

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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(Continued from Page Three.)

"By heavens, you're a wonder!" he cried at the close. "And I'm with you body and soul. It's dangerous—that's why I like it."

"Dangerous?" McNamara shrugged his shoulders. "Bah! Where is the danger? We've got the law, or, rather, we are the law. Now, let's get to work."

It seemed that the boss of North Dakota was no sluggard. He discarded coat and waistcoat and tackled the documents which Struve laid before him, going through them like a whirlwind. Gradually he infected the others with his energy, and soon behind the locked doors of Dunham & Struve there were only haste and fever and plot and intrigue.

As Helen Chester led the judge toward the flamboyant, three storied hotel she prattled to him light heartedly. The fascination of a new land already held her fast, and now she felt, in addition, security and relief. Glenister saw them from a distance and strode forward to greet them.

He beheld a man of perhaps three score years, benign of aspect save for the eyes, which were neither clear nor steady, but had the trick of looking past one. Glenister thought the mouth, too, rather weak and vacillating, but the clean shaven face was dignified by learning and acumen and was wrinkled in pleasant fashion.

"My niece has just told me of your service to her," the old gentleman began. "I am happy to know you, sir."

"Besides being a brave knight and assisting ladies in distress, Mr. Glenister is a very great and wonderful man," Helen explained lightly. "He owns the Midas."

"Indeed!" said the old man, his shifting eyes now resting full on the other with a flash of unmistakable interest. "I hear that is a wonderful mine. Have you begun work yet?"

"No. We'll commence sluicing day after tomorrow. It has been a late spring. The snow in the gulch was deep and the ground thaws slowly. We've been building houses and doing dead work, but we've got our men on the ground waiting."

"I am greatly interested. Won't you walk with us to the hotel? I want to hear more about these wonderful placers."

"Well, they are great placers," said the miner as the three walked on together. "Nobody knows how great because we've only scratched at them yet. In the first place, the ground is so shallow and the gold is so easy to get that if nature didn't safeguard us in the winter we'd never dare leave our claims for fear of 'snipers.' They'd run in and rob us."

"How much will the Anvil creek mines produce this summer?" asked the judge.

"It's hard to tell, sir, but we expect to average \$5,000 a day from the Midas alone, and there are other claims just as good."

"Your title is all clear, I dare say, eh?"

"Absolutely except for one jumper, and we don't take him seriously. A fellow named Galloway relocated us one night last month, but he didn't allege any grounds for doing so, and we could never find trace of him. If we had, our title would be as clean as snow again." He said the last with a peculiar inflection.

"You wouldn't use violence, I trust?"

"Sure! Why not? It has worked all right heretofore."

"But, my dear sir, those days are gone. The law is here, and it is the duty of every one to abide by it."

"Well, perhaps it is, but in this country we consider a man's mine as sacred as his family. We didn't know what a lock and key were in the early times, and we didn't have any troubles except famine and hardship. It's different now, though. Why, there have been more claims jumped around here this spring than in the whole length and history of the Yukon."

They had reached the hotel, and Glenister paused, turning to the girl as the judge entered. When she started to follow, he detained her.

"I came down from the hills on purpose to see you. It has been a long week"—

"Don't talk that way," she interrupted coldly. "I don't care to hear it."

"See here, what makes you shut me out and wrap yourself up in your haughtiness? I'm sorry for what I did that night. I've told you so repeatedly. I've wrung my soul for that act till there's nothing left but repentance."

"It is not that," she said slowly. "I have been thinking it over during the past month, and now that I have gained an insight into this life I see that it wasn't an unnatural thing for you to do. It's terrible to think of, but it's

true. I don't mean that it was pardonable," she continued quickly, "for it wasn't, and I hate you when I think about it, but I suppose I put myself into a position to invite such actions. No; I'm sufficiently broadminded not to blame you unreasonably, and I think I could like you in spite of it, just for what you have done for me. But that isn't all. There is something deeper. You saved my life, and I'm grateful, but you frighten me always. It is the cruelty in your strength. It is something away back in you—lustful and ferocious and wild and crouching." He smiled wryly.

"It is my local color maybe, absorbed from this country. I'll try to change, though, if you want me to. I'll let them rope and throw and brand me. I'll take on the graces of civilization and put away revenge and ambition and all the rest of it if it will make you like me any better. Why, I'll even promise not to violate the person of our claim jumper if I catch him, and heaven knows that means that Samson has parted with his locks."

"I think I could like you if you did," she said, "but you can't do it. You are a savage."

There are no clubs nor marts where men foregather for business in the north—nothing but the saloon, and this is all and more than a club. Here men congregate to drink, to gamble and to traffic.

It was late in the evening when Glenister entered the Northern and passed idly down the row of games, pausing at the crap table, where he rolled the dice when his turn came. Moving to the roulette wheel, he lost a stack of whites, but at the faro "lay-out" his luck was better, and he won a gold coin on the high card, whereupon he promptly ordered a round of drinks for the men grouped about him, a formality always precedent to overtures of general friendship.

As he paused, glass in hand, his eyes were drawn to a man who stood close by, talking earnestly. The aspect of the stranger challenged notice, for he stood high above his companions, with a peculiar grace of attitude in place of the awkwardness common in men of great stature. Among those who were listening intently to the man's carefully modulated tones Glenister recognized Mexico Mullins, the ex-gambler who had given Dextery the warning at Unalaska. As he further studied the listening group a drunken man staggered uncertainly through the wide doors of the saloon and, gaining sight of the tall stranger, blinked, then ap-



"I've been waitin' a terrible time for this day."

proached him, speaking with a loud voice:

"Well, if 'tain't ole Alec McNamara! How do, ye ole pirate?"

McNamara nodded and turned his back coolly upon the newcomer.

"Don't turn your dorsal fin to me. I wan' to talk to ye."

McNamara continued his calm discourse till he received a vicious whack on the shoulder. Then he turned for a moment to interrupt his assailant's garrulous profanity:

"Don't bother me. I am engaged."

"Ye won't talk to me, eh? Well, I'm goin' to talk to you, see. I guess you'd listen if I told these people all I know about you. Turn around here."

His voice was menacing and attracted general notice. Observing this, McNamara addressed him, his words dropping clear, concise and cold:

"Don't talk to me. You are a drunk on nuisance. Go away before something happens to you."

Again he turned away, but the drunken man seized and whirled him about, repeating his abuse, encouraged by this apparent patience.

"Your pardon for an instant, gentlemen," McNamara laid a large white and manicured hand upon the flannel sleeve of the miner and gently escorted him through the entrance to the sidewalk, while the crowd smiled.

As they cleared the threshold, however, he clutched his fist without a word and, raising it, struck the sot fully and cruelly upon the jaw. His victim fell silently, the back of his head striking the boards with a hollow thump; then, without even observing how he lay, McNamara re-entered the saloon and took up his conversation where he had been interrupted. His voice was as evenly regulated as his movements, betraying not a sign of anger, excitement or bravado. He lit a cigarette, extracted a notebook and

jotted down certain memoranda supplied him by Mexico Mullins.

All this time the body lay across the threshold without a sign of life. The buzz of the roulette wheel was resumed, and the crap dealer began his monotonous routine. Every eye was fixed on the nonchalant man at the bar, but the unconscious creature outside the threshold lay unheeded, for in these men's code it behooves the most humane to practice a certain aloofness in the matter of private brawls.

Having completed his notes, McNamara shook hands gravely with his companions and strode out through the door, past the bulk that sprawled across his path and without pause or glance disappeared.

A dozen willing, though unsympathetic, hands laid the drunkard on the roulette table, where the bartender poured pitcher upon pitcher of water over him.

"He ain't hurt none to speak of," said a bystander; then added, with enthusiasm:

"But, say, there's a man in this here camp!"

CHAPTER VI.

"WHO'S your new shift boss?" Glenister inquired of his partner a few days later, indicating a man in the cut below, bused in setting a line of sluices.

"That's old Slapjack Simms, friend of mine from up Dawson way."

Glenister laughed immoderately, for the object was unusually tall and loose jointed and wore a soiled suit of yellow mackinaw. He had laid off his coat, and now the baggy, bilious trousers hung precariously from his angular shoulders by suspenders of alarming frailty. His legs were lost in gun boots, also loose and cavernous, and his entire costume looked relaxed and flapping, so that he gave the impression of being able to shake himself out of his raiment and to rise like a burlesque Aphrodite. His face was overgrown with a grizzled tangle that looked as though it had been trimmed with buttonhole scissors, while above the brush heap grandly soared a shiny, dome-like head.

"Has he always been bald?"

"Naw! He ain't bald at all. He shaves his nob. In the early days he wore a long flowin' mane which was inhabited by crickets, tree toads and such fauna. It got to be a hobby with him finally, so that he grooved superstitious about goin' uncurried and would back into a corner with both guns drawn if a barber came near him. But once Hank—that's his real name—undertook to fry some slapjacks and in givin' the skillet a heave, the dough lit among his forest primeval, jest back of his ears, soft side down. Hank poluted the gulch with langwidge which no man had ought to keep in himself without it was fumigated. Disreppitableness oozed out through him like sweat through an ice pitcher, an' since then he's been known as Slapjack Simms an' has kept his head shingled smooth as a gun bar'l. He's a good miner, though. Ain't none better—an' square as a die."

Sluicing had begun on the Midas. Long sinuous lengths of canvas hose wound down the creek bottom from the dam, like gigantic serpents, while the roll of gravel through the flumes mingled musically with the rush of waters, the tinkle of tools and the song of steel on rock. There were four "strings" of boxes abreast, and the heaving line of shovellers ate rapidly into the creek bed, while teams with scrapers splashed through the tail races in an atmosphere of softened profanity. In the big white tents which sat back from the bluffs, fifty men of the night shift were asleep, for there is no respite here—no night, no Sunday, no halt, during the hundred days in which the northland leads herself to pillage.

The mine lay cradled between wonderful, mossy, willow mottled mountains, while above and below the gulch was dotted with tents and huts, and everywhere, from basin to hill crest, men dug and blasted, punily, patiently, while their tracks grew daily plainer over the face of this inscrutable wilderness.

A great contentment filled the two partners as they looked on this scene. To wrest from reluctant earth her richest treasures, to add to the wealth of the world, to create—here was satisfaction.

"We ain't robbin' no widders an' orphans doin' it, neither," Dextery suddenly remarked, expressing his partner's feelings closely. They looked at each other and smiled with that rare understanding that exceeds words.

Descending into the cut, the old man filled a gold pan with dirt taken from under the feet of the workers and washed it in a puddle, while the other watched his dexterous whirling motions. When he had finished they poked the stream of yellow grains into a pile; then, with heads together, guessed its weight, laughing again delightfully, in perfect harmony and contentment.

"I've been waitin' a terrible time for this day," said the elder. "I've suf-

fered slipped, and it crashed against a brace which held the sluices in place. These boxes stand more than a man's height above the bedrock, resting on supporting posts and running full of water. Should a sluice fall the rush-

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ing stream carries out the gold which has lodged in the riffles and floods the bedrock, raising havoc. Too late the partners saw the string of boxes sway and bend at the joint; then, before they could reach the threatened spot to support it, Slapjack Simms, with a shriek, plunged flapping down into the cut and seized the flume. His great height stood him in good stead now, for where the joint had opened water poured forth in a cataract. He dived under the breach unhesitatingly and, stooping, lifted the line as near to its former level as possible, holding the entire burden upon his naked pate.

He gesticulated wildly for help, while over him poured the deluge of icy, muddy water. It entered his gaping waistband, bulging out his yellow trousers till they were fat and full and the seams were bursting, while his yawning boot tops became as boiling springs. Meanwhile he chattered forth profanity in such volume that the ear ached under it as must have ached the heroic Slapjack under the chill of the melting snow. He was relieved quickly, however, and emerged triumphant, though blue and puckered, his wilderness of whiskers streaming like limber stalactites, his boots loosely "squishing," while oaths still poured from him in such profusion that Dextery whispered:

"Ain't he a ring tailed wonder? It's plumb solemn an' reverent the way he makes them untamed cuss words sit up an' beg. It's a privilege to be present. That's a gift, that is."

"You'd better get some dry clothes," they suggested, and Slapjack proceeded a few paces toward the tents, hobbling as though treading on pounded glass.

"Ow-w!" he yelled. "These blasted boots is full of gravel."

He seated himself and tugged at his foot till the boot came away with a sucking sound; then, instead of emptying the accumulation at random, he poured the contents into Dextery's empty glass.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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