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The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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He turned toward her to speak, but refrained. 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 darling holdup, wasn't it?"

"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 simulation 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 countenance 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 darky."

"What did you do when they left?" "Why, I kept my word and waited until they were out of sight; then I roused the camp and set Mr. McNamara and his men right after them down the gulch."

"pokes," leaping into the back room. In another instant he returned with them and faced desperately the candid barrenness of the little room that they lived and slept in.

"I told you he was a hard fighter," said Dextray as the quick footsteps grew louder. "He ain't no fool, neither. 'Stead of our belt' 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 vulpine-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 sight, and in an instant the four sacks were dropped softly into the featherly bottom and the ashes raked over.

Just in time. My coat hit my palate when he looked into that stove, but the next instant I wanted to laugh at Dextray's expression."

Impulsively Glenister laid his hands upon her shoulders. At his look and touch her throat swelled, her bosom heaved and the silken lids fluttered until she seemed choked by a very flood of sweet womanliness. She blushed like a little maid and launched a timid, broken laugh. Then, pulling herself together, the merry careless tone came into her voice, and her 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 'shins' 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 split. 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 would reach him.

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 Haddock. At the hours passed and no boat put off, he tried to hire a crew, but the longshoremen spat wilyly 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 comfortably." So he laid firm hands upon his impatience.

Every day meant many dollars to the watcher, and yet it seemed that nature was recalcitrant in thwarting him, for that night the wind freshened, and daylight saw the ship hugging the lee 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 about with a writ as a subpoena on an affidavit or whatever was necessary to get the "divis" on McNamara, so public excitement grew. McNamara boarded 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.

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

I knew what day 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 litigation out 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.

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

"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."

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

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

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

"I regret that I am forced to doubt the authenticity of these documents."

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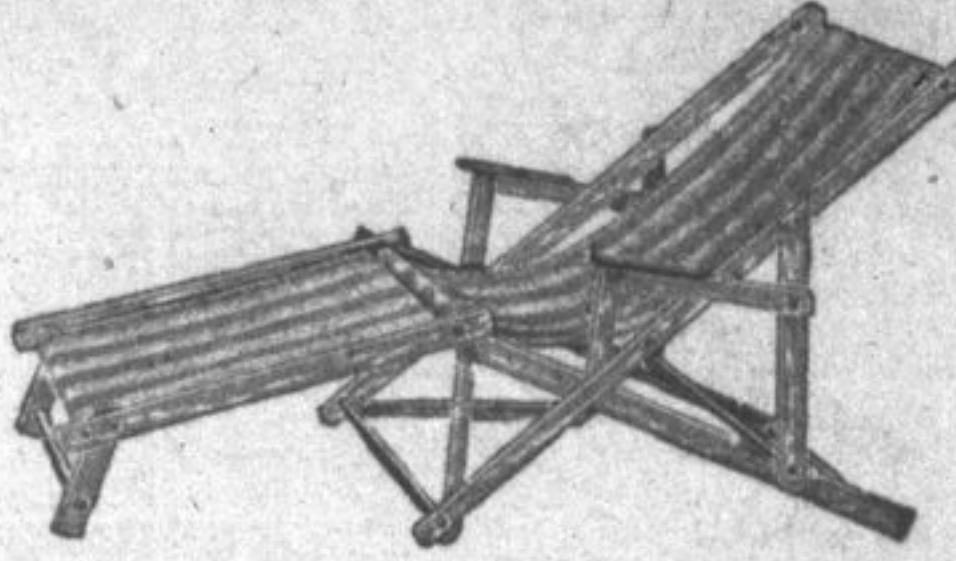


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