

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—At Unalaska Glenister and Dexter, gold miners bound to Nome, save a young woman from a party of savers. The three sail north on the Santa Maria, the girl as a stowaway in the miner's cabin, while the men go to low. Dexter is warned to guard his claim and to beware of a man named McNamara, who backed by the courts, is going to Nome. The girl overhears Glenister say he consents to "spoils of war." II.—The girl, carrying important papers, had left Seattle for Nome on the Ohio, which, with small-pox aboard, had been quarantined at Unalaska. She had fled from the Ohio in order to reach Nome as soon as possible. III.—The girl tells Glenister her name is Helen Chester. She is "bringing the law" to Nome. He tells her he will guard his mine himself. He kisses her against her will. IV.—As Helen leaves the cabin on the ship's arrival at Nome she is seen by Mrs. Champion of Nome. Struve, the lawyer who Helen has come to see for a trunk, is also there. Other arrivals are Alec McNamara, a political schemer, and Dunham, partner of Struve. McNamara and the two lawyers plot to "jump" the Midas claim. Their agent, Gallaway, has been driven off by Dexter. Struve, acting on instructions in the papers brought innocently by Helen, has clouded the titles of the richest placers in Nome. McNamara is head of a scheme to oust the rightful mine owners. There have been many attempts to "jump" claims. Glenister promises Helen that he will try to become civilized and will not wreck old and the vain attempt at legal relief made by his lawyer, Bill Wheaton. McNamara is supported by federal troops. Glenister becomes jealous of Helen when Chester tells he intends to marry the reformer, Bronco Kid, in love with Cherry, is jealous of Glenister.



"We're in terrible shape, miss."

himself in the sand against the boat, while at her greeting he broke into talk as if he was grateful only of her friendly presence to stir his confidential clouds into active vibration. "We're in terrible shape, miss," he said. "Our claims jumped. Somebody run in and talked the boy out of it when I was gone, and now this here new law game that you all brought in this summer. I've been drunk. That's what makes me look so ornery."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE water front had a strong attraction for Helen Chester and rarely did a fair day pass without finding her in some quiet spot from which she could watch the shifting life along its edge, the ships at anchor and the varied incidents of the surf.

This morning she sat in a dory pulled high up on the beach, bathed in the bright sunshine and staring at the rollers, while lines of condensation dripped from her hair. The wind had blown for some days till the ocean beat heavily across the shallow bar, and now, as it became quiet, longshoremen were launching their craft, preparing to resume their traffic.

Now until the previous day had the news of her friends' misfortune come to her, and although she had heard no hint of fraud, she began to realize that they were involved in a serious tangle. To the question which she anxiously put to her uncle he had replied that their difficulty arose from a technicality in the mining laws which another man had been shrewd enough to profit by. It was a complicated question, he said, and one requiring time to thrash out to an equitable settlement. She had undertaken to remind him of the advice those men had given her, but with a smile, he interrupted. He could not show such things to influence his judicial attitude, and she must not endeavor to prejudice him in the discharge of his duty. Recognizing the justice of this, she had desisted.

For many days the girl had caught scattered talk between the judge and McNamara and between Struve and his associates, but it all seemed foreign and dry, and beyond the fact that it bore on the litigation over the Anvil creek mines, she understood nothing and cared less, particularly as a new interest had but recently come into her life, an interest in the form of a man—McNamara.

He had begun with quiet, half concealed admiration of her, which had rapidly increased until his attentions had become of a singularly positive and restless character.

"What a misfortune! Neither gun nor bounder!"

"I'll scratch his back and talk pretty to him," says I, "while you run back and get a Winchester and then ferocious bulldozers."

"Wolf bounds," says he, with dignity, "full blooded, seventy pun each. They'll read the poor best limb from limb. I hate to do it, but it'll be good practice for them."

"I bet don't forget the gun."

"Well, I tried sticks at the critter when he tried to unclimb the tree till finally the boss got back with his dogs. They set up an awful holler when they see the bear—first one they'd ever smelled, I reckon—and the little fellow crawled in some forks and watched things, cautious while they crawled about, layin' most fierce and blood curdin'."

"How you blood curdin' to get him down?"

"I'll shoot him in the lower jaw," says the Britisher, "so he can't bite the dogs. I'll give 'em cavendish."

"He takes aim at Mr. Bear's chin and misses it three times round," he said that excited.

"Settle down, H'Anghlish," says I. "He ain't got no double chin. How many shells left in your gun?"

"When he looks he finds there's only one more, for he hadn't stopped to fill the magazine, so I cautions him."

"You're shootin' too low. Rabbe hee!"

"He raised her all right and caught Mr. Bruin in the snout. What followed thereafter was most too quick to notice, for the poor bear let out a howl, dropped off his limb into the midst of them ragin', turble seventy pun bounds an' tumbled 'em to death, one after another, like he was doin' a system of health exercises. He took 'em to his bosom as if he'd just got back one, he made that, droppin' soon an' put a good filling in his leg. Yes, sir; most chewed it off. H'Anghlish he'd had to step in with the hatchet and kill the brute, though I was most dead from laughin'."

"That's how it is with me an' Glenister," the old man concluded. "When he gets tired experimentin' with this new law game of his, I'll step in an' do business on a common sense basis."

"You talk as if you wouldn't get fair play," said Helen.

"We won't," said he, with conviction. "I look on all lawyers with suspicion, even to old badasses. I never give no pardon an' gettin' it, believe me, I'm a friend an' he ain't no real relation of yours, anyhow. No, sir. They're all crooked."

Dexter held the western distrust of the legal profession—comprehensive, unreasoning, deep.

"Is the old man all the kin you've got?" he questioned, when she refused to discuss the matter.

"He is—in a way. I have a brother, I hope I have, somewhere. He ran away when we were both little tads, and I haven't seen him since. I heard about him, indirectly, at Skagway—three years ago—during the big rush to the Klondike, but he has never been home. When father died, I went to live with Uncle Arthur—some day, perhaps, I'll find my brother. He's crossed to the mine, the weights there are only we two left, and I've loved him always."

She spoke sadly and her mood blended well with the gloom of her companion, so they stared silently out over the heaving green waters.

"It's a good thing me an' the kid had a little piece of money ahead," Dexter resumed later, reverting to the thought that lay uppermost in his mind. "I never would be up against it right if I hadn't. The poor couldn't have amused himself none with these court proceedings, because they come high. I call 'em luxuries, like brandied peaches an' silk undershirts."

"I don't trust these Jim Crows, neither. No, sirree! I kept a iron safe and nailed it out to the mine. The weights we'd be up against it right if I hadn't. We've got a feller named Johnson watchin' it now. Steal it? Well, hardly. They can't but her open without a stick of dynamite which would rouse everybody in five miles, an' they can't lug her off bodily—she's too heavy. No, it's safer there than any place I know of. There ain't no no-bondin' cashiers an' all that. Tomorrow I'm goin' back to live on the claim an' watch this receiver man till the thing's settled."

When the girl arose to go, he accompanied her up through the deep sand of the lanekie street to the main muddy thoroughfare of the camp. As yet the planked and graveled pavements which later threaded the town were unknown, and the incessant traffic had worn the road into a quagmire of chocolate colored slush, almost axle deep, with which the store fronts, show windows and awnings were plentifully shot and splattered from passing teams. Whenever a wagon approached pedestrians fled to the shelter of neighboring doorways, watching a chance to dodge out of the way. When vehicles passed the street out into the morasses that constituted the rest of the town, they ventured perilously, their horses plunging, snorting, terrified, amid an atmosphere of profanity. Discouraged animals were down constantly, and no foot passenger, even with rubber boots, ventured off the planks that led from house to house.

To avoid a splashing team Dexter pulled his companion close in against the entrance to the Northern saloon, standing before her protectingly.

Although it was late in the afternoon, the Bronco Kid had just arisen and was now loafing preparatory to the active duties of his profession. He was speaking with the proprietor when Dexter and the girl sought shelter just without the open door, so he caught a fair though fleeting glimpse of her as she flashed a curious look inside. She had never been so close to a gambling hall before and would have liked to peer in more carefully had she dared, but her companion moved forward. At the first look the Bronco Kid had broken off in his speech and stared at her through an opening. When she had vanished, he spoke to Reilly:

"Who's that?"

Reilly shrugged his shoulders; then, without further question, the Kid turned back toward the empty theater and out of the back door.

He loved nonchalantly till he was outside, then with the speed of a cat

ter, for McNamara rode into town behind me."

The old prospector proceeded to the Golden Gate hotel and inquired for Judge Stillman's room. A boy attempted to take his name, but he seized him by the scruff of the neck and sat him in his seat, proceeding unannounced to the suit to which he had been directed. Hearing voices, he knocked and then, without awaiting a summons, walked in.

The room was fitted like an office, with desk, table, typewriter and law books. Other rooms opened from it on each side—two men were talking earnestly—one gray haired, smooth shaven and clerical, the other tall, picturesque and masterful. With his first glance the minor knew that before him were the two he had come to see and that in reality he had to deal with but one, the big man who shot at him the level glances.

"We are engaged," said the Judge; "very busy engaged, sir. Will you call again in half an hour?"

Dexter looked him over carefully from head to foot, then turned his back on him and regarded the other. Neither he nor McNamara spoke, but their eyes were busy, and each instinctively knew that there was a foe.

"What do you want?" McNamara inquired finally.

"I just dropped in to get acquainted. My name is Dexter—Joe Dexter—from everywhere west of the Missouri. An' your name is McNamara, ain't it? This here, I reckon, is your little French possid'—eh?" indicating Stillman.

"What do you mean?" said McNamara, while the judge murmured indignantly.

"Just what I say. However, that ain't what I want to talk about. I don't take no stock in such truck as judges an' lawyers an' orders of court. They ain't intubed to be took serious. They're all right for children an' court-eners an' non compass mental people. I judge, jury an' hangman, an' I ain't to continue workin' no legislator, except an' judicial duties to the end of the string. You look out! My partner is young an' seems to like the idea of lettin' somebody else run his business. We ain't to give him no hand and let him amuse himself for awhile with your dinky little writs an' receiver ships. But don't go too far. You can rot the Sweden, 'cause Sweden ain't outbid to have no money, an' some other crook would get it if you didn't, but don't play me an' Glenister fer Scandinavians. It's a mistake. We're who we are, an' I ain't to come around 'up here with one of those an' bust you so you won't hold together durin' the ceremonies."

With his last words he made the slightest shifting movement, only a lifting shrug of the shoulder, yet in his palm lay a six shooter. He had slipped it from his trousers band with the ease of long practice and absolute surety. Judge Stillman gasped and backed against the desk, but McNamara, still waving his leg as he sat side wise on the table. His only sign of interest was a quickening of the eyes, a fact of which Dexter made mental note.

"Yes," said the minor, disregarding the alarm of the lawyer, "you can wear this court in your vest pocket like a Waterbury, if you want to, but if you don't let me alone, I'll uncoil its main spring. That's all."

He replaced his weapon and, turning, walked out the door.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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