

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH

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

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

The other shook his head unsmilingly, at which McNamara dared up. "I say you will, and you'll make your wife apologize before she leaves this hall, too, or you'll answer to me, man to man. I won't stand to have a girl like Miss Chester cold decked by a bunch of mining camp swells, and that goes as it lies." In his excitement McNamara reverted to his western idiom.

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. The boss' reputation had gone abroad. "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 drop."

"Go on." "There has been a lot of talk among the ladies about—well, er—the fact is, it's that young Glenister. Mrs. Chapman had the next stateroom to them—er—him—I should say—on the way up from the States, and she saw things. Now, as far as I'm concerned, a girl can do as she pleases, but Mrs. Chapman has her own ideas of propriety. From what my wife could learn, there's some truth in the story, too, so you can't blame her."

With a word McNamara could have explained the gossip and made this man put his wife right, forcing through her an elucidation of the silly affair in such a way as to spare Helen's feelings and cover the busy fanged magpies with confusion. Yet he hesitated. It is a wise skipper who trims his sails to every breeze. He thanked his informant and left him. Entering the lobby, he saw the girl hurrying toward him.

"Take me away, quick! I want to go home." "You've changed your mind?" "Yes, let us go," she panted, and when they were outside she walked so rapidly that he had difficulty in keeping pace with her. She was silent, and he knew better than to question, but when they arrived at her house he entered, took off his overcoat and turned up the light in the tiny parlor. She flung her wraps over a chair, storming back and forth like a little fury. Her eyes were stary with tears of anger, her face was flushed, her hands worked nervously. He leaned against the mantel, watching her through his cigar smoke.

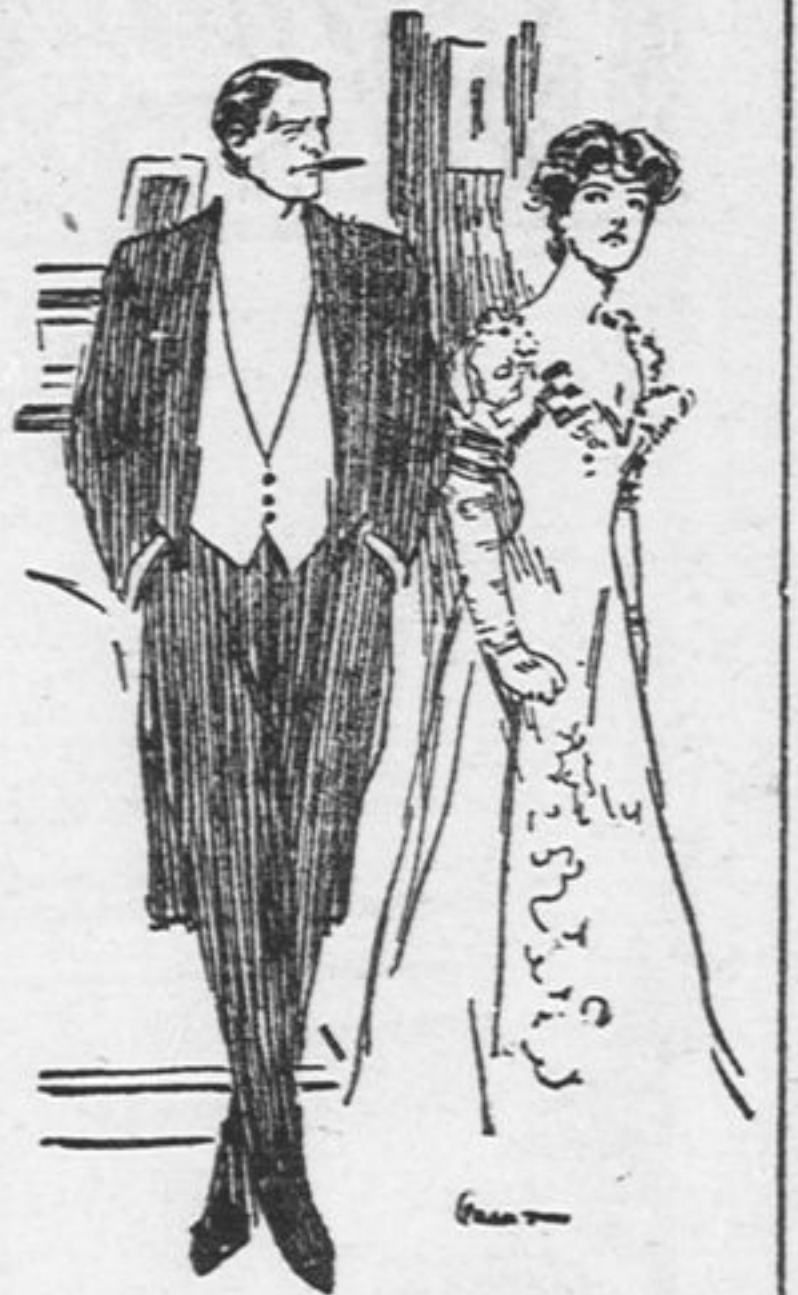
"You needn't tell me," he said at length. "I know all about it." "I am glad you do. I never could repeat what she said. Oh, it was brutal!" Her voice caught, and she bit her lip. "What made me ask them? Why didn't I keep still? After we left I went to those women and asked them. Oh, but they were brutal! Yet, why should I care?" She stamped her slippered foot.

"I shall have to kill that man some day," he said, fecking his cigar ashes into the grate. "What man?" She stood still and looked at him. "Glenister, of course. If I had thought the story would ever reach you I'd have shot him up long ago."

"It didn't come from him," she cried, hot with indignation. "He's a gentleman. It's that cat, Mrs. Chapman." He shrugged his shoulders the slightest bit, but it was eloquent, and she noted it. "Oh, I don't mean that he did it intentionally—he's too decent a chap for that—but anybody's tongue will wag to a beautiful girl! My lady Malotte is a jealous trick."

"Malotte! Who is she?" Helen questioned 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. Glenister 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 he made in his evening clothes! The cozy room with its shaded lights enhanced his size and strength and rugged outlines. In his eyes was that admiration which women live for. He lifted his bold, handsome face and met her gaze.

ferred this night swept over her again. This town—this crude, half born mining camp—had turned against her, misjudged her cruelly. The women were envious, clacking scandal mongers, all 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 bound up here during the next few years or so, or as long as her uncle remained a judge. This man would free her. He loved her; he offered her



"Malotte! Who is she?" "Everything. He is bigger than all the rest combined. They were his playthings, and they knew it. She was not sure that she loved him, but his magnetism was overpowering and her admiration intense. No other man had ever known compared with him, except Glenister—Bah! The beast! He had insulted her at first; he wronged 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, somewhat astenying. Some one ran up on the porch and hammered loudly at the door. McNamara scowled, walked into the hall and flung the portal open, disclosing Struve.

"Hello, McNamara! Been looking all over for you. There's the deuce to 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 spoke sourly:

"I've been called to the mines, and I must go at once." "You bet! It may be too late now. The news came an hour ago, but I couldn't find you," said Struve. "Your horse is saddled at the office. Better not wait to change your clothes."

"You say Voorhees has gone with twenty deputies, eh? That's good. You stay here and find out all you can." "I telephoned out to the creek for the boys to arm themselves and throw out pickets. If you hurry, you can get there in time. It's only midnight now."

"What is the trouble?" Miss Chester inquired anxiously. "There's a plot on to attack the mines tonight," answered the lawyer. "The other side are trying to seize them, and there's apt to be a fight."

"You mustn't go out there," she cried, aghast. "There will be bloodshed!" "That's just why I must go," said McNamara. "I'll come back in the morning, though. Good night!" There was a strange, new light in his eyes as he left her. For one unversed in woman's ways he played the game surprisingly well, and as he hurried toward his office he smiled grimly into the darkness.

"She'll answer me tomorrow. Thank you, Mr. Glenister," he said to himself. Helen questioned Struve at length, but gained nothing more than that secret service men had been at work for weeks and had today unearthed the fact that vigilantes had been formed. They had heard enough to make them think the mines would be jumped again tonight and so had given the alarm.

was silent for a time. "I suppose they really think they own those mines." "Undoubtedly." "But they don't, do they?" Somehow this question had recurred to her insistently of late, for things were constantly happening which showed there was more back of this great, fierce struggle than she knew. It was impossible that injustice had been done the mine owners, and yet scattered talk reached her which was puzzling.

When she strove to follow it up, her acquaintances adroitly changed the subject. She was baffled on every side. The three local newspapers upheld the court. She read them carefully and was more at sea than ever. There was a disturbing undercurrent of alarm and unrest that caused her to feel insecure, as though standing on hollow ground.

"Yes, this whole disturbance is caused by those two. Only for them we'd be all right." "Who is Miss Malotte?" He answered promptly, "The handsomest woman in the north and the most dangerous."

"In what way? Who is she?" "It's hard to say who or what she is. She's different from other women. She came to Dawson in the early days—just came—we didn't know how, whence or why, and we never found out. We woke up one morning, and there she was. By night we were all jealous, and in a week we were most of us driving idiots. It might have been the mystery or perhaps the competition. That was the day when a dance hall girl could make a home stake in a winter or marry a millionaire in a month, but she never bothered. She tolled not, neither did she spin on the waxed floors, yet Solomon in all his glory would have looked like a tramp beside her."

"You say she is dangerous?" "Well, there was a young nobleman, in the winter of '88, Dane, I think—fine family and all that—big yellow haired boy. He wanted to marry her, but a fero dealer shot him. Then there was Rock of the mounted police, the finest officer in the service. He was cashiered. She knew he was going to pot for her, but she didn't seem to care—and there were others. Yet, with it all, she is the most generous person and the most tender hearted. Why, she has fed every 'stew bum' on the Yukon, and there isn't a busted prospector in the country who wouldn't swear by her, for she has grubstaked dozens of them. I was horribly in love with her myself. Yes, she's dangerous all right—to everybody but Glenister."

"What do you mean?" "She had been across the Yukon to nurse a man with scurvy, and coming back she was caught in the spring breakup. I wasn't there, but it seems this Glenister got her ashore somehow when nobody else would tackle the job. They were carried five miles downstream in the ice pack before he succeeded."

"What happened then?" "She fell in love with him, of course." "And he worshipped her as madly as all the rest of you, I suppose," she said scornfully. "That's the peculiar part. She hypnotized him at first, but he ran away, and I didn't hear of him again till I came to Nome. She followed him finally and last week evaded up her score. She paid him back for saving her."

"I haven't heard about it." He detailed the story of the gambling episode at the Northern saloon and concluded: "I'd like to have seen that turn, for they say the excitement was terrific. She was keeping cases and at the finish slammed her case keeper shut and declared the bet off because she had made a mistake. Of course they couldn't dispute her, and she stuck to it. One of the bystanders told me she lied, though."

"So, in addition to his other vices, Mr. Glenister is a reckless gambler, is he?" said Helen with heat. "I am proud to be indebted to such a character. Truly this country breeds wonderful species."

"There's where you're wrong," Struve chuckled. "He's never been known to bet before." "I'm tired of these contradictions," she cried angrily. "Saloons, gambling halls, scandals, adventures! Ugh! I hate it! I hate it! Why did I ever come here?"

"Those things are a part of every new country. They were about all we had till this year. But it is women like you that we fellows need, Miss Helen. You can help us a lot." She did not like the way he was looking at her and remembered that her uncle was upstairs and asleep.

"I must ask you to excuse me now, for it's late and I am very tired." The clock showed half past 12, so, after letting him out, she extinguished the light and dragged herself wearily up to her room. She removed her outer garments and threw over her bare shoulders a negligee of many flounces and bewildering, clinging looseness. As she took down her heavy braids the story of Cherry Malotte returned to her tormentingly. So Glenister had saved her life also at the risk of his own. What a very gallant cavalier he was, to be sure! He should bear a coat of arms—a dragon, an armed knight and a fainting maiden. "I succor ladies in distress—handsome ones," should be the motto on his shield. "The handsomest woman in the north," Struve had said. She raised her eyes to the glass and made a mouth at the petulant, tired reflection there. She pictured Glenister, leaping from floe to floe with the hungry river surging and snapping at his feet, while the cheers of the crowd on shore gave heart to the girl crouching out there. She could see him snatch her up and fight his way back to safety over the plunging ice cakes with death dragging at his heels. What a strong embrace he had! At this she blushed and realized with a shock that while she was mooning with that very man might be fighting hand to hand in the darkness of a mountain gorge with the man she was going to marry.

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alarms. Would people never cease coming? She was worn out, but at the thought of the tragedy abroad and the sick old man sleeping near by she lit a candle and slipped downstairs to avoid disturbing him. Doubtless it was some message from McNamara, she thought, as she unchained the door.

As she opened it she fell back amazed while it swung wide and the candle flame flickered and sputtered in the night air. Roy Glenister stood there, grim and determined, his soft, white Stetson pulled low, his trousers tucked into tan half boots, in his hand a Winchester rifle. Beneath his corduroy coat she saw a loose cartridge belt, yellow with shells, and the nicked flash of a revolver. Without invitation he strode across the threshold, closing the door behind him.

"Miss Chester, you and the judge must dress quickly and come with me." "I don't understand." "The vigilantes are on their way here to hang him. Come with me to my house, where I can protect you."

She laid a trembling hand on her bosom, and the color died out of her face, then at a slight noise above they both looked up to see Judge Stillman leaning far over the banister. He had wrapped himself in a dressing gown and now gripped the rail convulsively, while his features were blanched to the color of putty and his eyes were wide with terror, though puffed and swollen from sleep. His lips moved in a vain endeavor to speak.

CHAPTER XV. ON the morning after the episode in the Northern, Glenister awoke under a weight of discouragement and desolation. The past twenty-four hours with their manifold experiences seemed distant and unreal. At breakfast he was saluted by the old man in a treacherous way, for he had dealt treacherously with the old man in risking half of the mine, even though they had checked the senseless, unreasoning lust for play that possessed him later. This lapse was the last stand of his old, untamed instincts. The embers of revolt in him were dead. He felt that he would never again lose mastery of himself, that his passions would never best him hereafter.

Dextry spoke. "We had a meeting of the 'Strangers' last night." He always spoke of the vigilantes in that way, because of his early western training. "What was done?" "They decided to act quick and do any old jobs of lynching, claim jumpin' or such as needs doin'. There's a lot of law sharps and storekeepers in the bunch who figure McNamara's gang will wipe them off the map next."

"It was bound to come to this." "They talked of ejectin' the receiver's men and puttin' all us fellers back on our mines." "Good! How many can we count on to help us?" "About sixty. We've kept the number down and only taken men with so much property that they'll have to keep their mouths shut."

"I wish we might engineer some kind of an encounter with the court crowd and create such an uproar that it would reach Washington. Everything else has failed, and our last chance seems to be for the government to step in—that is, unless Bill Wheaton can do something with the California courts." "I don't count on him. McNamara don't care for California courts no more'n he would for a boy with a pea shooter—he's got too much pull at headquarters. If the 'Strangers' don't do no good we'd better go in an clean out the bunch like we was killin' snakes. If that falls I'm goin' out to the States and be a doctor."

"A doctor! What for?" "I read somewhere that in the United States every year there is 40,000,000 gallons of whisky used for medical purposes." Glenister laughed. "Speaking of whisky, Dex, I notice that you've been drinking pretty hard of late—that is, hard for you." The old man shook his head. "You're mistaken. It ain't hard for me." "Well, hard or easy, you'd better cut it out."

some new men. I've fired the woman who rooms next to him, and through her I've got a line on some of them, but I haven't spotted them all. They're bad ones, 'up river' men mostly, remnants of Soapy Smith's Skagway gang. They won't stop at anything." "Thank you. I'll keep my eyes open."

A few nights after Glenister had reason to recall the words of the sleuth and to realize that the game was growing close and desperate. To reach his cabin, which sat on the outskirts of the town, he ordinarily followed one of the plank walks which wound through the confusion of tents, warehouses and cottages lying back to the two principal streets along the water front. This part of the city was not laid out in rectangular blocks, for in the early rush the first corners had seized vacant and erected thereon some kind of buildings to make good their titles. There resulted a formless jumble of huts, cabins and sheds, penetrated by no cross streets and quite unlighted. At night one leaving the illuminated portion of the town found this darkness intensified.

Glenister knew his course so well that he could have walked it blindfolded. Nearing a corner of the warehouse this evening he remembered that the plinking at this point was torn up, so to avoid the mud he leaped lightly across. Simultaneously with his jump he detected a movement in the shadows that banked the wall at his elbow and saw the flaming spurt of a revolver shot. The man had crouched behind the building and was so close that it seemed impossible to miss. Glenister fell heavily upon his side, and the thought flashed over him, "McNamara's thugs have shot me."

His assailant leaped out from his hiding place and ran down the walk, the sound of his quick, soft footfalls thudding faintly out into the silence. The young man felt no pain, however, so scrambled to his feet, felt himself over with care and then swore roundly. He was untouched. The other had missed him cleanly. The report, coming while he was in the act of leaping, had startled him so that he had lost his balance, slipped upon the wet boards and fallen. His assailant was lost in the darkness before he could rise. Pursuit was out of the question, so he continued homeward, considerably shaken, and related the incident to Dextry.

"You think it was some of McNamara's work, eh?" Dextry inquired when he had finished. "Of course. Didn't the detective warn me today?" Dextry shook his head. "It don't seem like the game is that far along yet. The time is coming when we'll go to the mat with them people, but they've got the edge on us now, so what could they gain by putting you away? I don't believe it's them, but whoever it is you'd better be careful or you'll be got."

"Suppose we come home together after this?" Roy suggested, and they arranged to do so, realizing that danger lurked in the dark corners and that it was in some such lonely spot that the deed would be tried again. They experienced no trouble for a time, though on nearing their cabin one night the younger man fancied that he saw a shadow glide away from its vicinity and out into the blackness of the tundra as though some one had stood at his very door waiting for him, then became frightened at the two figures approaching. Dextry had not observed it, however, and Glenister was not positive himself, but it served to give him the uncanny feeling that some determined, unscrupulous force was bent on his destruction. He determined to go nowhere unarmed.

A few evenings later he went home early and was busied in writing when Dextry came in about 10 o'clock. The old miner hung up his coat before speaking, lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply, then, amid mouthfuls of smoke, began:

"I had my own toes over the edge tonight. I was mistook for you, which compliment I don't aim to have repeated." Glenister questioned him eagerly. "We're about the same height, an' these hats of ours are alike. Just as I came by that lumber pile down yonder a man hopped out an' throwed a 'gat' under my nose. He was quicker than light and near blowed my skip into the next block before he saw who I was. Then he dropped his weapon and said:

"My mistake. Go on! I accepted his apology." "Could you see who he was?"

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It was some time later that one of the detectives employed by the Swedes met Glenister on Front street and by an almost imperceptible sign signified his desire to speak with him. When they were alone he said: "You've been shadowed." "I've known that for a long time." "The district attorney has put on

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