."

CHAPTER XI.

A RAW, gray day, with a driving drizzle from seaward and a leaden rack of clouds drifting low, matched the sullen, fitful mood of Glenister.

During the last month he had chafed and fretted like an animal in leash for word of Wheaton. This uncertainty, this impotent waiting with folded hands, was maddening to one of his spirit. He could apply himself to no fixed duty, for the sense of his wrong preyed on him fiercely, and he found himself haunting the vicinity of the Midas, gazing at it from afar, grasping hungrily for such scraps of news as chance to reach him. McNamara allowed access to none but his minions, so the partners knew but vaguely of what happened on their property, even though, under fiction of the law, it was being worked for their protection.

No steps regarding a speedy hearing of the case were allowed, and the collusion between Judge Stillman and the receiver had become so generally recognized that there were uneasy mutterings and threats in many quarters. Yet, although the politician had by now virtually absorbed all the richest properties in the district and worked them through his hirelings, the people of Nome, as a whole, did not grasp the full turpitude of the scheme nor the system's perfect working.

Strange to say, Dexty, the fire eater, had assumed an oriental patience quite foreign to his peppery disposition and spent much of his time in the hills prospecting.

On this day, as the clouds broke about noon, close down on the angry horizon a drift of smoke appeared, shortly resolving itself into a steamer. She lay to in the offing, and through his glasses Glenister saw that it was the Roanoke. As the hours passed and no boat put off, he tried to hire a crew, but the longshoremen spat wisely and

shook their heads as they watched the surf.

"There's the devil of an undertow settin' along this beach," they told him, "and the water's too cold to drown in comfortable." So he laid firm hands upon his impatience.

Every day meant many dollars to the watcher, and yet it seemed that nature was resolute in thwarting him, for that night the wind freshened, and daylight saw the ship hugging the lee of Sledge island, miles to the westward, while the surf, white as boiling milk, boomed and thundered against the shore.

Word had gone through the street that Bill Wheaton was aboard with a writ or a subpoena or an alibi or whatever was necessary to put the "kibosh" on McNamara, so public excitement grew. McNamara hoarded his gold in the Alaska bank, and it was taken for granted that there would be the scene of the struggle. No one supposed for an instant that the usurper would part with the treasure peaceably.

On the third morning the ship lay abreast of the town again, and a lifeboat was seen to make off from her, whereupon the idle population streamed toward the beach.

"She'll make it to the surf all right, but then watch out."

"We'd better make ready to haul 'em out," said another. "It's mighty dangerous." And, sure enough, as the skill came rushing in through the breakers she was caught.

She had made it past the first line, soaring over the bar on a foamy roller crest like a storm driven gull winging in toward the land. The wiry figure of Bill Wheaton crouched in the stern, while two sailors fought with their oars. As they gathered for their rush through the last zone of froth a great comber rose out of the sea behind them, rearing high above their heads. The crowd on the surf's edge shouted. The boat wavered, snaked back into the ocean's angry maw, and with a crash the deluge engulfed them. There remained nothing but a swirling flood through which the lifeboat emerged bottom up, amid a tangle of oars, gratings and gear.

Men rushed into the water, and the next roller pounded them back upon the marble hard sand. There came the sound of splitting wood, and then a group swarmed in waist deep and bore out a dripping figure. It was a hump headed seaman, who shook the water from his mane and grinned when his breath had come.

A step farther down the beach the bystanders seized a limp form which the tide rolled to them. It was the second sailor, his scalp split from a blow of the gunwale. Nowhere was Wheaton.

Glenister had plunged to the rescue first, a heaving line about his middle, and, although buffeted about, he had reached the wreck, only to miss sight of the lawyer utterly. He had time for but a glance when he was drawn outward by the undertow till the line at his waist grew taut, then the water surged over him and he was hurled high up on the beach again. He staggered dizzily back to the struggle, when suddenly a wave lifted the cap sized cutter and righted it, and out from beneath shot the form of Wheaton, grimly clutching the life ropes. They brought him in choking and breathless.

"I got it," he said, slapping his streaming breast. "It's all right, Glenister. I knew what delay meant, so I took a long chance with the surf." The terrific ordeal he had undergone had blanched him to the lips, his legs wobbled uncertainly, and he would have fallen but for the young man, who thrust an arm about his waist and led him up into the town.

"I went before the circuit court of appeals in 'Frisco," he explained later, "and they issued orders allowing an appeal from this court and gave me a writ of supersedeas directed against old Judge Stillman. That takes the litigation out of his hands altogether and directs McNamara to turn over the Midas and all the gold he's got. What do you think of that? I did better than I expected."

Glenister wrung his hand silently, while a great satisfaction came upon him. At last this waiting was over and his peaceful yielding to injustice had borne fruit—had proved the better course after all, as the girl had prophesied. He could go to her now with clean hands. The mine was his again. He would lay it at her feet, telling her once more of his love and the change it was working in him. He would make her see it—make her see that beneath the harshness his years in the wild had given him his love for her was gentle and true and all absorbing. He would bid her be patient till she saw he had mastered himself, till he could come with his soul in harness.

"I am glad I didn't fight when they jumped us," he said. "Now we'll get our property back and all the money they took out—that is, if McNamara hasn't ratted it."

"Yes; all that's necessary is to file the documents, then serve the judge and McNamara. You'll be back on Anvil creek tomorrow."

Having placed their documents on record at the courthouse, the two men continued to McNamara's office. He met them with courtesy.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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