

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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...and spurred up through the mud of the streets. Bill Wheaton was smothered luxuriously when wrenched from his bed by a dishevelled man who shook him into wakefulness and into a portion of his clothes, with a storm of excited instructions. The lawyer had neither time nor opportunity for expostulation, for Glenister snatched a valise and swept into it a litter of documents from the table.

"Hurry up, man!" he yelled, as the lawyer dived frantically about his office in a rabbit-like hunt for items. "My heavens, are you dead? Wake up! The ship's leaving!" With those words still in his eyes, Wheaton was dragged down the street to the beach, where a knot had assembled to witness the race. As they tumbled into the skiff, willing hands ran it out into the surf on the crest of a roller. A few lifting heaves and they were over the bar with the men at the oars bending the white ash at every swing.

"I guess I didn't forget anything," gasped Wheaton as he put on his coat. "I got ready yesterday, but I couldn't find you last night, so I thought the deal was off."

Glenister stripped off his coat and, facing the bow, pushed upon the oars at every stroke, thus adding his strength to that of the oarsmen. They crept rapidly out from the beach, cutting up the two miles that lay toward the ship. He urged the men with all his power. All the sweat soaked through their clothes and, under their clinging shirts, the muscles stood out like iron. They had covered half the distance when Wheaton uttered a cry and Glenister desisted from his work with a curse. The Roskoche was moving slowly.

The rowers rested, but the young man shouted at them to begin again and, setting a boat hook, stuck it into the arm of his coat. He waved this on high while the men redoubled their efforts. For many moments they hung in suspense, watching the black hull as it gathered speed, and then, as they were about to cease their effort, a puff of steam burst from his whistle and the next moment a short note of recognition reached them. Glenister wiped the moisture from his brow and grinned at Wheaton.

A quarter of an hour later as they lay heaving below the ship's steel sides he thrust a heavy buckskin sack into the lawyer's hand.

"There's money to win the fight, Bill. I don't know how much, but it's enough. God bless you. Hurry back!" A sailor cast them a whirling rope, upon which Wheaton clambered; then, tying the grip sack to its end, they sent it after.

"Important!" the young man yelled at the officer on the bridge. "Government business." He heard a muffled clang in the engine room, the thrash of the propellers followed, and the big ship glided past.

As Glenister dragged himself up the beach upon landing Helen Chester called to him and made room for him beside her. It had never been necessary to call him to her side before, and equally unfamiliar was the abandonment or perhaps physical weariness that led the young man to sink back in the warm sand with a sigh of relief. She noted that for the first time the anxiety that was gone from his eyes.

"I watched your race," she began. "It was very exciting, and I cheered for you."

"I never give up anything that I want," he said.

"Have you never been forced to? Then it is because you are a man. Women have to sacrifice a great deal."

Helen expected him to continue to the effect that he would never give her up—it was in accordance with his earlier presumption—but he was silent, and she was not sure that she liked him as well thus as when he overwhelmed her with the boldness of his suit. For Glenister it was delightful, after the perils of the night, to rest in the calm of her presence and to feel dumbly that she was near. She saw him secretly creep a fold of her dress.

"If only she had not the memory of that one night on the ship. 'Still, he's trying to make amends in the best way he can,' she thought. 'Though of course no woman could care for a man who would do such a thing.' Yet she thrilled at the thought of how he had thrust his body between her and danger; how, but for his quick, instant action, she would have fallen in escaping from the pest ship, failed in her mission and met death on the night of her landing. She owed him much.

"Did you hear what happened to the good ship Ohio?" she asked.

"No. I've been too busy to inquire. I was told the health officers quarantined her when she arrived, that's all."

"She was sent to Egg Island with every one aboard. She has been there more than a month now and may not get away this summer."

"What a disappointment for the poor devils on her!"

"Yes, and only for what you did, I should be one of them," Helen remarked.

"Oh, I thank you," said she. "I know it is all for the best. Uncle Arthur wouldn't do anything wrong, and Mr. McNamara is an honorable man."

He turned toward her to speak, but he could not tell her what he felt certain of. She believed in her own blood and in her uncle's friends, and it was not for him to speak of McNamara. The rules of the game sealed his lips.

"She was thinking again. 'If only you had not acted as you did.' She longed to help him now in his trouble as he had helped her, but what could she do? The law was such a confusing, intricate, perplexing thing. 'I spent last night at the Midas,' she told him, 'and rode back early this morning. That was a daring holdup, wasn't it?'

"What holdup?"

"Why, haven't you heard the news?"

"No," he answered steadily. "I just got up."

"Your claim was robbed. Three men overcame the watchman at midnight and cleaned the boxes."

His stimulation of excited astonishment was perfect, and he rained a shower of questions upon her. She noted with approval that he did not look her in the eye, however. He was not an accomplished liar. Now, McNamara had a consciousness of iron. Unconsciously she made comparison, and the young man at her side did not lose thereby.

"Yes, I saw it all," she concluded, after recounting the details. "The negro wanted to bind me so that I could not give the alarm, but his civility prevented. He was a most gallant dandy."

"What did you do when they left?"

"Why, I kept my word and waited until they were out of sight; then I routed the camp and set Mr. McNamara and his men right after them down the gulch."

"Down the gulch?" spoke Glenister, off his guard.

"Yes, of course. Did you think they went upstream?" She was looking squarely at him now, and he dropped his eyes. "No; the posse started in that direction, but I put them right."

There was an odd light in her glance, and he felt the blood drumming in his ears.

She sent them downstream! So that was why there had been no pursuit! Then she must suspect—she must know everything! Glenister was stunned. Again his love for the girl surged tumultuously within him and demanded expression. But Miss Chester, no longer feeling sure that she had started to return to the hotel. "I saw the men distinctly," she told him before they separated, "and I could identify them all."

At his own house Glenister found Dextray removing the stains of the night's adventure.

"Miss Chester recognized us last night," he announced.

"How do you know?"

"She told me so just now, and what's more she sent McNamara and his crowd down the creek instead of up. That's why we got away so easily."

"Well, well—ain't she a brick? She's even with us now. By the way, I wonder how much we cleaned up, anyhow—let's weigh it." Going to the bed, Dextray turned back the blankets, exposing four mooseskin sacks, wet and heavy, where he had thrown them.

"There must have been \$20,000 in what I gave Wheaton," said Glenister.

At that moment, without warning, the door was flung open, and as the young man jerked the blankets into place he whirled, snatched the six shooter that Dextray had discarded and covered the entrance.

"Don't shoot, boy!" cried the newcomer, breathlessly. "My, but you're nervous!"

Glenister dropped his gun. It was Cherry Malotte, and from her heaving breast and the flying colors in her cheeks the men saw she had been running. She did not give them time to question, but closed and locked the door while the words came tumbling from her:

"They're on to you, boys—you'd better duck out quick. They're on their way up here now."

"By God! They'll search the place," said Dextray, and the men looked grimly in each other's faces.

Then in a flash Glenister stripped back the blankets and seized the "pokes," leaping into the back room. In another instant he returned with them and faced desperately the candid hardness of the little room that they lived and slept in. Nothing could be hidden; it was folly to think of it. There was a loft overhead, he remembered hopefully, then realized that the pursuers would search there first of all.

"I told you he was a hard fighter," said Dextray as the quick footsteps grew louder. "He ain't no fool, neither. 'Steard of our belts' caught in the mountains, I reckon we'll shoot it out here. We should have cached that gold somewhere."

He spun the cylinder of his blackened Colt, while his face grew hard and vulture-like.

Meanwhile Cherry Malotte watched the hunted look in Glenister's face grow wilder and then stiffen into the stubbornness of a man at bay. The posse was at the door now, knocking. The three inside stood rigid and strained. Then Glenister tossed his burden on the bed.

"Go into the back room, Cherry; there's going to be trouble."

"Who's there?" inquired Dextray through the door, to gain time. Suddenly, without a word, the girl glided to the hot blast heater, now cold and empty, which stood in a corner of the room. These stoves, used widely in the north, are vertical iron cylinders into which coal is poured from above. She lifted the lid and peered in to find it a quarter full of dead ashes, then turned with shining eyes and parted lips to Glenister. He caught the hint, and in an instant the four sacks were dropped softly into the feathery bottom and the ashes raked over. The daring maneuver was almost as quick as the flash of woman's wit that prompted it and was carried through while the answer to Dextray's question was still unspoken.

Then Glenister opened the door carefully and admitted the group of men.

The four sacks were dropped softly into the feathery bottom.

"We've got a search warrant to look through your house," said Voorhees. "What are you looking for?"

"Gold dust from Anvil creek."

"All right—search away."

They rapidly searched the premises, covering every inch, paying no heed to the girl, who watched them with indifferent eyes, nor to the old man, who glared at their every movement. Glenister was carelessly sarcastic, although he kept his right arm free, while beneath his saggyrod was a thoroughly trained alertness.

McNamara directed the search with a manner wholly lacking in his former mock courtesy. It was as though he had been soured by the gall of defeat. The mask had fallen off now, and his character showed—insistent, overbearing, cruel. Toward the partners he preserved a contemptuous silence.

The invaders ransacked thoroughly, while a dozen times the hearts of Cherry Malotte and her two companions stopped, then lunged onward, and then passed the stove. At last Voorhees lifted the lid and peered into its dark interior. At the same instant the girl cried out sharply, flinging herself from her position while the marshal jerked his head back in time to see her dashed upon Dextray.

"Don't! Don't!" she cried her appeal to the old man. "Keep cool. You'll be sorry, Dex—they're almost through."

The officer had not seen any movement on Dextray's part, but doubtless her quick eyes had detected signs of violence. McNamara emerged, glowering from the back room at that moment.

"Let them hunt," the girl was saying, while Dextray stared dazedly over her head. "They won't find anything. Keep cool and don't act rash."

Voorhees' duties sat uncomfortably upon him at the best, and, looking at the smoldering eyes of the two men, he became averse to further search in a powdery household whose members thumbed to shoot him in the back.

"It isn't here," he reported, but the politician only scowled, then spoke for the first time directly to the partners: "I've got warrants for both of you, and I'm tempted to take you in, but I won't. I'm not through yet—not by any means. I'll get you yet by both." He turned out of the door, followed by the marshal, who called off his guards, and the group fled back along the walk.

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cheeks grew cool and clear.

"You wouldn't trust me at first, eh? Some day you'll find that your old friends are the best after all."

And as she left them she added mockingly:

"Say, you're a pair of 'shine' desperadoes. You need a governess."

CHAPTER XI

RAW, gray day, with a driving drizzle from seaward and a leaden rack of clouds drifting low, matched the sullen, fitful mood of Glenister.

During the last month he had chafed and fretted like an animal in leash for word of Wheaton. This uncertainty, this impotent waiting with folded hands, was maddening to one of his spirit. He could apply himself to no fixed duty, for the sense of his wrong preyed on him fiercely, and he found himself haunting the vicinity of the Midas, gazing at it from afar, grasping hungrily for such scraps of news as chance to reach him. McNamara allowed access to none but his minions, so the partners knew but vaguely of what happened on their property, even though, under fiction of the law, it was being worked for their protection.

No steps regarding a speedy hearing of the case were allowed, and the collusion between Judge Stillman and the receiver had become so generally recognized that there were openly mutterings and threats in many quarters. Yet, although the politician had by now virtually absorbed all the richest properties in the district and worked them through his hirelings, the people of Nome, as a whole, did not grasp the full turpitude of the scheme nor the system's perfect workings.

Strange to say, Dextray, the fire eater, had assumed an oriental patience quite foreign to his peppery disposition and spent much of his time in the hills prospecting.

On this day, as the clouds broke about noon, close down on the angry horizon a drift of smoke appeared, shortly resolving itself into a steamer. She lay to in the offing, and through his glasses Glenister saw that it was the Roskoche. As the hours passed and no boat put off, he tried to hire a crew, but the longshoremen spat wisely and shook their heads as they watched the surf.

"There's the devil of an undertow settin' along this beach," they told him, "and the water's too cold to drown in comfortable." So he laid firm hands upon his impatience.

Every day meant many dollars to the watcher, and yet it seemed that nature was resolute in thwarting him, for that night the wind freshened, and daylight saw the ship hugging the leeward side of Sledge Island, miles to the westward, while the surf, white as boiling milk, boomed and thundered against the shore.

Word had gone through the street that Bill Wheaton was aboard with a writ or a subpoena or an alibi or whatever was necessary to put the "kibosh" on McNamara, so public excitement grew. McNamara hoarded his gold in the Alaska bank, and it was taken for granted that there would be the scene of the struggle. No one supposed for an instant that the usurper would part with the treasure peacefully.

On the third morning the ship lay abreast of the town again, and a life-raft upon the idle population streamed toward the beach.

"She'll make it to the surf all right, but then watch out."

"We'd better make ready to haul 'em out," said another. "It's mighty dangerous." And, sure enough, as the skiff came rushing in through the breakers she was caught.

She had made it past the first line, soaring over the bar on a foamy roller crest like a storm driven gull winging in toward the land. The wiry figure of Bill Wheaton crouched in the stern, while two sailors fought with their oars. As they gathered for their rush through the last zone of froth a great comb rose out of the sea behind them, rearing high above their heads. The crowd on the surf's edge shouted. The boat wavered, sucked back into the ocean's angry maw, and with a crash the deluge engulfed them. There remained nothing but a swirling flood through which the lifeboat emerged bottom up, amid a tangle of oars, gratings and gear.

Men rushed into the water, and the next roller pounded them back upon the marble hard sand. There came the sound of splashing wood, and then a group swarmed in waist deep and bore out a dripping figure. It was a hump-headed seaman, who shook the wa-

ter from his mane and grinned when his breath had come.

A step farther down the beach the bystanders seabed a lump from which the tide rolled to them. It was the second sailor, his scalp split from a blow of the gunwale. Nowhere was Wheaton.

Glenister had plunged to the rescue first, a heaving line about his middle, and, although buffeted about, he had reached the wreck, only to miss sight of the lawyer utterly. He had time for but a glance when he was drawn outward by the undertow till the line at his waist grew taut, then the water surged over him and he was hurled high up on the beach again. He staggered dimly back to the struggle, when suddenly a wave lifted the cap-sized cutter and righted it, and out from beneath shot the form of Wheaton, grimly clutching the life ropes. They brought him in choking and breathless.

"I got it," he said, snapping his streaming breast. "It's all right, Glenister. I knew what delay meant, so I took a long chance with the surf." The terrific ordeal he had undergone had blanched him to the lips, his legs wobbled uncertainly, and he would have fallen but for the young man, who thrust an arm about his waist and led him up into the town.

"I went before the circuit court of appeals in 'Prisco,' he explained later, "and they issued orders allowing an appeal from this court and gave me a writ of superseades directed against old Judge Stillman. That takes the lid off of his hands altogether and directs McNamara to turn over the Midas and all the gold he's got. What do you think of that? I did better than I expected."

Glenister wrung his hand silently, while a great satisfaction came upon him. At last this waiting was over and his peaceful yielding to injustice had borne fruit—had proved the better course after all, as the girl had prophesied. He could go to her now with clean hands. The mine was his again. He would lay it at her feet, telling her once more of his love and the change it was working in him. He would make her see it—make her see that beneath the harshness his years in the wild had given him his love for her was gentle and true and all absorbing. He would bid her be patient till she saw he had mastered himself, till he could come with his soul in harness.

"I am glad I didn't fight when they jumped us," he said. "Now we'll get our property back and all the money they've lost—that is, if McNamara hasn't snatched it."

"Yes; all that's necessary is to file the documents, then serve the judge and McNamara. You'll be back on Anvil creek tomorrow."

Having placed their documents on record at the courthouse, the two men continued to McNamara's office. He met them with courtesy.

"I heard you had a narrow escape this morning, Mr. Wheaton. Too bad! What can I do for you?"

The lawyer rapidly outlined his position and stated in conclusion:

"I filed certified copies of these orders with the clerk of the court ten minutes ago, and now I make formal demand upon you to turn over the Midas to Messrs. Glenister and Dextray and also to return all the gold dust in your safe deposit boxes in accordance with this writ." He handed his documents to McNamara, who tossed them on his desk without examination.

"Well," said the politician quietly, "I won't do it."

Had he been slapped in the face the attorney would not have been more astounded.

"I won't do it," said McNamara repeated sharply. "Don't think for a minute that I haven't gone into this fight armed for everything. Writs of superseades? Bah! He snapped his fingers."

"We'll see whether you'll obey or not," said Wheaton, and when he and Glenister were outside he continued: "Let's get to the judge quick."

As they neared the Golden Gate hotel they spied McNamara entering. It was evident that he had slipped from the rear door of his office and beaten them to the judicial car.

"I don't like that," said Glenister. "He's up to something."

"So it appeared, for they were fifteen minutes in gaining access to the magistrate and then found McNamara with him. Both men were astounded at the change in Stillman's appearance. During the last month his weak face had shrunk and altered until vacillation was betrayed in every line, and he had acquired the habit of furtively

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