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The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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"No, he hasn't. He may be hidden aboard somewhere among the coal bunkers, but I think he's still ashore and aiming to make a quick run just before the sails. He hasn't left the beach since daylight, that's sure. I'm going out to the ship now with four men and search her again. If we don't bring him off, you can bet he's lying out somewhere in town, and we'll get him later. I've stationed men along the shore for two miles."

"I won't have him get away. If he should reach 'Prisco— Tell your men I'll give \$500 to the one that finds him."

Three hours later Voorhees returned. "He sailed without him." "The politician cursed. 'I don't believe it. He tricked you. I know he did.'"

Glenister grinned into a half eaten sandwich, then turned upon his back and lay thus on the plank, identifying the speakers below by their voices.

He kept his post all day. Later in the evening he heard Struve enter. The man had been drinking.

"So he got away, eh?" he began. "I was afraid he would. Smart fellow, that Wheaton."

"He didn't get away," said McNamara. "He's in town yet. Just let me land him in jail on some excuse! I'll hold him till snow flies." Struve sank into a chair and lit a cigarette with wavering hand.

"This is a hell of a game, ain't it, Mac? D'you s'pose we'll win?" The man overhead picked up his ears.

"Win? Aren't we winning? What do you call this? I only hope we can lay hands on Wheaton. He knows things. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but more is worse. Lord! If only I had a man for judge in place of Stillman! I don't know why I brought him."

"That's right. Too weak. He hasn't got the backbone of an angleworm. He ain't half the man that his niece is. There's a girl for you! Say, what'd we do without her, eh? She's a pippin! Glenister felt a sudden tightening of every muscle. What right had that man's liquor sodden lips to speak so of her?"

"She's a brave little woman all right. Just look how she worked Glenister and his fool partner. It took nerve to bring in those instructions of yours alone, and if it hadn't been for her we'd never have won like this. It makes me laugh to think of those two men stowing her away in their stateroom while they slept between decks with the sheep, and her with the papers in her bosom all the time. Then, when we got ready to do business, why, she up and talketh into giving us possession of their mine without a fight. That's what I call reciprocating a man's affection."

Glenister's nails cut into his flesh, while his face went livid at the words. He could not grasp it at once. It made him sick—physically sick—and for many moments he strove blindly to beat back the hideous suspicion, the horror that the lawyer had aroused. His was not a doubting disposition, and to him the girl had seemed as one pure, mysterious, apart, angelically incapable of deceit. He had loved her, feeling that some day she would return his affection without fail. In her great, unclouded eyes he had found no lurking place for double dealing. Now—God! It couldn't be that all the time she had known!

He had lost a part of the lawyer's speech, but peered through his observation hole again.

McNamara was at the window gazing out into the dark street, his back toward the lawyer, who lolled in the chair, babbling garrulously of the girl. (Glenister ground his teeth—a frenzy possessed him to loose his anger, to rip through the frail ceiling with naked hands and fall vindictively upon the two men.)

"She looked good to me the first time I saw her," continued Struve. He paused, and when he spoke again a change had coarsened his features. "Say, I'm crazy about her, Mac. I tell you, I'm crazy—and she likes me—I know she does—or, anyway, she would."

"Do you mean that you're in love with her?" asked the man at the window without shifting his position. It seemed that utter indifference was in his question, although where the light shone on his hands, tight clinched behind his back, they were bloodless. "Love her? Well—that depends—ha! You know how it is," he chuckled coarsely. His face was gross and bestial. "I've got the judge where I want him, and I'll have her!"

His miserable words died with a gurgle, for McNamara had silently leaped and throttled him where he sat, pinning him to the wall. Glenister saw the big politician shift his fingers slightly on Struve's throat and then drop his left hand to his side, holding his victim writhing and helpless with his right despite the man's frantic struggles. McNamara's head was thrust forward from his shoulders, peering into the lawyer's face. Struve lay ineffectually at the iron arm which was squeezing his life out, while for endless minutes the other leaned his weight against him, his left hand behind his back, his legs braced like stone columns as he watched his victim's struggles abate.

Struve fought and wrenched while his breath caught in his throat with horrid, sickening sounds, but gradually



His miserable words died with a gurgle.

his eyes rolled farther and farther back till they stared 'out of his blackened visage, straight up toward the ceiling, toward the hole through which Glenister peered. His struggles lessened, his chin sagged, and his tongue protruded, then he sat loose and still. The politician flung him out into the room so that he fell limply upon his face, then stood watching him. Finally, McNamara passed out of the watcher's vision, returning with a water bucket. With his foot he rolled the unconscious wretch upon his back, then drenched him. Replacing the pail, he seated himself, lit a cigar and watched the return of life into his victim. He made no move, even to drag him from the pool in which he lay.

Struve groaned and shuddered, twisted to his side, and at last sat up weakly. In his eyes there was now a great terror, while in place of his drunkenness was only fear and faintness—abject fear of the great bulk that sat and smoked and stared at him so stably. He felt uncertainly of his throat and groaned again.

"Why did you do that?" he whispered, but the other made no sign. He tried to rise, but his knees relaxed. He staggered and fell. At last he gained his feet and made for the door. Then, when his hand was on the knob, McNamara spoke through his teeth, without removing his cigar.

"Don't ever talk about her again. She is going to marry me." When he was alone he looked curiously up at the ceiling over his head. "The rats are thick in this shack," he mused. "Seems to me I heard a whole swarm of them."

A few moments later a figure crept through the hole in the roof of the house next door and thence down into the street. A block ahead was the slow moving form of Attorney Struve. Had a stranger met them both he would not have known which of the two had felt at his throat the clutch of a stranger, for each was drawn and haggard and awayed as he went. Glenister unconsciously turned toward his cabin, but at leaving the lighted streets the thought of its darkness and silence made him shudder. Not now! He could not bear that stillness and the company of his thoughts. He dared not be alone. Dextrity would be downtown undoubtedly, and he, too, must get into the light and turmoil. He licked his lips and found that they were cracked and dry.

At rare intervals during the past years he had staggered in from a long march where for hours he had waged a bitter war with cold and hunger, his limbs clumsy with fatigue, his garments wet and stiff, his mind slack and sullen. At such extreme seasons he had felt a consuming thirst, a thirst which burned and scorched until his very bones cried out feverishly—not a thirst for water or a thirst which eaten snow could quench, but a savage yearning of his whole exhausted system for some stimulant, for some coursing fiery fluid that would burn and strange, a thirst for whisky, for brandy! Remembering these occasional ferocious desires, he had become charitable to such unfortunates as were too weak to withstand similar temptations.

Now with a shock he caught himself in the grip of a thirst as insistent as though the cold bore down and the weariness of endless miles wrapped him about. It was no foolish wish to drown his thoughts or to banish the grief that preyed upon him, but physical thirst—to quench the fires that burned inside. He remembered that it had been more than a year since he had tasted whisky. Now the fever of the past few hours had parched his every tissue.

As he elbowed in through the crowd at the Northern those next him made room at the bar, for they recognized the hunger that peers thus from men's faces. Their manner recalled Glenister to his senses, and he wrenched himself away. This was not some solitary, snow banked roadhouse. He would not stand and soak himself shoulder to shoulder with stavedores and longshoremen. This was something to be done in secret. He had no pride in it. The man on his right raised a glass, and the young man strained a madness to tear it from his hands. Instead, he hurried back to the theater and up to a box, where he drew the curtains.

"Whisky!" he said thickly to the waiter. "Bring it to me fast. Don't you hear? Whisky!"

had seen him enter and peek the curtains together. She arose and went to him, entering without ceremony. "What's the matter, boy?" she questioned. "Ah, I'm glad you came. Talk to me."

"Thank you for your few well chosen remarks," she laughed. "Why don't you peek me! Spring some good, original jokes? You look like the finish to a six day go-as-you-please. What's up?" She talked to him for a moment until the waiter entered. Then, when she saw what he bore, she snatched the glass from the tray and poured the whisky on the floor. Glenister was on his feet and had her by the wrist. "What do you mean?" he said roughly.

"It's whisky, boy," she cried, "and you don't drink!" "Of course it's whisky! Bring me another!" he shouted at the attendant. "What's the matter?" Cherry insisted. "I never saw you act so. You know you don't drink. I won't let you. It's booze—booze. I tell you, fit for fools and brawlers. Don't drink it, Roy. Are you in trouble?"

"I say I'm thirsty—and I will have it! How do you know what it is to smoulder inside and feel your veins turn dry?" "It's something about that girl," the woman said, with quiet conviction. "She's double crossed you."

"Well, so she has, but what of it? I'm thirsty. She's going to marry me. McNamara. I've been a fool." He ground his teeth and reached for the drink with which the boy had returned. "McNamara is a crook, but he's a man, and he never drank a drop in his life." The girl said it casually, evenly, but the other stopped the glass halfway to his lips.

"Well, what of it? Go on. You're good at W. C. T. U. talk. Virtue comes you." She flushed, but continued: "It simply occurred to me that if you aren't strong enough to handle your own throat, you're not strong enough to beat a man who has mastered his."

Glenister looked at the whisky a moment, then set it back on the tray. "Bring two lemonades," he said; and with a laugh which was half a sob Cherry Malotte leaned forward and kissed him.

"You're too good a man to drink. Now, tell me all about it." "Oh, it's too long! I've just learned that the girl is in, hand and glove with the Judge and McNamara—that's all. She's an advance agent—their lookout. She brought in their instructions to Struve and persuaded Dex and me to let them jump our claim. She got us to trust in the law and in her uncle. Yes, she hypnotized my property out of me and gave it to her lover, this ward politician. Oh, she's smooth, with all her innocence! Why, when she smiles, she makes you glad and good and warm, and her eyes are as honest and clear as a mountain pool, but she's wrong—she's wrong—and great God! how I love her!" He dropped his face into his hands.

When she had pleaded with him for himself a moment before Cherry Malotte was genuine and girlish, but now as he spoke thus of the other woman a change came over her which he was too disturbed to note. She took on the subtleties that masked her as a rule, and her eyes were not pleasant.

"I could have told you all that and more." "More? What more?" he questioned. "Do you remember when I warned you and Dextrity that they were coning

you?" "You're too good a man to drink." To search "your cabin for the gold? Well, that girl put them on to you. I found it out afterward. She keeps the keys to McNamara's safety vault where your dust lies, and she's the one who handles the Judge. It isn't McNamara at all." The woman lied easily, fluently, and the man believed her.

gambler brought his friend along and invaded her box. He introduced the man as Mr. Champian.

"Do you feel like dancing?" the newcomer inquired. "No, I'd rather look on. I feel so capable. You're a society man, Mr. Champian. Don't you know anything of interest? Scandal or the like?" "Can't say that I do. My wife attends to all that for the family. But I know there's lots of it. It's funny to me the airs some of these people assume up here, just as though we weren't all equal, north of fifty-three. I never heard the like."

"Anything new and exciting?" inquired Bronco, mildly interested. "The last I heard was about the Judge's niece, Miss Chester."

Cherry Malotte turned abruptly, while the Kid slowly lowered the front legs of his chair to the floor. "What was it?" she inquired.

"Why, it seems she compromised herself pretty badly with this fellow Glenister coming up on the steamer last spring. Mighty brazen, according to my wife. Mrs. Champian was on the same ship and says she was horribly shocked."

Ah! Glenister had told her only half the tale, thought the girl. The truth was baring itself. At that moment Champian thought she looked the typical creature of the dance halls, the crafty, jealous, malevolent adventuress.

"And the hussy masquerades as a lady," she sneered. "She is a lady," said the Kid. He sat bolt upright and rigid, and the knuckles of his clenched hands were very white. In the shadow they did not note that his dark face was ghastly, nor did he say more except to bid Champian goodbye when he left, later on. After the door had closed, however, the Kid arose and stretched his muscles, not languidly, but as though to take out the cramp of long tension. He wet his lips, and his mouth was so dry that the sound caused the girl to look up.

"What are you grinning at?" Then, as the light struck his face, she started. "My, how you look! What ails you? Are you sick?" No one, from Dawson down, had seen the Bronco Kid as he looked tonight.

"No, I'm not sick," he answered in a cracked voice. Then the girl laughed harshly. "Do you love that girl too? Why, she's got every man in town crazy!" She wrung her hands, which is a bad sign in a capable person, and as Glenister crossed the floor below in her sight she said, "Ah—I could kill him for that!"

"So could I," said the Kid and left her without adieu.

CHAPTER XIII. FOR a long time Cherry Malotte sat quietly thinking, removed by her mental stress to such an infinite distance from the music and turmoil beneath that she was conscious of it only as a formless clamor. She had tipped a chair back against the door, wedging it beneath the knob so that she might be saved from interruption, then flung herself into another seat and stared unseeing. As she sat thus and thought and selected harsh and hateful lines seemed to eat into her face. Now and then she moaned impatiently, as though fearing lest the strategy she was plotting might prove futile; then she would rise and pace her narrow quarters. She was unconscious of time and had spent perhaps two hours thus when amid the buzz of talk in the next compartment she heard a name which caused her to start, listen, then drop her preoccupation like a mantle. A man was speaking of Glenister. Excitement thrilled his voice.

"I never saw anything like it since McMaster's night in Virginia City, thirteen years ago. He's right." "Well, perhaps so," the other replied doubtfully, "but I don't care to back you. I never 'staked' a man in my life."

"Then lend me the money. I'll pay it back in an hour, but for heaven's sake be quick. I tell you he's as right as a golden guinea. It's the lucky night of his life. Why, he turned over the black jack game in four bets. In fifteen minutes more we can't get close enough to a table to send in our money with a messenger boy—every sport in camp will be here."

"I'll stake you to fifty," the second man replied, in a tone that showed a trace of his companion's excitement. So Glenister was gambling, the girl learned, and with such luck as to break the black jack game and excite the greed of every gambler in camp. News of his winnings had gone out into the street, and the sporting men were coming to share his fortune, to fatten like vultures on the adversity of their fellows. Those who had no money to stake were borrowing, like the man next door.

(Continued Next Saturday.)

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