The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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[Continued from last week.]

Men spoke; some laughed, but in their laughter was no mirth. It was more like the sound of choking. They stamped their feet to relieve the grip of strained muscles. The dealer reached forth and slid the stack of bills into the drawer at his waist without counting. The case keeper passed a shaking hand over her face, and when it came away she saw blood on her fingers where she had sank her teeth into her lower lip. Glenister did not rise. He sat, heavy browed and sullen, his Jaw thrust forward, his hair low upon his forehead, his eyes bloodshot and dead. "I'll sit the hand out if you'll let me

bet the 'finger,' " said he. "Certainly," replied the dealer.

When a man requests this privilege, it means that he will call the amount of his wager without producing the visible stakes, and the dealer may accept or refuse according to his judgment of the bettor's responsibility. It is safe, for no man shirks a gambling debt in the north, and thousands may go with a nod of the head though never a cent be on the board.

There were still a few cards in the box, and the dealer turned them, paying the three men who played. Glenister took no part, but sat buiked over his end of the table, glowering from beneath his shock of hair,

Cherry was deathly tired. The strain of the last hour had been so intense that she could barely sit in her seat. yet she was determined to finish the hand. As Bronco paused before the last turn many of the bystanders made bets. They were the "case players" who risked money only on the final pair, thus avoiding the chance of two cards of like denomination coming together, in which event ("splits" it is called) the dealer takes half the money. The stakes were laid at last and the deal about to start when Glenister speke. "Wait! What's this place worth, Bronco?"

"What do you mean?"

"You own this outfit?" He waved his hand about the room. "Well, what does it stand you?"

The gambler hesitated an instant, while the crowd pricked up its ears, and the girl turned wondering, troubled eyes upon the miner. What would he do now?

"Counting bank rolls, fixtures and all, about \$120,000. Why?"

"I'll pick the ace to lose, my one-half interest in the Midas against your

There was an absolute hush while the realization of this offer smote the onlookers. It took time to realize it. This man was insane. There were three cards to choose from-one would win, one would lose, and one would have no action.

Of all those present only Cherry Malotte divined even vaguely the real reason which prompted the man to do this. It was not "gameness" nor altogether a brutish stubbornness which would not let him quit. It was something deeper. He was desolate, and his heart was gone. Helen was lost to him-worse yet, was unworthy and she was all he cared for. What did he want of the Midas, with its lawsuits, its intrigues and its trickery? He was sick of it all, of the whole game, and wanted to get away. If he won, very well. If he lost, the land of the aurora would know him no more.

When he put his proposition the Bronco Kid dropped his eyes as though debating. The girl saw that he stu-

died the cards in his box intently and that his fingers caressed the top one ever so softly during the instant the eyes of the rest were on Glenister, The dealer looked up at last, and Cherry saw the gleam of triumph in his eye. He could not mask it from her, though his answering words were hesitating. She knew by the look that Glenister was a pauper.

"Come on." insisted Roy hoarsely; "turn the cards,"

"You're on!" The girl felt that she was fainting. She wanted to scream. The triumph of this moment stifled her or was it triumph, after all? She heard the ... breath of the little man behind her rattle as though he were being throttled and saw the lookout pass a shaking hand to his chin, then wet his parched lips. She saw the man she had helped to ruin bend forward, his lean face strained and hard, an odd look of pain and weariness in his eyes. She never forgot that look. The crowd was frozen in various attitudes home. of eagerness, although it had not yet recovered from the suspense of the last great wager. It knew the Midas and what it meant. Here lay half of vilues anyhow." it, hidden beneath a tawdry square of pasteboard. With maddening deliberation the Kid dealt the top card. Be- hard work or are you truly ill? You're

ister said no word nor made a move. Some one coughed, and it sounded like a gunshot. Slowly the dealer's fingers retraced their way. He hesitated purposely and leered at the girl, then the three spot disappeared and beneath it lay the ace as the king had fain on that other wager. It spelled utter ruin to Glenister. He raised his eyes bfindly, and then the deathlike silence of the room was shattered by a sudden crash. Cherry Malotte had closed her cheek rack violently, at the same instant crying shrill and clear;

"That bet is off! The cases are

Glenister half rose, overturning his chair; the Kid lunged forward across the fable, and his wonderful hands, tense and talon-like, thrust themselves forward as though reaching for the riches she had snatched away. They worked and writhed and trembled as though in dumb fury, the nails sinking into the oilcloth table cover. His face grew livid and cruel, while his eyes blazed at her till she shrank from him affrightedly, bracing herself away from the table with rigid arms.

Reason came slowly back to Glenister and understanding with it. He seemed to awake from a nightmare. He could read all too plainly the gambler's look of baffled hate as the man sprawled on the table, his arms spread wide, his eyes glaring at the cowering woman, who shrank before him like a rabbit before a snake. She tried to speak, but choked. Then the dealer came to himself and cried harshly through his teeth one word;

"Christ!" He raised his fist and struck the table so violently that chips and conpers leaped and rolled, and Cherry closed her eyes to lose sight of his aw ful grimace. Glenister looked down on him and said:

"I think I understand, but the money was yours anyhow, so I don't mind." His meaning was plain. The Kid suddenly jerked open the drawer before him, but Glenister clinched his right hand and leaned forward. The miner could have killed him with a blow, for the gambler was seated and at his mercy. The Kid checked himself. while his face began to twitch as though the nerves underlying it had broken bondage and were dancing in a wild, ungovernable orgy.

"You have taught me a lesson," was all that Glenister said, and with that he pushed through the crowd and out ito the cool night air. arctic stars winked at him, and the



"That bet is off! The cases are wrong!" sea smells struck him clean and fresh. As he went homeward he heard the distant full throated plaint of a wolf dog. It held the mystery and sadness of the north. He paused and, baring his thick, matted head, stood for a long time gathering himself together. Standing so, he made certain covenants with himself and vowed solemn-

ly never to touch another card, At the same moment Cherry Malotte came imrrying to her cottage door, fleeing as though from pursuit or from some hateful, haunted spot. She paused before entering and flung her arms outward into the dark in a wide gesture of despair.

"Why did I do it? Oh, why did I do it? I can't understand myself."

CHAPTER XIV. Y dear Helen, don't you re alize that my official position carries with it a certain social obligation which

"I suppose so, Uncle Arthur; but I would much rather stay at home." "Tut, tut! Go and have a good time." "Dancing doesn't appeal to me any

It is our duty to discharge?"

more. I left that sort of thing back Now, if you would only come "No; I'm too busy. I must work totight, and I'm not in a mood for such

"You're not well," his niece sald. "I have noticed it for weeks. Is it neath it was the trey of spades. Glen- newcons: you don't eat; you're goest-

ing positively gaunt. way, you're getting wrinkles like an old man!" She rose from her seat at the breakfast table and went to him, smoothing his silvered head with affection.

He took her cool hand and pressed it to his cheek, while the worry that haunted him habitually of late gave way to a smile.

"It's work, little girl-hard and find out." thankless work, that's all. This country is intended for young men, and I'm at which McNamara flared up. too far along." His eyes grew grave again, and he squeezed her fingers nervously as though at the thought, this hall, too, or you'll answer to me, "It's a terrible country this. I-Iwish we had never seen it."

"Don't say that," Helen cried spiritthe honor. You're a United States judge and the first one to come here, idiom, You're making history; you're building a state; people will read about you." She stooped and kissed him, but he seemed to flinch beneath her caress,

"Of course I'll go if you think I'd better," she said, "though I'm not fond The boss' reputation had gone abroad. of Alaskan society. Some of the women are nice, but the others"- She shrugged her dainty shoulders. "They talk scandal all the time. One would drop." think that a great, clean, fresh, vigorous country like this would broaden but it doesn't."

"I'll tell McNamara to call for you at long unused finery to such good purher that evening he believed her the loveliest of women.

Upon their arrival at the hotel he regarded her with a fresh access of you can't blame her."

pride, for the function proved to bear With a word McNamara could have party. The women were handsome boxes, while its floor was like polished

just like home."

"I've seen quick rising cities before," be said, "but nothing like this. home." Still, if these northerners can build a railroad in a month and a city in a summer why shouldn't they have symballrooms?"

she said.

"You shall be my judge and jury.

After the first waltz he left her surrounded by partners and made his way out of the ballroom. This was his first relaxation since landing in the north. It was well not to become a dull boy, he mused, and as he chewed his clgar he pictured, with an odd thrill, quite brutal!" Her voice caught, and she unusual with him, that slender, gray bit her lip. "What made me ask eyed girl, with her coiled mass of hair, her ivory shoulders and merry smile. He saw her float past to the measure of a two-step and caught bimself resenting the thought of another man's enjoyment of the girl's charms even for an instant.

"Hold on, Alec," he muttered. You're too old a bird to lose your head." However, he was waiting for her before the time for their next dance. She seemed to have lost a part of her gavety.

"What's the matter? Aren't you enloving yourself?"

"Oh, yes," she returned brightly "I'm having a delightful time"

When he came for his third dance she was more distrait than ever. As he led her to a seat they passed a group of women, among whom were Mrs. Champain and others whom be knew to be wives of men prominent in the town. He had seen some of them at tea in Judge Stillman's house and therefore was astonished when they returned his greeting, but ignored Helen. She shrank slightly, and he realized that there was something wrong. He could not guess what. Affairs of men he could cope with, but the subtleties of women were out of his realm.

"What ails those people? Have they

offended you?" "I don't know what it is, I have spoken to them, but they cut me."

"Cut you!" he exclaimed. "Yes." Her voice trembled, but she held her head high. "It seems as though all the women in Nome were , here and in league to ignore me. It dazes me. I do not understand."

he inquired fiercely. "Any man, I

mean? "No, no! The men are kind. It's the

women." "Come, we'll go home."

"Indeed, we will not," she said proudly. "I shall stay and face it out. I yet was not ready. have done nothing to run away from. and I intend to find out what is the

"All right."

"Your wife has been entertained at Miss Chester's house. I've seen ber there. Tonight she refuses to speak to the girl. She cut her dead, and I wart to know what it's about."

"How should I know?" "If you don't know, I'll ask you to

The other shook his head amusedly,

"I say you will, and you'll make your wife apologize before she leaves man to man. I won't stand to have a girl like Miss Chester cold decked by a bunch of mining camp swells, and edly. "Why, it's glorious. Think of that goes as it lies." In his excitement McNamara reverted to his western

The other did not reply at once, for it is embarrassing to deal with a person who disregards the conventions utterly, and at the same time has the inclination and force to compel obedience.

"Well-er-I know about it in a general way, but of course I don't go much on such things. You'd better let it

"There has been a lot of talk among the women as it broadens the men- the ladies about-well, er-the fact is, it's that young Glenister. Mrs. Champlan had the next stateroom to them-9 o'clock," said the judge as he arose, er-him-I should say- on the way up So, later in the day, she prepared her from the States, and she saw things. Now, as far as I'm concerned, a girl pose that when her escort called for can do as she pleases, but Mrs. Champian has her own ideas of propriety. From what my wife could learn, there's some truth in the story, too, so

little resemblance to a mining camp explained the gossip and made this man put his wife right, forcing through gowns, and every man was in evening her an elucidation of the silly affair dress. The wide hall ran the length in such a way as to spare Helen's of the hotel and was flanked with feelings and cover the busy tongued magpies with confusion. Yet he hesiglass and its walls effectively deco- tated. It is a wise skipper who trims his sails to every breeze. He thanked "Oh, how lovely!" exclaimed Helen his informant and left him. Entering as she first caught sight of it. "It's the lobby, he saw the girl hurrying toward him.

"Take me away, quick! I want to go

"You've changed your mind?"

"Yes, let us go," she panted, and when they were outside she walked so phony orchestras and Louis Quinze rapidly that he had difficulty in keeping pace with her. She was silent, and "I know you're a splendid dancer," he knew better than to question, but when they arrived at her house he entered, took off his overcoat and I'll sign this card as often as I dare turned up the light in the tiny parlor. without the certainty of violence at She flung her wraps over a chair, the hands of these young men, and the storming back and forth like a little rest of the time I'll smoke in the lobby. fury. Her eyes were starry with tears I don't care to dance with any one but of anger, her face was flushed, her hands worked nervously. He leaned against the mantel, watching her through his efgar smoke.

"You needn't tell me," he said at length. "I know all about it."

"I am glad you do. I never could repeat what they said. Oh, it was them? Why didn't I keep still? After you left I went to those faced them. Ob, but they were brutal! Yet, why should I care?" She stamped her slippered foot.

"I shall have to kill that man some day," he said, fleeking his eigar ashes into the grate.

"What man?" She stood still aufi looked at him.

"Glenister, of course. If I had thought the story would ever reach you I'd have shut him up long ago."

"It didn't come from him." she cried, hot with indignation. "He's a gentleman. It's that cat, Mrs. Champian."

He shrugged his shoulders the slightest bit, but it was eloquent, and she noted it. "Oh, I don't mean that he dld it intentionally-he's too decent a chap for that--but anybody's tougue will wag to a beautiful girl! My lady Malotte is a jealous trick.'

"Malotte! Who is she?" Helen ques tioned curiously.

He seemed surprised. "I thought every one knew who she is. It's just as well that you don't."

"I am sure Mr. Gleuister would not talk of me." There was a pause. 'Who is Miss Malotte?"

He studied for a moment, while she watched him. What a splendid figure be made in his evening clothes! The cozy room with its shaded lights enbanced his size and strength and rug-

ged outlines. In his eyes was that admiration which women live for. He lifted his hold, handsome face and met her gaze.

"I had rather leave that for you to find out, for I'm not much at scandal. "Has anybody said anything to you?" I have something more important to tell you. It's the most important thing I have ever said to you, Helen." It was the first time he had used that name, and she began to tremble, while her eyes sought the door in a panic. She had expected this moment, and

> "Not tonight. Don't say it now. she managed to articulate.

"Yes, this is a good time. If you When he had surrendered her, at the 'can't answer, I'll come back tomorrow. beginning of the next dance, McNa- I want you to be my wife. I want to mara sought for some acquaintance give you everything the world offers. whom he might question. Most of the and I want to make you happy, girl. men in Nome either hated or feared There'll be no gossip hereafter-I'll him, but he espied one that he thought shield you from everything unpleasant, suited his purpose and led him into a and if there is anything you want in life, I'll lay it at your feet. I can do "I want you to answer a question, it." He lifted his massive arms, and in No beating about the bush. Under the set of his strong, square face was * "yud? I'm blunt, and I war: you to the promise that she should have what-

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ever she craved it morial man could give it to her-love, protection, position, adoration.

She stammered uncertainly till the humiliation and chagrin she had suffered this night swept over her agala This town-this crude, half born mining camp-had turned against her, misjudged her cruelly. The women were envious, clacking scandal mongers, att of them, who would ostracize her and make her life in the northland a misery, make her an outcast with nothing to sustain her but her own solitary pride. She could picture her future clearly, pitilessly, and see herself standing alone, vilified, harassed in a thousand cutting ways, yet unable to run away or to explain. She would have to stay and face it, for her life was boun I up here during the next few years or so, or as long as her uncleremained a judge. This man would free her. He loved her; he offered her

everything. He was bigger than all the rest combined. They were his play things, and they knew it. She was not sure that she loved him, but his magnetism was overpowering and her ad miration intense. No other man she had ever known compared with him. except Glenister -- Bah! The beast! He had insulted her at first; he wronges her now.

"Will you be my wife, Helen?" the man repeated softly.

She dropped her head, and he strode forward to take her in his arms, then stopped listening. Some one ran up on the porch and hammered loudly at the loor. McNamara scowled, walked into the hall and flung the portal open, disdosing Struve.

"Hello, McNamara! Been looking alt over for you. There's the dence to



"Malattel Who is shef"

pay." Helen sighed with relief and gathered up her cloak, while the hum of their voices reached her indistinctly. She was given plenty of time to regain her composure before they appeared, When they did, the politician spoks

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

