

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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[Continued from last week.]

"Do you remember when they broke into your safe and took that money?"

"Yes."

"Well, what made them think you had \$10,000 in there?"

"I don't know."

"I do. Dextery told her."

Glenister arose. "That's all I want to hear now. I'm going crazy. My mind aches, for I've never had a fight like this before and it hurts. You see, I've been an animal all these years. When I wanted to drink, I drank, and what I wanted, I got, because I've been strong enough to take it. This is new to me. I'm going downstairs now and try to think of something else—then I'm going home."

When he had gone she pulled back the curtains and, leaning her chin in her hands, with elbows on the ledge, gazed down upon the crowd. The show was over and the dance had begun, but she did not see it, for she was thinking rapidly with the eagerness of one who sees the end of a long and weary search. She did not notice the Bronco Kid beckoning to her, or the man with him, so the gambler brought his friend along and invaded her box. He introduced the man as Mr. Champlain.

"Do you feel like dancing?" the newcomer inquired.

"No, I'd rather look on. I feel so-rible. You're a society man, Mr. Champlain. Don't you know anything of interest? Scandal or the like?"

"Can't say that I do. My wife attends to all that for the family. But I know there's lots of it. It's funny to me the air some of these people assume up here, just as though we weren't all equal, north of fifty-three. I never heard the like."

"Anything new and exciting?" inquired Bronco, mildly interested.

"The last I heard was about the judge's niece, Miss Chester."

Cherry Malotte turned abruptly, while the Kid slowly lowered the front legs of his chair to the floor.

"What was it?" she inquired.

"Why, it seems she compromised herself pretty badly with this fellow Glenister coming on on the steamer last spring. Mighty brazen, according to my wife. Mrs. Champlain was on the same ship and says she was horribly shocked."

Ah! Glenister had told her only half the tale, thought the girl. The truth was baring itself. At that moment Champlain thought she looked the typical creature of the dance halls, the crafty, jealous, malevolent adventurer.

"And the hussy masquerades as a lady," she sneered.

"She is a lady," said the Kid. He sat bolt upright and rigid, and the muscles of his clenched hands were very white. In the shadow they did not note that his dark face was ghastly, nor did he say more except to bid Champlain goodbye when he left, later on. After the door had closed, however, the Kid arose and stretched his muscles, not languidly, but as though to take out the cramp of long tension. He wet his lips, and his mouth was so dry that the sound caused the girl to look up.

"What are you grinning at?" Then, as the light struck his face, she started. "My, how you look! What ails you? Are you sick?" No one, from Dawson down, had seen the Bronco Kid as he looked tonight.

"No; I'm not sick," he answered in a cracked voice.

Then the girl laughed harshly.

"Do you love that girl too? Why, she's got every man in town crazy!" She rushed her hands, which is a bad sign in a capable person, and as Glenister crossed the floor below in her sight she said, "Ah-h—I could kill him for that!"

"So could I," said the Kid and left her without adieu.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR a long time Cherry Malotte sat quietly thinking, removed by her mental stress to such an infinite distance from the music and turmoil beneath that she was conscious of it only as a formless clamor. She had tipped a chair back against the door, wedging it beneath the knob so that she might be saved from interruption, then flung herself into another seat and stared unseeingly. As she sat thus and thought and schemed harsh and hateful lines seemed to eat into her face. Now and then she moaned impatiently, as though fearing best the strategy she was plotting might prove futile; then she would rise and pace her narrow quarters. She was unconscious of time and had spent perhaps two hours thus when amid the buzz of talk in the next compartment she heard a name which

caused her to start, listen, then drop her preoccupation like a mantle. A man was speaking of Glenister. Excitement thrilled his voice.

"I never saw anything like it since McMaster's night in Virginia City, thirteen years ago. He's right."

"Well, perhaps so," the other replied doubtfully, "but I don't care to back you. I never 'staked' a man in my life."

"Then lend me the money. I'll pay it back in an hour, but for heaven's sake be quick. I tell you he's as right as a golden guinea. It's the lucky night of his life. Why, he turned over the black jack game in four bets. In fifteen minutes more we can't get close enough to a table to send in our money with a messenger boy—every sport in camp will be here."

"I'll stake you to fifty," the second man replied, in a tone that showed a trace of his companion's excitement.

So Glenister was gambling, the girl learned, and with such luck as to break the black jack game and excite the greed of every gambler in camp. News of his winnings had gone out into the street, and the sporting men were coming to share his fortune, to fatten like vultures on the adversity of their fellows. Those who had no money to stake were borrowing, like the man next door.

She left her retreat and, descending the stairs, was greeted by a strange sight. The dance hall was empty of all but the musicians, who blew and fiddled lustily in vain endeavor to draw from the rapidly swelling crowd that thronged the gambling room and stretched to the door. The press was thickest about a table midway down the hall. Cherry could see nothing of what went on there, for men and women stood ten deep about it and others perched on chairs and tables along the walls. A roar arose suddenly, followed by utter silence; then came the clink and rattle of silver. A moment and the crowd resumed its laughter and talk.

"All down, boys," sounded the level voice of the dealer. "The field or the favorite. He's made eighteen straight passes. Get your money on the line." There ensued another breathless instant wherein she heard the thud of dice; then followed the shout of triumph that told what the spots revealed. The dealer paid off. Glenister reared himself head and shoulders above the others and pushed out through the ring to the roulette wheel. The rest followed. Behind the circular table they had quitted, the dealer was putting away his dice, and there was not a coin in his rack. Mexico Mullins approached Cherry, and she questioned him.

"He just broke the crap game," Mullins told her. "Nineteen passes without losing the bones."

"How much did he win?"

"Oh, he didn't win much himself, but it's the people betting with him that does the damage! They're gamblers, most of them, and they play the limit. He took out the black jack bank roll first, \$4,000, then cleaned the 'Tub.' By that time the tin horns began to come in. It's the greatest run I ever see."

"Did you get in?"

"Now, don't you know that I never play anything but 'bank'? If he lasts long enough to reach the faro layout, I'll get mine."

The excitement of the crowd began to infect the girl, even though she looked on from the outside. The exultant voices, the sudden hush, the

tensity of nerve it all betokened, set her a-thrill. A stranger left the throng and rushed to the spot where Cherry and Mexico stood talking. He was small and sandy, with shifting glance and chinless jaw. His eyes glittered, his teeth shone ratlike through his dry lips, and his voice was shrill. He darted toward them like some furtive, frightened little animal, unnaturally excited.

"I guess that isn't so bad for three bets!" He shook a sheaf of banknotes at them.

"Why don't you stick?" inquired Mullins.

"I am too wise. Ha! I know when to quit. He can't win steady—he don't play any system."

"Then he has a good chance," said the girl.

"There he goes now," the little man cried as the uproar arose. "I told you he'd lose." At the voice of the multitude he wavered as though affected by some powerful magnet.

"But he won again," said Mexico.

"No! Did he? Lord! I quit too soon!"

He scampered back into the other room, only to return, hesitating, his money tightly clutched.

"Do you s'pose it's safe? I never

saw a man bet so reckless. I guess I'd better quit, eh?" He noted the sneer on the woman's face, and without waiting a reply dashed off again. They saw him clamorously fight his way in toward a post at the roulette table. "Let me through! I've got money, and I want to play it!"

"Pah!" said Mullins disgustedly. "He's one of them Vermont desperadoes that never laid a bet till he was thirty. If Glenister loses he'll hate him for life."

"There are plenty of his sort here," the girl remarked. "His soul would fit in a flea track." She spied the Bronco Kid sauntering back toward her and joined him. He leaned against the wall, watching the gossamer thread of smoke twist upward from his cigarette, seemingly oblivious to the surroundings and showing no hint of the emotion he had displayed two hours before.

"This is a big killing, isn't it?" said the girl.

The gambler nodded, murmuring indifferently.

"Why aren't you dealing bank? Isn't this your shift?"

"I quit last night."

"Just in time to miss this affair. Lucky for you."

"Yes; I own the place now. Bought it yesterday."

"Good heavens! Then it's your money he's winning!"

"Sure, at the rate of a thousand a minute."

She glanced at the long trail of devastated tables behind Glenister and his followers. At that instant the sound told that the miner had won again, and it dawned upon Cherry that the gambler beside her stood too quietly, that his hand and voice were too steady, his glance too cold to be natural. The next moment approved her instinct.

The musicians, grown tired of their endeavors to lure back the dancers, determined to join the excitement and ceased playing. The leader laid down his violin, the pianist trailed up the keyboard with a departing twitter and quit his stool. They all crossed the hall, headed for the crowd, some of them making ready to bet. As they approached the Bronco Kid, his lips thinned and slid apart slightly, while out of his heavy lidded eyes there flashed unreasoning rage. Stepping forward, he seized the foremost man and spun him about violently.

"Where are you going?"

"Why, nobody wants to dance, so we thought we'd go out front for a bit."

"Get back, all of you!" It was his first chance to vent the passion within him. A glance at his maddened features was sufficient for the musicians, and they did not delay. By the time they had resumed their duties, however, the curtains of composure had closed upon the Kid, masking his emotion again, but from her brief glimpse Cherry Malotte knew that this man was not of ice, as some supposed. He turned to her and said, "Do you mean what you said upstairs?"

"I don't understand."

"You said you could kill Glenister."

"I could."

"Don't you love?"

"I hate him," she interrupted hoarsely. He gave her a mirthful smile and, spying the crap dealer leaving his bankrupt table, called him over and said:

"Toby, I want you to drive the hearse when Glenister begins to play faro. I'll deal. Understand?"

"Sure! Going to give him a little 'work,' eh?"

"I never dealt a crooked card in this camp," exclaimed the Kid, "but I'll 'lay' that man tonight or I'll kill him! I'll use a 'sand-tell,' see? And I want to explain my signals to you. If you miss the signs you'll queer us both and put the house on the blink."

He rapidly rehearsed his signals in a jargon which to a layman would have been unintelligible, illustrating them by certain almost imperceptible shiftings of the fingers or changes in the position of his hand so slight as to thwart discovery. Through it all the girl stood by and followed his every word and motion with eager attention. She needed no explanation of the terms they used. She knew them all; knew that the "hearse driver" was the man who kept the cases; knew all the code of the "inside life." To her it was all as an open page, and she memorized more quickly than did Toby the signs by which the Bronco Kid proposed to signal what card he had smuggled from the box or held back.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Ruling on Rights of Pupils.

Lincoln, Dec. 9.—Deputy County Attorney Matson holds, in an opinion given out, that a school teacher has no right to compel a pupil to say the Lord's prayer. The question was asked of him by a Johnson county teacher, one of whose pupils refused to join in the daily devotional exercises.

Buckingham for General Manager.

Omaha, Dec. 10.—At the annual meeting of the stockholders of the Union Stock Yards company of South Omaha the following officers were elected: President, R. J. Dunham; vice president, J. D. Creighton; secretary-treasurer, J. C. Sharp; general manager, Everett Buckingham.

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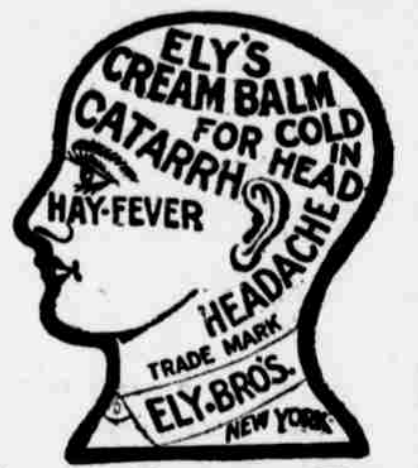
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