

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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[Continued from last week.]

CHAPTER XVIII.

GLENISTER did not wait long after his visitor's departure, but extinguished the light, locked the door and began the further adventures of this night. The storm welcomed him with suffocating violence. King the very breath from his face while the rain beat through till his flesh was cold and aching. He thought with a pang of the girl facing this tempest, going out to meet the thousand perils of the night. And it remained for him to hear his part as she bore hers, smilingly.

The last hour had added another and mysterious danger to his full measure. Could the Kid be jealous of Cherry? Surely not. Then what else?

The formula had driven his trailers to cover, evidently, for the streets were given over to its violence, and Roy encountered no hostile sign as he was buffeted from house to house. He adventured cautiously and yet with haste, finding certain homes where the marshals had been before him peopled now only by frightened wives and children. A scattered few of the vigilantes had been taken thus, while the warring elements had prevented their families from spreading the alarm or venturing out for succor. Those whom he was able to warn dressed hurriedly, took their rifles and went out into the drifting night, leaving empty cabins and weeping women. The great fight was on.

Toward daylight the remnants of the vigilantes straggled into the big blank warehouse on the sandspit and there beneath the smoking glare of lanterns cursed the name of McNamara. As dawn grayed the ragged eastern skyline, Dexty and Slapjack blew in through the spindrift, bringing word from Cherry and lifting a load from Glenister's mind.

"There's a game girl," said the old miner as he wrung out his clothes. "She was half gone when she got to us, and now she's waiting for the storm to break so that she can come back."

"It's clearing up to the east," Slapjack chattered. "You know I'm gettin' so rheumatic that lee water don't feel comfortable to me no more."

"Uric acid in the blood," said Dexty. "What's our next move?" he asked of his partner. "When do we hang this politician? Seems like we've got enough abandoned piano movers here to tie a can on to the whole outfit, push the town site of Nome off the map and start afresh."

"I think we had better lie low and watch developments," the other cautioned. "There's no telling what may turn up during the day."

"That's right. Strangers is like spirits—they work best in the dark."

As the day grew the storm died, leaving ramparts of clouds hanging suddenly above the ocean's rim, while those skilled in weather prophecy foretold the coming of the equinoctial. In McNamara's office there was great stir and the coming of many men. The boss sat in his chair, smoking countless cigars, his big face set in grim lines, his hard eyes peering through the pall of blue at those he questioned. He worked the wires of his machine until his dolls doubled and danced and twisted at his touch. After a gusty interview he had dismissed Voorhees with a merciless tongue lashing, raging bitterly at the man's failure.

"You're not fit to herd sheep. Thirty men out all night and what do you get? A dozen mullet headed miners. You bag the mudhens and the big game runs to cover. I wanted Glenister, but you let him slip through your fingers—now it's war. What a mess you've made! If I had even one helper with a brain the size of a flaxseed, this game would be a gift, but you've bungled every move from the start. Bah! Put a spy in the bull pen with those prisoners and make them talk. Offer them anything for information. Now get out!"

He called for a certain deputy and questioned him regarding the night's quest, remarking finally:

"There's treachery somewhere. Those men were warned."

"Nobody came near Glenister's house except Miss Chester," the man replied. "What?"

"The judge's niece. We caught her by mistake in the dark."

Later, one of the men who had been with Voorhees at the Northern asked to see the receiver and told him:

"The chief won't believe that I saw Miss Chester in the dance hall last night, but she was there with Glenister. She must have put him wise to our game or he wouldn't have known we were after him."

His hearer made no comment, but when alone rose and paced the floor

with heavy tread while his face grew savage and brutal.

"So that's the game, eh? It's man to man from now on. Very well, Glenister, I'll have your life for that, and then—you'll pay, Miss Helen." He considered carefully. A plot for a plot. If he could not swap intrigue with these miners and beat them badly, he deserved to lose. Now that the girl gave herself to their cause, he would use her again and see how well the answered. Public opinion would not stand too great a strain, and although he had acted within his rights last night, he dared not go much further. Diplomacy therefore must serve. He must force his enemies beyond the law and into his trap. She had passed the word once. She would do so again.

He hurried to Stillman's house and stormed into the presence of the judge. He told the story so artfully that the judge's astonished unbelief yielded to rage and cowardice, and he sent for his niece. She came down, white and silent, having heard the loud voices. The old man berated her with shrewish fury, while McNamara stood silent. The girl listened with entire self control until her uncle made a reference to Glenister that she found intolerable.

"Hush! I will not listen!" she cried passionately. "I warned him because you would have sacrificed him after he had saved our lives. That is all. He is an honest man, and I am grateful to him. That is the only foundation for your insult."

McNamara, with apparent candor, broke in:

"You thought you were doing right, of course, but your action will have terrible consequences. Now we'll have riot, bloodshed and heaven knows what. It was to save all this that I wanted to break up their organization. A week's imprisonment would have done it, but now they're armed and belligerent, and we'll have a battle to-night."

"No, no!" she cried. "There mustn't be any violence."

"There is no use trying to check them. They are rushing to their own destruction. I have learned that they plan to attack the Midas tonight, and I'll have fifty soldiers waiting for them there. It is a shame, for they are decent fellows blinded by ignorance and misled by that young miner. This will be the blackest night the north has ever seen."

With this McNamara left the house and went in search of Voorhees, remarking to himself: "Now, Miss Helen, send your warning—the sooner the better. If I know those vigilantes, it will set them crazy, and yet not crazy enough to attack the Midas. They will strike for me, and when they hit my poor unguarded office they'll think hell has moved north."

"Mr. Marshal," said he to his tool. "I want you to gather forty men quietly and to arm them with Winchester. They must be fellows who won't faint at blood. You know the kind. Assemble them at my office after dark, one at a time, by the back way. It must be done with absolute secrecy. Now, see if you can do this one thing and not get balled up. If you fail, I'll make you answer to me."

"Why don't you get the troops?" ventured Voorhees.

"If there's one thing I want to avoid, it's soldiers, either here or at the mines. When they step in, we step out, and I'm not ready for that just yet." The receiver smiled slyly.

Helen meanwhile had fled to her room and there received Glenister's note through Cherry Malotte's messenger. It rekindled her worst fears and here out McNamara's prophecy. The more she read of it the more certain she grew that the crisis was only a question of hours and that with darkness tragedy would walk the streets of Nome. The thought of the wrong already done was lost in the lonely girl's terror of the crime about to happen, for it seemed to her she had been the instrument to set these forces in motion, that she had loosed this swift speeding avalanche of greed, hatred and brutality. And when the crash should come—the girl shuddered. It must not be. She would shriek a warning from the houseposts even at cost of her uncle, of McNamara and of herself. And yet she had no proof that a crime existed. Although it all lay clear in her own mind, the certainty of it arose only from her intuition. If only she were able to take a hand—if only she were not a woman. Then Cherry Malotte's words ament Struve returned to her. "A bottle of wine and a woman's face." They brought back the lawyer's assurance that those documents she had safeguarded all through the long springtime journey really contained the proof. If they did, then they held the power to check this impending conflict. Her uncle

and the boss would not dare commit if threatened with exposure and prosecution. The more she thought of it the more urgent seemed the necessity to prevent the battle of tonight. There was a chance here at least, and the only one.

Adding to her mental torment was the constant vision of that face in the curtains at the Northern. It was her brother, yet what mystery shrouded this affair also? What kept him from her? What caused him to slink away like a thief discovered? She grew dizzy and hysterical.

Struve turned in his chair as the door to his private office opened, then leaped to his feet at sight of the gray eyed girl standing there.

"I came for the papers," she said. "I knew you would." The blood went out of his cheeks, then surged back up to his eyes. "It's a bargain then?"

She nodded. "Give them to me first." He laughed unpleasantly. "What do you take me for? I'll keep my part of the bargain if you'll keep yours. But this is no place, nor time. There's riot in the air, and I'm busy preparing for tonight. Come back tomorrow when it's all over."

But it was the terror of tonight's dangers that led her into his power.

"I'll never come back," she said. "It is my whim to know today yes, at once."

He meditated for a time. "Then today it shall be. I'll shirk the fight, I'll sacrifice what shreds of duty have clung to me, because the fever for you is in my bones, and it seems to me I'd do murder for it. That's the kind of a man I am, and I have no pride in myself because of it. But I've always been that way. We'll ride to the Sign of the Sled. It's a romantic little roadhouse ten miles from here, perched high above the Snake river trail. We'll take dinner there together."

"But the papers?"

"I'll have them with me. We'll start in an hour."

"In an hour," she echoed lifelessly and left him.

He chuckled grimly and seized the

telephone. "Central—call the Stea roadhouse—seven rings on the Snake river branch. Hello! That you, Shortz? This is Struve. Anybody at the house? Good. Turn them away if they come and say that you're closed. None of your business. I'll be out about dark, so have dinner for two. Spread yourself and keep the place clear. Goodby."

Strengthened by Glenister's note, Helen went straight to the other woman and this time was not kept waiting nor greeted with sneers, but found Cherry cloaked in a shy dignity, which she clasped tightly about herself. Under her visitor's incoherence she lost her diffidence, however, and, when Helen had finished, remarked, with decision: "Don't go with him. He's a bad man."

"But I must. The blood of those men will be on me if I don't stop this tragedy. If those papers tell the tale I think they do, I can call off my uncle and make McNamara give back the mines. You said Struve told you the whole scheme. Did you see the proof?"

"No, I have only his word, but he spoke of those documents repeatedly, saying they contained his instructions to tie up the mines in order to give a foothold for the lawsuits. He bragged that the rest of the gang were in his power and that he could land them in the penitentiary for conspiracy. That's all."

"It's the only chance," said Helen. "They are sending soldiers to the Midas to be in ambush, and you must warn the vigilantes." Cherry paled at this and ejaculated:

"Good Lord! Roy said he'd lead an attack tonight." The two stared at each other.

"If I succeed with Struve I can stop it all—all of this injustice and crime—everything."

"Do you realize what you're risking?" Cherry demanded. "That man is an animal. You'll have to kill him to save yourself, and he'll never give up those proofs."

"Yes, he will," said Helen fiercely. "and I defy him to harm me. The Sign

of the Sled is a public roadhouse with a landlord, a telephone and other guests. Will you warn Mr. Glenister about the troops?"

"I will, and bless you for a brave girl. Wait a moment." Cherry took from the dresser her tiny revolver. "Don't hesitate to use this. I want you to know also that I'm sorry for what I said yesterday."

As she hurried away Helen realized with a shock the change that the past few months had wrought in her. In truth, it was as Glenister had said, his northland worked strangely with its denizens. What of that shrinking girl who had stepped out of the sheltered life, strong only in her untried honesty, to become a hunted, harried thing, juggling with honor and reputation, in her heart a half formed fear that she might kill a man this night to gain her end? The elements were molding her with irresistible hands. Roy's contact with the primitive had not roughened him more quickly than had hers.

She met her appointment with Struve, and they rode away together, he talkative and elated, she silent and by.

Late in the afternoon the cloud banks to the eastward assumed alarming proportions. They brought with them an

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