

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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(CONTINUED.)

"I heard you had a narrow escape this morning, Mr. Wheaton. Too bad. What do I do for you?"

The lawyer rapidly outlined his position and stated in conclusion:

"I hold certified copies of these orders with the clerk of the court ten minutes ago, and now I make formal demand upon you to turn over the Medals to Messrs. Glenister and Deery and also to return all the gold dust in your safe deposit boxes in accordance with this writ." He handed his documents to McNamara, who tossed them on his desk without examination.

"Well," said the politician quietly, "I won't do it."

Had he been slapped in the face the attorney would not have been more astonished.

"Why—you?"

"I won't do it, I said!" McNamara repeated sharply. "Don't think for a minute that I haven't gone into this fight armed for everything. Writs of subpoena—Bah!" He snapped his fingers.

"We'll see whether you'll obey or not," said Wheaton, and when he and Glenister were outside he continued:

"Let's get to the judge quick."

As they neared the Golden Gate hotel they spied McNamara entering. It was evident that he had slipped from

the rear door of his office and beaten them to the judicial ear.

"I don't like that," said Glenister. "He's up to something."

So it appeared, for they were fifteen minutes in gaining access to the magistrate and then found McNamara with him. Both men were astounded at the change in Stillman's appearance. During the last month his weak face had shrunk and altered until vacillation was betrayed in every line, and he had acquired the habit of furtively watching McNamara's slightest movement. It seemed that the part he played sat heavily upon him.

The judge examined the papers perfunctorily, and, although his air was deliberate, his fingers made clumsy work of it. At last he said:

"I regret that I am forced to doubt the authenticity of these documents."

"My heavens, man!" Wheaton cried.

"They're certified copies of orders from your superior court. They grant the appeal that you have denied us and take the case out of your hands altogether. Yes, and they order this man to surrender the mine and everything connected with it. Now, sir, we want you to enforce these orders."

Stillman glanced at the silent man in the window and replied:

"You will, of course, proceed regularly and make application in court in the proper way, but I tell you now that I won't do anything in the matter."

Wheaton stared at him fixedly until the old man snapped out:

"You say they are certified copies. How do I know they are? The signatures may all be false. Maybe you signed them yourself."

The lawyer grew very white at this and stammered until Glenister drew him out of the room.

"Come, come," he said; "we'll carry this thing through in open court. Maybe his nerve will go back on him then. McNamara has him hypnotized, but he won't dare refuse to obey the orders of the circuit court of appeals."

"He won't, eh? Well, what do you think he's doing right now?" said Wheaton. "I must think. This is the hottest game I ever played in. They told me things while I was in 'Prisco which I couldn't believe, but I guess they're true. Judges don't disobey the orders of their courts of appeal unless there is power back of them."

They proceeded to the attorney's office, but had not been there long before Slapjack Simms burst in upon them.

"Hell to pay!" he panted. "McNamara's taking your dust out of the bank."

"What's that?" they cried.

"I goes into the bank just now for an assay on some quartz samples. The assayer is busy, and I walk back into his room, and while I'm there in trots McNamara in a hurry. He don't see me, as I'm inside the private office, and I overhear him tell them to get his dust out of the vault quick."

"We've got to stop that," said Glenister. "If he takes ours, he'll take the Swedes', too. Simms, you run up to the Pioneer company and tell them about it. If he gets that gold out of there, nobody knows what'll become of it. Come on, Bill."

He snatched his hat and ran out of the room, followed by the others. That the loose-jointed Slapjack did his work with expedition was evidenced by the fact that the Swedes were close upon

their heels as the two entered the bank.

Others had followed, sensing something unusual, and the space within the doors filled rapidly. At the disturbance the clerks suspended their work, the barred doors of the safe deposit vault changed to, and the cashier laid head upon the navy Colt's at his elbow. "What's the matter?" he cried.

"We want Alec McNamara," said Glenister.

The manager of the bank appeared, and Glenister spoke to him through the heavy wire netting.

"Is McNamara in there?"

No one had ever known Morehouse to lie. "Yes, sir." He spoke hesitatingly, in a voice full of the slow rattle of Virginia. "He is in here. What of it?"

"We hear he's trying to move that dust of ours, and we won't stand for it. Tell him to come out and not hide in there like a dog."

At those words the politician appeared beside the southerner, and the two conversed softly an instant, while the impatience of the crowd grew to anger. Some one cried:

"Let's go in and drag him out," and the rumble at this was not pleasant. Morehouse raised his hand.

"Gentlemen, Mr. McNamara says he doesn't intend to take any of the gold away."

"Then he's taken it already."

"No, he hasn't."

The receiver's course had been quickly chosen at the interruption. It was not wise to anger these men too much. Although he had planned to get the money into his own possession, he now thought it best to leave it here for the present. He could come back at any time when they were off guard and get it. Beyond the door against which he stood lay \$500,000—weighed, sacked, sealed and ready to move out of the custody of this Virginian whose confidence he had tried so fruitlessly to gain.

As McNamara looked into the angry eyes of the lean faced men beyond the grating he felt that the game was growing close, and his blood tingled at the thought. He had not planned on a resistance so strong and swift, but he would meet it. He knew that they hungered for his destruction and that Glenister was their leader. He saw further that the man's hatred now stared at him openly for the first time. He knew that back of it was something more than love for the dull metal over which they wrangled, and then a thought came to him.

"Some of your work, eh, Glenister?" he mocked. "Were you afraid to come alone, or did you wait till you saw me with a lady?"

At the same instant he opened a door behind him, revealing Helen Chester. "You'd better not walk out with me, Miss Chester. This man might—well, you're safer here, you know. You'll pardon me for leaving you." He hoped he could incite the young man to some rash act or word in the presence of the girl and counted on the conspicuous heroism of his own position, facing the mob single handed, one against fifty.

"Come out," said his enemy hoarsely, upon whom the insult and the sight of the girl in the receiver's company had acted powerfully.

"Of course I'll come out, but I don't want this young lady to suffer any violence from your friends," said McNamara. "I am not armed, but I have the right to leave here unmolested—the right of an American citizen." With that he raised his arms above his head. "Out of my way!" he cried. Morehouse opened the gate, and McNamara strode through the mob.

It is a peculiar thing that, although under fury of passion, a man may fire even upon the back of a defenseless foe, yet no one can offer violence to a man whose arms are raised on high and in whose glance is the level light of fearlessness. Moreover, it is safer to face a crowd thus than a single adversary.

McNamara had seen this psychological trick tried before and now took advantage of it to walk through the press slowly, eye to eye. He did it theatrically, for the benefit of the girl, and, as he foresaw, the men fell away before him—all but Glenister, who blocked him, gun in hand. It was plain that the persecuted miner was beside himself with passion. McNamara came within an arm's length before pausing. Then he stopped, and the two stared malignantly at each other, while the girl behind the railing heard her heart pounding in the stillness. Glenister raised his hand uncertainly, then let it fall. He shook his head and stepped aside, so that the other brushed past

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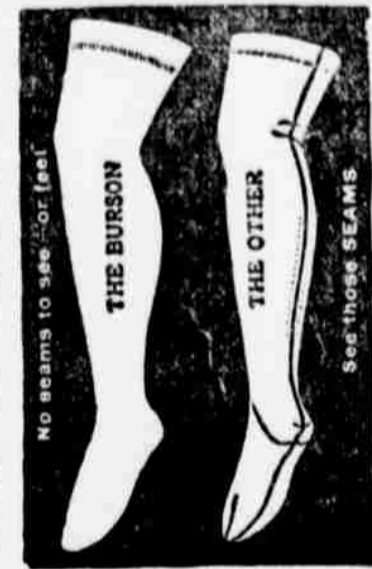
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