

# The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH

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Dextry talked with his companion, then made a purchase which he laid at the lady's feet.

"Here's a pair of half grown gum boots. You put 'em on an' come with us. We'll take your mind off of things complete. An' as for sweet dreams, when you get back you'll make the slumbers 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 roed 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 limb 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.

"I'm 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 line 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



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"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're 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 on one night last month, but he didn't allege any grounds for doing so. If 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 wrong 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—justful 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 bet I'll take on the graces of civilization and put away revenge and ambition and all the rest of it. 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 forego their 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 trade.

It was late in the evening when Glenister entered the Northern and passed idly down the row of games,

passing 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 "play-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 Dextry 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 approached 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 want 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 and a 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 manured hand upon the flannel sleeve of the miner and gently escorted him through the entrance to the sidewalk, while the crowd smiled.

They cleared the threshold, however, he clinched his fist without a word and, raising it, struck the soft 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 cap began his monotonous routine. Every eye on the floor, 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.

"HO'S your new shift boss?"

Glenister inquired of his partner a few days later, indicating a man in the cut below, busied 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 gum 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 hair grandly soared a shiny, dome-like head.

"Has he always been bald?"

"Now! He ain't bald at all. He shaves his nob. In the early days he wore a long flowing mane which was inhabited by crickets, tree toads and such fauna. It got to be a hobby with him finally, so that he grew superstitious about going 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, jist back of his ears, soot side down. Hank plotted the gulch with langwidge while no man had ought to keep in himself without it was fumigated. Disreputableness 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



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

ferred the plagues of prospectin' from the Mexico to the Circle, an' yet I don't begrudge it none now that I've struck pay."

While they spoke two miners struggled with a bowlder they had unearthed and, having scraped and washed it carefully, staggered back to place it on the cleaned bedrock behind. One of them slipped, and it crashed against a brace which held more than a man's height above the bedrock, resting on supporting posts and running full of water. Should a sluice fall the rushing 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 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 puffed, his wildness of whiskers streaming like limber.

To be continued.

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