

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

CHAPTER XV.
ON the morning after the episode in the Northern, Glenister awoke under a weight of discouragement and desolation.

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 net, claim and dump the jobs of lynch, quiet jump in or such as needs do. There's a lot of law sharps and storekeepers in the bunch who figure McNamara's gang will wipe them off the map next.

"I wish we might shut 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—he's got too much pull at headquarters. If the Strangers don't do no good we'd better go in and clean out the bunch like we was killing snakes. If that fails I'm going 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 medicinal purposes."

Glenister laughed. "Speaking of whisky, Dex, I notice that you've been drinking pretty hard of late—that is, hard for you."

"Well, hard or easy, you'd better cut it out."
It was some time later that one of the detectives employed by the Swedenet met Glenister on Front street and by an almost imperceptible sign signified his desire to speak with him.

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 started 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 forward, considerably shaken, and related the incident to Dextry.

"You think it's some of McNamara's work, eh?" Dextry inquired when he had finished.

"Of course. Didn't the detective warn me to look?"
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 man with them people, but they've got the gain on us now, so what could they gain by putting you away? I don't believe it's them, but whoever it is I'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 uneasy 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 bused 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, aren't these hats of ours alike. Just as I came by that lumber pile down yesterday a man hopped out and threw a yander under my nose. He was quicker than light and never blew his whiskers 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?"
"Sure."
"Can't you?"
"Is Bronco Kid."

"Loni!" ejaculated Glenister. "Do you think he's after me?"
He ain't after nobody else, ain't take my word for it, it's got nothin' to do with McNamara nor that gambler row. He's too game for that. There's some other reason."

their serious faces lighted imperfectly by scattered lanterns. A certain constraint seized them upon Glenister's entrance. The chairman was embarrassed. It was but momentary, however, and he was back to his usual manner. He was back to his usual manner. He was back to his usual manner.

"We will be presenting here quietly with our arms at 10 o'clock. And let me caution you again not to talk or do anything to scare the birds away."

Glenister arose. "I came late, Mr. Chairman, as I missed hearing your plan. I gather that you're out for business, however, and I want to be in it. May I ask what is on foot?"

"Certainly. Things have reached such a pass that moderate means are useless. We have decided to act and act quickly. We have exhausted every legal resource, and now we're going to stamp out this gang of robbers in our own way. We will get together in an hour, divide into three groups of twenty men, each with a leader, then go to the houses of McNamara, Stillman and Voorhees, take them prisoners, and—"

He waved his hand in a large gesture. Glenister made no answer for a moment, while the crowd watched him intently.

"You have discussed this fully?" he asked.

"We have. It has been voted on, and we're unanimous."

"My friends, when I stepped into this room just now I felt that I wasn't wanted. Why, I don't know, because I have had more to do with organizing this movement than any of you and because I have suffered just as much as the rest. I want to know if I was omitted from this meeting intention ally."

"This is an embarrassing position to put me in," said the chairman gravely. "I shall answer as spokesman for these men if they wish."

himself. He felt that he was being ground between his loyalty to the vigilantes and his own conscience. The girl was one of the gang, he reasoned—she had schemed with them to betray him through his love, and she was pledged to the one man in the world whom he hated with fanatical fury. Why should he think of her in this hour? Six months back he would have looked with jealous eyes upon the right to the vigilantes, but this change had mastered him—what was it? Not cowardice, nor caution. No. Yet, being intangible, it was none the less marked, as his friends had shown him an hour since.

He slipped out to the night. The mob stirred up as it pleased elsewhere, but no man should enter her house. He found a light shining from her parlor window, and, noting the shade up a few inches, stole close. Peering through the doorway he saw Helen, he discovered Struve and Helen. He snuck back into the shadows and remained hidden for a considerable time after the lawyer left, for the dancers were returning from the hotel and passed close to the front of the house, and mounting the steps, knocked sharply. As Helen appeared at the door, he stepped inside and closed it after him.

The girl's hair lay over her neck and shoulders in tumbled brown masses, while her breast heaved tumultuously at the sudden, grim sight of him. She stepped back against the wall, her wondrous, deep gray eyes wide and troubled, the blush of modesty struggling with the pallor of dismay.

The picture palmed him like a knife thrust. This girl was his life's love, and he had loved her for years. He forgot for a moment that she was false and plotting, then, recalling it, spoke as roughly as he might and stated his errand. Then the old man had appeared on the stairs above, speechless with fright at what he overheard. It was evident that his nerves, so sorely strained by the events of the past week, were now snapped utterly. A lunatic mood seized Glenister, a lunatic mood which made him strike the girl's face and address the girl again.

"Don't take anything with you. Just dress and come with me."

The creature on the stairs above stammered and stuttered loudly: "What outrage is this, Mr. Glenister?"

"The people of Nome are up in arms, and I've come to save you. Don't stop to argue." He spoke impatiently.

"Is this some ruse to get me into your power?"

"Uncle Arthur!" exclaimed the girl sharply. Her eyes met Glenister's and begged him to take no offense. "I don't understand this atrocity. You must be mad!"

She did as directed, taking her place beside him at the opening, while the judge crept in and sat upon the bed, his heavy breathing the only sound in the room. The two young people stood so close to each other that the sweet scent of her person awoke in him an almost irresistible longing. He forgot her treachery again, forgot that she was another's, forgot all save that she loved her truly and purely, with a love which was like an agony to him. Her shoulder brushed his arm; he heard the soft rustling of her garment at her breast as she breathed. Some one passed in the street and she laid a hand upon him fearfully. It was very cold, very dry and very soft, but he made no move to take it. The momentary fragrance, still, tense, interminable. Occasionally she turned toward him, and he stooped to catch her whispered words. At such times her eyes would stare against his cheek, and he would kiss her forehead. Out in the night a wolf dog barked and the air, then came the sound of other wrangling and snarling in a nearby corral. This is a chickenless land and no cock crow breaks the midnight peace. The suspense enhanced the judge's perturbation till his chattering teeth sounded like castanets. Now and then he glanced at his watch. The watch had lost track of time when their strained eyes detected dark blotches materializing out of the shadows.

"There they come," whispered Glenister, forcing her back from the aperture; but she would not be denied, and returned to his side.

As the foremost figure reached the gate Roy leaped forth and spoke, not loudly, but in tones that sliced through the silence, sharp, clean and without warning.

"Halt! Don't come inside the fence. There was an instant's confusion; then, before the men beneath had time to answer or take action, he continued: "This is Roy Glenister talking. I told you not to molest these people, and I warn you again. We're ready for you."

The leader spoke. "You're a traitor, Glenister."

"He winced. 'Perhaps I am. You betrayed me first, though, and traitor or not, you can't come into this house.' There was a murmur at this, and some one said: 'Miss Chester is safe. All we want is the judge. We won't harm him, not if he'll wear this suit we brought along. He needs't be afraid. Tar is good for the skin.'"

"Oh, my God!" groaned the limb of the law.

Suddenly a man came running down the plank pavement and into the group.

"McNamara's gone and so's the marshal and the rest," he panted. There was a moment's silence, and then the leader growled to his men, "Scatter out and rush the house, boys." He raised his voice to the man in the window. "This is your work, you damned turn coat!" His followers melted away to right and left, vaulted the fence and bolted into the shelter of the walls. The click, click of Glenister's Winchester sounded through the room, while the sweat stood on his head. He wondered if he could do this deed, if he could really fire on these people. He wondered if his muscles would not tremble and paralyze before they obeyed his command.

"Good night, and God bless you—friend."

She returned to the judge, who was in a pitiable state, and for a long time she loved to soothe him as though he were a child. She undertook to question him about the things which lay uppermost in her mind and which his night had half revealed, but he became fretful and irritated at the mention of names and naming. She sat beside his bed till he dozed off, puzzling to discover what lay behind the hints she had heard till her brain and body melted in absolute weariness. The rest of the day's excitement sapped her strength till she could barely creep to her own couch, where she rolled and sighed, too tired to sleep at all. She awoke finally, with one last nervous flicker, before complete oblivion took her. A sentence was on her mind—it almost seemed as though she had spoken it aloud: "The handsomest woman in the north—has been away."

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"Just dress and come with me."

sent the law and the dignity of the government. You mustn't bear a mob of ruffians. We will stay here and meet them, of course."

"Good Lord!" said Glenister. "That's madness; these men aren't ruffians. They are the best citizens of Nome. You don't realize that this is Alaska and that they have sworn to wipe out McNamara's gang. Come along."

"Thank you for your good intentions," she said, "but we have done nothing to run away from. We will get ready to meet these cowards. You had better go or they will find you here."

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