

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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[CONTINUED.]

when you get back you'll make the numbers of the just seem as restless as a riot or the antics of a mountain goat which nimbly leaps from crag to crag, and—well, that's restless enough, come on!"

As the sun slanted up out of Bering sea they marched back toward the hills, their feet ankle deep in the soft fresh moss, while the air tasted like a cool draft and a myriad of earthy odors rose up and encircled them. Snipe and reed birds were noisy in the hollows, and from the misty tundra lakes came the honking of brant. After their weary weeks on shipboard the dewy freshness livened them magically, cleansing from their memories the recent tragedy, so that the girl became herself again.

"Where are we going?" she asked at the end of an hour, pausing for breath.

"Why, to the Midas, of course," they said, and one of them vowed recklessly as he drank in the beauty of her clear eyes and the grace of her slender, panting form that he would gladly give his share of all its riches to undo what he had done one night on the Santa Maria.

CHAPTER V.

IN the lives of countries there are crises where for a breath destinies lie in the laps of the gods and are jumbled, heads or tails. Thus are marked distinctive cycles like the seven ages of a man, and, though perhaps they are too subtle to be perceived at

the time, yet, having swung past the shadowy milestones, the epochs disclose themselves.

Such a period in the progress of the far northwest was the 19th day of July, although to those concerned in the building of this new empire the day appeared only as the date of the coming of the law. All Nome gathered on the sands as lighters brought ashore Judge Stillman and his following. It was held fitting that the Senator should be the ship to safeguard the dignity of the first court and to introduce justice into this land of the wild.

The interest awakened by his honor was augmented by the fact that he was met on the beach by a charming girl, who flung herself upon him with evident delight.

"That's his niece," said some one. "She came up on the first boat. Name's Chester. Swell looking, eh?"

Another newcomer attracted even more notice than the flub of the law; a gigantic, well groomed man, with keen, close set eyes and that indefinable easy movement and polished bearing that come from confidence, health and travel. Unlike the others, he did not dally on the beach or display much interest in his surroundings, but with purposeful frown strode through the press up into the heart of the city. His companion was Struve's partner, Dunham, a middle aged, pompous man. They went directly to the offices of Dunham & Struve, where they found the white haired junior partner.

"Mighty glad to meet you, Mr. McNamara," said Struve. "Your name is a household word in my part of the country. My people were mixed up in Dakota politics somewhat, so I've always had a great admiration for you, and I'm glad you've come to Alaska. This is a big country, and we need big men."

"Did you have any trouble?" Dunham inquired when the three had adjourned to a private room.

"Trouble," said Struve ruefully. "Well, I wonder if I did. Miss Chester brought me your instructions O. K. and I got busy right off. But tell me this—how did you get the girl to act as messenger?"

"There was no one else to send," answered McNamara. "Dunham intended sailing on the first boat, but he was detained in Washington with me, and the judge had to wait for us at Seattle. We were afraid to trust a stranger for fear he might get curious and examine the papers. That would have meant"—He moved his hand eloquently.

Struve nodded. "I see. Does she know what was in the documents?"

"Decidedly not. Women and business don't mix. I hope you didn't tell her anything."

"No, I haven't had a chance. She seemed to take a dislike to me for some reason. I haven't seen her since the day after she got here."

"The judge told her it had something to do with preparing the way for his court," said Dunham, "and that if the papers were not delivered before he arrived it might cause a lot of trouble—litigation, riots, bloodshed and all

that. He filled her up on generalities till the girl was frightened to death and thought the safety of her uncle and the whole country depended on her."

"Well," continued Struve, "it's dead easy to hire men to jump claims, and it's dead easy to buy their rights afterward, particularly when they know they haven't got any. But what course do you follow when owners go gunning for you?"

McNamara laughed. "Who did that?"

"A benevolent, silver haired old Texan pirate by the name of Dextry. He's one-half owner in the Midas and the other half mountain lion, as peaceable, you'd imagine, as a benediction, but with the temperament of a Geronimo. I sent Galloway out to relocate the claim, and he got his notices up in the night when they were asleep, but at 6 a. m. he came flying back to my room and nearly hammered the door down. I've seen fright in varied forms and phases, but he had them all, with some added starters."

"Hide me out, quick!" he panted.

"What's up?" I asked.

"I've stirred up a breakfast of grizzly bear, smallpox and sudden death, and it don't set well on my stummick. Let me in."

"I had to keep him hidden three days, for this gentle mannered old cannibal roused the streets with a cannon in his hand, breathing fire and pestilence."

"Anybody else act up?" queried Dunham.

"No; all the rest are Swedes, and they haven't got the nerve to fight. They couldn't lick a spoon if they tried. These other men are different, though. There are two of them—the old one and a young fellow. I'm a little afraid to mix it up with them, and if their claim wasn't the best in the district I'd say let it alone."

"I'll attend to that," said McNamara.

Struve resumed:

"Yes, gentlemen, I've been working pretty hard and also pretty much in the dark so far. I'm groping for light. When Miss Chester brought in the papers I got busy instantly. I clouded the title to the richest placers in the region, but I'm blam'd if I quite see the use of it. We'd be thrown out of any court in the land if we took them to law. What's the game—blackmail?"

"Humph!" ejaculated McNamara.

"What do you take me for?"

"Well, it does seem small for Alec McNamara, but I can't see what else you're up to."

"Within a week I'll be running every good mine in the Nome district."

McNamara's voice was calm, but decisive, his glance keen and alert, while about him clung such a breath of power and confidence that it compelled belief even in the face of this astounding speech.

In spite of himself Wilton Struve, lawyer, rake and gentlemanly adventurer, felt his heart leap at what the other's daring implied. The proposition was utterly past belief, and yet, looking into the man's purposeful eyes, he believed.

"That's big—awful big—too big," the younger man murmured. "Why, man, it means you'll handle \$50,000 a day!"

Dunham shifted his feet in the silence and licked his dry lips.

"Of course it's big, but Mr. McNamara's the biggest man that ever came to Alaska," he said.

"And I've got the biggest scheme that ever came north, backed by the biggest men in Washington," continued the politician. "Look here!" He displayed a typewritten sheet bearing parallel lists of names and figures. Struve gasped incredulously.

"Those are my stockholders, and that is their share in the venture. Oh, yes, we're incorporated—under the laws of Arizona; secret, of course. It would never do for the names to get out. I'm showing you this only because I want you to be satisfied who's behind me."

"Lord, I'm satisfied," said Struve, laughing nervously. "Dunham was with you when you figured the scheme out, and he met some of your friends in Washington and New York. If he says it's all right, that settles it. But, say, suppose anything went wrong with the company and it leaked out who those stockholders are?"

"There's no danger. I have the books where they will be burned at the first sign. We'd have had our own land laws passed but for Sturtevant of Nevada, curse him. He blocked us in the senate. However, my plan is this." He rapidly outlined his proposition to the listeners, while a light of admiration grew and shone in the reckless face of Struve.

(Continued on Page Six.)

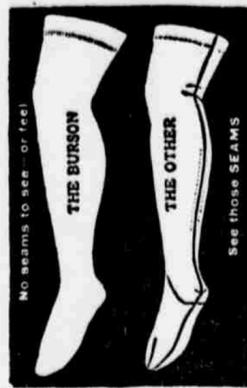
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