

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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(Continued from last week.)

"Boys, we've overplayed. We don't want these people—McNamara's our meat. Old bald face yonder has to do what he's told, and I'm ag'in this twenty to one midnight work. I'm goin' home." There were some whistlings, then the original spokesman called for Judge Stillman. The old man tottered to the window, a palsied, terror-stricken object. The girl was glad he could not be seen from below.

"We won't hurt you this time, Judge, but you've gone far enough. We'll give you another chance; then, if you don't make good, we'll stretch you to a lamp post. Take this as a warning." "I shall do my d-d-duty," said the Judge.

The men disappeared into the darkness, and when they had gone Glenister closed the window, pulled down the shades and lighted a lamp. He knew by how narrow a margin a tragedy had been averted. If he had fired on these men, his shot would have kindled a feud which would have consumed every vestige of the court crowd and himself among them. He would have fallen under a false banner, and his life would not have reached to the next sunset. Perhaps it was forfeit now. He could not tell. The vigilantes would probably look upon his part as traitorous, and at the very least he had cut himself off from their support, the only support the northland offered him. Henceforth he was a renegade, a pariah, hated alike by both factions. He purposely avoided sight of Stillman

and turned his back when the Judge extended his hand with expressions of gratitude. His work was done, and he wished to leave this house. Helen followed him down to the door and as he opened it laid her hand upon his sleeve. "Words are feeble things, and I can never make amends for all you've done for us."

"For us?" cried Roy, with a break in his voice. "Do you think I sacrificed my honor, betrayed my friends, killed my last hope, ostracized myself, for 'us'?" This is the last time I'll trouble you, perhaps the last time I'll see you. No matter what else you've done, however, you've taught me a lesson, and I thank you for it. I have found myself at last. I'm not an Eskimo any longer. I'm a man!"

"You've always been that," she said. "I don't understand as much about this affair as I want to, and it seems to me that no one will explain it. I'm very stupid, I guess. But won't you come back tomorrow and tell it to me?" "No," he said roughly. "You're not of my people. McNamara and his are no friends of mine, and I'm no friend of theirs." He was half down the steps before she said softly:

"Good night, and God bless you—friend."

She returned to the Judge, who was in a pitiable state, and for a long time she labored to soothe him as though he were a child. She undertook to question him about the things which lay uppermost in her mind and which this night had half revealed, but he became fretful and irritated at the mention of mines and mining. She sat beside his bed till he dozed off, puzzling to discover what lay behind the hints she had heard till her brain and body reached in absolute weariness. The reflex of the day's excitement sapped her strength till she could barely creep to her own couch, where she rolled and sighed, too tired to sleep at once. She awoke finally, with one last nervous flicker, before complete oblivion took her. A sentence was on her mind—it almost seemed as though she had spoken it aloud:

"The handsomest woman in the north—but Glenister ran away."

CHAPTER XVI.

It was nearly noon of the next day when Helen awoke to find that McNamara had ridden in from the creek and stopped for breakfast with the Judge. He had asked for her, but on hearing the tale of the night's adventure would not allow her to be disturbed. Later he and the Judge had gone away together.

Although her judgment approved the step she had contemplated the night before, still the girl now felt a strange reluctance to meet McNamara. It is true that she knew no ill of him except that implied in the accusations of certain embittered men, and she was aware that every strong and aggressive character makes enemies in direct proportion to the qualities which lend him greatness. Nevertheless she was aware of an inner conflict that she had not foreseen. This man who so confidently believed that she would marry him did not dominate her consciousness.

She had ridden much of late, taking

long solitary gallops beside the shimmering sea that she loved so well, or up the winding valleys into the foothills where echoed the roar of swift waters or glistened the flash of shovel blades. This morning her horse was lame, so she determined to walk. In her early rambles she had looked timidly askance at the rough men she met till she discovered their genuine respect and courtesy. The most unkept among them were often college bred, although for that matter the roughest of the miners showed abundant consideration for a woman. So she was glad to allow the men to talk to her with the free freedom inspired by the new country and its wide spaces. The wilderness breeds a chivalry all its own.

Thus there seemed to be no danger abroad, though they had told the girl of mad dogs which roamed the city, explaining that the hot weather affects powerfully the thick coated, shaggy "mahmoots." This is the land of the dog, and, whereas in winter his lot is to labor and shiver and starve, in summer he loafs, fights, grows fat and runs mad with the heat.

Helen walked far and, returning, chose an unfamiliar course through the outskirts of the town to avoid meeting any of the women she knew because of that vivid memory of the night before. As she walked swiftly along she thought that she heard faint cries far behind her. Looking up, she noted that it was a lonely, barren quarter and that the only figure in sight was a woman some distance away. A few paces farther on the shouts recurred, more plainly this time, and a gun shot sounded. Glancing back, she saw several men running, one bearing a smoking revolver, and heard nearer still the snarling hubbub of fighting dogs. In a flash the girl's curiosity became horror, for as she watched one of the dogs made a sudden dash through the now subdued group of animals and ran swiftly along the plank on which she stood.

It was a handsome specimen of the Eskimo mahmoot—tall, gray and coated like a wolf, with the speed, strength and cunning of his cousin. Its head hung low and swung from side to side as it trotted, the motion flecking foam and slobber. The creature had scattered the pack and now, swift, menacing, relentless, was coming toward Helen. There was no shelter near, no fence, no house, save the distant one toward which the other woman was making her way. The men, too far away to protect her, shouted horse warnings.

Helen did not scream or hesitate—she turned and ran, terror-stricken, toward the distant cottage. She was blind with fright and felt an utter certainty that the dog would attack her

before she could reach safety. Yes! there was the quick patter of his pads close up behind her. Her knees weakened. The sheltering door was yet some yards away. But a horse tethered near the walk reared and snorted as the flying pair drew near. The mad creature swerved, leaped at the horse's legs and snapped in fury. Badly frightened at this attack, the horse lunged at his halter, broke it and galloped away, but the delay had served for Helen, weak and faint, to reach the door. She wrenched at the knob. It was locked. As she turned hopelessly away she saw that the other woman was directly behind her and was, in her turn, awaiting the mad animal's onslaught, but calmly, a tiny revolver in her hand.

"Shoot!" screamed Helen. "Why don't you shoot?" The little gun spoke, the dog spun around, snarling and yelping. The woman fired several times more before it lay still and then remarked calmly as she "broke" the weapon and ejected the shells:

"The caliber is too small to be good for much."

Helen sank down upon the steps. "How well you shoot!" she gasped. Her eyes were on the gray bundle whose death agonies had thrust it almost to her feet. The men had run up and were talking excitedly, but after a word with them the woman turned to Helen.

"You must come in for a moment and recover yourself," she said and led her inside.

It was a cozy room in which the girl found herself—more than that, luxurious. There was a piano with scattered music and many of the pretty, feminine things that Helen had not seen since leaving home. The hostess had stepped behind some curtains for an instant and was talking to her from the next room.

"That is the third mad dog I have seen this month. Hydrophobia is becoming a habit in this neighborhood." She returned, bearing a tiny silver tray with dainties and glasses.

"You're all unstrung, but this brandy will help you—if you don't object to a swallow of it. Then come right in here and lie down for a moment and you'll be all right." She spoke with such genuine kindness and sympathy that Helen flashed a grateful glance at her. She was tall, slender, and with a peculiar undulating suggestion in her movements, as though she had been bred to the clinging folds of silken garments. Helen watched the charm of her smile, the friendly solicitude of her expression, and felt her heart warm toward this one kind woman in Nome. "You're very good," she answered; "but I'm all right now. I was badly frightened. It was wonderful, your saving me." She followed the other's graceful motion as she placed her burden on the table, and in doing so gazed squarely at a photograph of Roy Glenister.

"Oh!" Helen exclaimed and then paused as it flashed over her who this girl was. She looked at her quickly. Yes, probably men would consider the woman beautiful, with that smile. The revelation came with a shock, and she arose, trying to mask her confusion.

"Thank you so much for your kindness. I'm quite myself now and I must go."

Her change of face could not escape the quick perceptions of one schooled by experience in the slights of her sex. Times without number Cherry Malotte had marked that subtle, scornful change in other women, and reviled herself for heeding it. But in some way this girl's manner hurt her worst of all. She betrayed no sign, however, save a widening of the eyes and a certain fixity of smile as she answered:

"I wish you would stay until you are rested, Miss"—She paused with outstretched hand.

"Chester. My name is Helen Chester. I'm Judge Stillman's niece," hurried the other, in embarrassment.

Cherry Malotte withdrew her proffered hand and her face grew hard and hateful.

"Oh! So you are Miss Chester—and I—saved you!" She laughed harshly.

Helen strove for calmness. "I'm sorry you feel that way," she said coolly. "I appreciate your service to me." She moved toward the door.

"Wait a moment. I want to talk to you." Then, as Helen paid no heed, the woman burst out bitterly: "Oh, don't be afraid! I know you are committing an unpardonable sin by talking to me, but no one will see you, and in your code the crime lies in being discovered. Therefore, you're quite safe. That's what makes me an outcast—I was found out. I want you to know, however, that, bad as I am, I'm better than you, for I'm loyal to those



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that like me, and I don't betray my friends."

"I don't pretend to understand you," said Helen coldly.

"Oh, yes, you do! Don't assume such innocence. Of course it's your role, but you can't play it with me." She stepped in front of her visitor, placing her back against the door, while her face was bitter and mocking. "The little service I did you just now entitles me to a privilege, I suppose, and I'm going to take advantage of it to tell you how badly your mask fits. Dreadfully rude of me, isn't it? You're in with a fine lot of crooks, and I admire the way you've done your share of the dirty work, but when you assume these scandalized, supervirtuous airs it offends me."

"Let me out!"

"I've done bad things," Cherry continued unheedingly, "but I was forced into them usually, and I never deliberately tried to wreck a man's life just for his money."

"What do you mean by saying that I have betrayed my friends and wrecked anybody's life?" Helen demanded hotly.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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