

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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"Aye, Bill—it's all right. We did our best, but we were done by a damned blackguard. Now he'll send me up but I don't care. I broke him—with my naked hands. Didn't I, McNamara?" He mocked unsteadily at the boss, who cursed aloud in return, glowering like an evil mask, while Stillman ran up, disheveled and shilly friskable.

"Take him away, I tell you! Take him to jail!"

But Wheaton held his place, while the room centered its eyes upon him, keening some unexpected development. He saw it, and, in concession to a natural vanity and dramatic instinct, he threw back his head and stuffed his hands into his coat pockets, while the crowd waited. He grinned insolently at the judge and the receiver.

"This will be a day of defeats and disappointments to you, my friends. That boy won't go to jail because you will wear the shackles yourselves. Oh, you played a shrewd game, you two, with your senators, your politics and your pulls, but it's our turn now, and we'll make you dance for the mines you gutted and the robberies you've done and the men you've ruined. Thank heaven, there's one honest court,



"We'll make you dance for the mines you gutted."

and I happened to find it." He turned to the strangers who had accompanied him from the ship, crying, "Serve those warrants," and they stepped forward.

The uproar of the past few minutes had brought men running from every direction till, finding no room on the stairs, they had massed in the street below while the word flew from lip to lip concerning this closing scene of their drama, the battle of the Midas, the great fight upstairs and the arrest by the "Frisco deputies. Like Sindbad's genie, a wondrous tale took shape from the rumors. Men shouldered one another eagerly for a glimpse of the actors, and when the press streamed out, greeted it with volleys of questions. They saw the unconscious marshall borne forth, followed by the old judge, now a palsied wretch, sinking beside his captor, a very shell of a man at whom they jeered. When McNamara lurched into view, an image of defeat and chagrin, their voices rose menacingly. The pack was turning and he knew it, but though racked and crippled, he bent upon them a visage so full of defiance and contemptuous malignity that they hushed themselves, and their dim picture of him was that of a big man downed, but unbeaten to the last. They began to cry for Glenister, so that when he loomed in the doorway, a ragged, heroic figure, his heavy shock bow over his eyes, his unshaven face aggressive even in its weariness, his corded arms and chest bare beneath the fluttering streamers, the street broke into wild cheering. Here was a man of their own, a son of the northland who labored and loved and fought in a way they understood, and he had come into his due.

But Roy, dumb and listless, staggered up the street, refusing the help of every man except Wheaton. He heard his companion talking, but grasped only that the attorney gloated and gloried.

"We have whipped them, boy. We have whipped them at their own game. Arrested in their very dooryards—cited for contempt of court—that's what they are. They disobeyed those other writs, and so I got them."

"I broke his arm," muttered the miner.

"Yes, I saw you do it! Ugh! It was an awful thing! I couldn't prove conspiracy, but they'll go to jail for a little while just the same, and we have broken the ring."

"It snapped at the shoulder," the other continued dully, "just like a shovel handle. I felt it—but he tried to kill me, and I had to do it."

The attorney took Roy to his cabin and dressed his wounds, talking incessantly the while, but the boy was like a sleep-walker, displaying no elation, no excitement, no joy of victory. At last Wheaton broke out:

"Cheer up! Why, man, you act like a loser! Don't you realize that we've won? Don't you understand that the Midas is yours? And the whole world with it?"

"Won?" echoed the miner. "What do you know about it, Bill? The Midas—the world—what good are they? You're wrong. I've lost—yes, I've lost everything she taught me, and by some damned trick of fate she was there to see me do it. Now, go away; I want to sleep."

He sank upon the bed with his tangle

of blankets and was unconscious before the lawyer had covered him.

There he lay like a dead man till late in the afternoon, when Dextery and Slapjack came in from the hills, answering Wheaton's call, and fell upon him hungrily. They shook Roy into consciousness with joyous riot, pommeling him with affectionate roughness till he rose and joined with them stiffly. He bathed and rubbed the soreness from his muscles, emerging physically fit. They made him recount his adventures to the tiniest detail, following his description of the fight with absorbed interest till Dextery broke into mournful complaint:

"I'd have given my half of the Midas to see you bust him. Lord, I'd have screeched with supreme delight at that."

"Why didn't you gouge his eyes out when you had him crippled?" questioned Slapjack vindictively. "I'd 'a' done it."

Dextery continued: "They tell me that when he was arrested he swore in eighteen different languages, each one more refreshingly repulsive an' vigorous than the precedin'. Oh, I have sure missed a plenty today, partic'lar because my own diction is gettin' run down an' skim milky of late, showin' sad lack of new ideas, which I might have assimilated somethin' robustly, original an' expressive if I'd been here. No, sir; a hose bag full of nuggets wouldn't have kept me away."

"How did it sound when she busted?" insisted the morbid Simms, but Glenister refused to discuss the combat.

"Come on, Slap," said the old prospector; "let's go downtown. I'm set up, I can't set still, an' besides, maybe we can get the story the way it really happened from somebody who ain't bound an' gagged an' chloroformed by such 'unbecomin' modesties. They don't never go into vawdville with them personal episodes, because they read about as thrillin' as a cook-book. Why, say, I've had the story of that fight from four different fellers already, none of which was within four blocks of the scrimmage, an' they're all different an' all better'n your account."

Now that Glenister's mind had recovered some of its poise he realized what he had done.

"I was a beast, an animal," he groaned, "and that after all my striving. I wanted to leave that part behind. I wanted to be worthy of her love and trust even though I never won it, but at the first test I am found lacking. I have lost her confidence. Yes, and what is worse, infinitely worse, I have lost my own. She's always seen me at my worst, she went on, 'but I'm not that kind at bottom—not that kind. I want to do what's right, and if I have another chance I will—I know I will. I've been tried too hard, that's all.'"

Some one knocked, and he opened the door to admit the Bronco Kid and Helen.

"Wait a minute, old man," said the Kid. "I'm here as a friend." The gambler handled himself with difficulty, offering in explanation:

"I'm all sewed up in bandages of one kind or another."

"He ought to be in bed now, but he wouldn't let me come alone, and I could not wait," the girl supplemented, while her eyes avoided Glenister's in strange hesitation.

"He wouldn't let you. I don't understand."

"I'm her brother," announced the Bronco Kid. "I've known it for a long time, but I—I—well, you understand, I couldn't let her know. All I can say is, I've gambled square till the night I played you, and I was as mad as a devilish then, blinning you for the talk I'd heard. Last night I learned by chance about Struve and Helen and got to the roadhouse in time to save her. I'm sorry I didn't kill him." His long white fingers writhed about the arm of his chair at the memory.

"Isn't he dead?" Glenister inquired.

"No. The doctors have brought him in, and he'll get well. He's like half the men in Alaska—here because the sheriff's back home couldn't shoot straight. There's something else. I'm not a good talker, but give me time and I'll manage it so you'll understand. I tried to keep Helen from coming on this errand, but she said it was the square thing and she knows better than I. It's about those papers she brought in last spring. She was afraid you might consider her a party to the deal, but you don't do you?" He glared belligerently, and Roy replied with fervor:

"Certainly not. Go on."

"Well, she learned the other day that those documents told the whole story and contained enough proof to break up this conspiracy and convict the judge and McNamara and all the rest, but Struve kept the bundle in his safe and wouldn't give it up without a price. That's why she went away with him. She thought it was right, and—that's all. But it seems Wheaton had succeeded in another way. Now, I'm coming to the point. The judge and McNamara are arrested for contempt of court and they're as good as convicted; you have recovered your mine, and these men are disgraced. They will go to jail."

"Yes, for six months, perhaps," broke in the other boy, "but what does that amount to? There never was a bolder crime consummated nor one more cruelly unjust. They robbed a realm and pillaged its people, they defied a court and made justice a waanton, they jailed good men and sent others to rule; and for this they are to suffer—how? By a paltry fine or a short im-

prisonment, perhaps, by an ephemeral disgrace and the loss of their stolen goods. Contempt of court is the accusation, but you might as well convict a murderer for breach of the peace. We've thrown them off, it's true, and they won't trouble us again, but they'll never have to answer for their real infamy. That will go unpunished while their lawyers quibble over technicalities and rules of court. I guess it's true that there isn't any law of God or man north of fifty-three; but if there is justice south of that mark, those people will answer for conspiracy and go to the penitentiary."

"You make it hard for me to say what I want to. I am almost sorry we came, for I am not cunning with words, and I don't know that you'll understand," said the Bronco Kid gravely. "We looked at it this way: you have had your victory, you have beaten your enemies against odds, you have recovered your mine, and they are disgraced. To men like them that last will outlive and outweigh all the rest; but the judge is our uncle and our blood runs in his veins. He took Helen when she was a baby and was a father to her in his selfish way, loving her as best he knew how. And she loves him."

"I don't quite understand you," said Roy.

And then Helen spoke for the first time eagerly, taking a packet from her bosom as she began:

"This will tell the whole wretched story, Mr. Glenister, and show the plot in all its villainess. It's hard for me to betray my uncle, but this proof is yours by right to use as you see fit, and I can't keep it."

"Do you mean that this evidence will show all that? And you're going to give it to me because you think it is your duty?"

"It belongs to you. I have no choice. But what I came for was to plead and ask a little mercy for my uncle, who is an old man, and very weak. This will kill him."

He saw that her eyes were swimming, while the little chin quivered ever so slightly and her pale cheeks were flushed. There rose in him the old wild desire to take her in his arms, a yearning to pillow her head on his shoulder and kiss away the tears, to smooth with tender caress the wavy hair and bury his face deep in it till he grew drunk with the madness of her. But he knew at last for whom she really pleaded.

So he was to forewear this vengeance, which was no vengeance after all, but in verity a just punishment. They asked him—a man—a man's man—a northman—to do this, and for what? For no reward, but on the contrary to insure himself lasting bitterness. He strove to look at the proposition calmly, clearly, but it was difficult. If only by freeing this other villain as well as her uncle he would do a good to her, then he would not hesitate. Love was not the only thing. He marveled at his own attitude. This could not be his old self debating thus. He had asked for another chance to show that he was not the old Roy Glenister. Well, it had come, and he was ready.

Roy dared not look at Helen any more, for this was the hardest moment he had ever lived.

"You ask this for your uncle, but what of—the other fellow? You must know that if one goes free so will they both. They can't be separated."

"It's almost too much to ask," the Kid took up, uncertainly. "But don't you think the work is done? I can't help but admire McNamara, and neither can you—he's been too good an enemy to you for that—and—she—she loves Helen."

"I know—I know," said Glenister hastily, at the same time stopping an unintelligible protest from the girl. "You've said enough." He straightened his slightly stooping shoulders and looked at the unopened package wearily, then slipped the rubber band from it and, separating the contents, tore them up—one by one—tore them into fine bits without hurry or ostentation and tossed the fragments away, while the woman began to sob softly, the sound of her relief alone disturbing the silence. And so he gave her his enemy, making his offer gameily, according to his code.

"You're right—the work is done. And now I'm very tired."

They left him standing there, the

glory of the dying day (flaming his iron, brown features, the vision of a great loneliness in his weary eyes.

He did not rouse himself till the sky before him was only a curtain of steel, penciled with streaks of soot that lay close down above the darker sea. Then he sighed and said aloud:

"So this is the end, and I give him to her with these hands." He held them out before him curiously, becoming conscious for the first time that the left one was swollen and discolored and fearfully painful. He noted it with impersonal interest, realizing its need of medical attention—so left the cabin and walked down into the city. He encountered Dextery and Simms on the way, and they went with him, both flowing with the gossip of the camp.

"Lord, but you're the talk of the town," they began. "The curio hunters have commenced to pull Struve's office apart for souvenirs, and the Swedes want to run you for congress as soon as ever we get admitted as a state. They say that at collar an' elbow bolts you could lick any of them eastern senators and thereby rattle out a lot of good legislation for us crippled up here."

"Speakin' of laws goes to show me that this here country is gettin' too blasted civilized for a white man," said Simms pessimistically, "and now that this fight is ended up it don't look like there would be anything doin' fit to claim the interest of a growed up person for a long while. I'm goin' west."

"West! Why, you can throw a stone into Bering strait from here," said Roy, smiling.

"Oh, well, the world's round. There's a schooner outfitin' for Siberia—two years' cruise. Me an' Dex is figgerin' on gettin' out toward the frontier fer a spell."

"Sure!" said Dextery. "I'm beginnin' to feel all cramped up hereabouts owing to these silly monarch orchestras an' French restaurants and such discrepancies of scenery. They're puttin' a pavement on Front street, and there's a shoe shinin' parlor opened up. Why, I'd like to get where I could stretch an' holler without disturbin' the pensiveness of some dude in a dress suit. Better come along, Roy; we can sell out the Midas."

"I'll think it over," said the young man.

The night was bright with a full moon when they left the doctor's office. Roy, in no mood for the exuberance of his companions, parted from them, but had not gone far before he met Cherry Malotte. His head was low, and he did not see her till she spoke.

"Well, boy, so it's over at last."

Her words chimed so perfectly with his thoughts that he replied, "Yes; it's all over, little girl."

"You don't mind my congratulations—you know me too well for that. How does it feel to be a winner?"

"I don't know. I've lost."

"Lost what?"

"Everything—except the gold mine."

"Everything except—I see! You mean that she—that you have asked her, and she won't?" He never knew the cost at which she held her voice so steady.

"More so than that. It's so new that it hurts yet, and it will continue to hurt for a long time, I suppose. But tomorrow I am going back to my hills and my valleys, back to the Midas and my work, and try to begin all over. For a time I've wandered in strange paths, seeking new gods, as it were, but the dazle has died out of my eyes and I can see true again. She isn't for me, although I shall always love her. I'm sorry I can't forget easily, as some do. It's hard to look ahead and take an interest in things. But what about you? Where shall you go?"

"I don't know. It doesn't really matter—now." The dusk hid her white, set face, and she spoke monotonously. "I am going to see the Bronco Kid. He sent for me. He's ill."

"He's not a bad sort," said Roy. "And I suppose he'll make a new start too."

"Perhaps," said she, gazing far out over the gloomy ocean. "It all depends." After a moment she added, "What a pity that we can't all sponge off the state and begin afresh and forget!"

"It's part of the game," said he. "I don't know why it's so, but it is. I'll see you sometimes, won't I?"

"See how I think no."

(Continued Next Saturday.)

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