

The Spoilers.

By Rex E. Beach.

CHAPTER XVII. It was nearly noon of the next day when Helen awoke to find that McNameara had ridden in from the creek and stopped for breakfast with the judge. He had asked for her, but on hearing the tale of the night's adventure would not allow her to be disturbed. Later he and the judge had gone away together.



"Shoot!" screamed Helen. "Why don't you shoot?"

Although her judgment approved the step she had contemplated the night before, still the girl now felt a strange reluctance to meet McNameara. It is true that she knew as well as if she had known that the accusations of certain ennobled men, and she was aware that every strong and aggressive character makes enemies in direct proportion to the qualities which lend him greatness. Nevertheless she was aware of an inner conflict that she had not foreseen. This man who so confidently believed that she would marry him did not dominate her consciousness.

She had ridden much of late, taking long solitary gallops beside the slender meadow where she loved so well or up the winding valleys into the foothills where echoed the roar of swift waters or glistened the flash of shovels blades. This morning her horse was lame, so she determined to walk. In her early rambles she had looked timidly askance at the rough men she met till she discovered their common respect and courtesy. The most unkept among them were often collected, although for that matter the roughest of the miners showed abundant consideration for a woman. So she was glad to allow the men to talk to her with the free freedom inspired by the new country and its wide spaces. The wilderness breeds a chivalry all its own.

Thus there seemed to be no danger ahead, though the girl beside the slender meadow with its rounded hills, explaining that the hot weather affects powerfully the thick coated shaggy "malamoos." This is the land of the dog, and whereas in winter his lot is to labor and shiver and starve, in summer he loaf, fights, grows fat and runs wild with the heat.

Helen walked far and, returning, chose an unfamiliar course through the outskirts of the town to avoid meeting any of the women she knew because of that vivid memory of the night before. As she walked swiftly along she thought that she heard faint cries far behind her. Looking up, she noted that it was a lonely, barren quarter and that the only figure in sight was a woman some distance away. A few paces farther on the shouts returned, more plainly, till she saw a man and a woman, and a dog, and she saw several men running, one bearing a smoking revolver, and heard nearer still the snarling hubbub of fighting dogs. In a flash the girl's curiosity became horror, for as she watched one of the dogs made a sudden dash through the now subdued group of animals and ran swiftly along the plank on which she stood. It was a handsome specimen of the Eskimo matamoor—tall, gray and coated like a wolf, with the speed, strength and cunning of its cousin. Its head hung low and swung from side to side as it trotted, the motion flapping foam and slaver. The creature had scattered the pack and now, swift, menacing, relentless, was coming toward Helen.

"How well you shoot!" she gasped. Her eyes were on the gray bulge whose death agonies had thrust it alive into the air. "Let me out!" "I've done bad things," Cherry continued unhesitatingly, "but I was forced into them usually, and I never deliberately tried to wreck a man's life just for his money."

"What do you mean by saying that I have betrayed my friends and wrecked anybody's life?" Helen demanded hotly. "Bah! I had you alone up at the start, but you couldn't see it. Then Struve told me what I hadn't guessed. A bottle of wine, a woman, and that fool will tell all he knows. It's a great game McNameara's playing, and he did well to get you in on it, for you're clever, your nerve is good, and your makeup is great for the little I ought to know. For I've turned a few tricks myself. You'd pardon this little burst of feeling—professional pipe. I'm jealous of your ability, that's all. However, now that you realize we're in the same class, don't look down on me hereafter." She opened the door and bowed her guest out with elaborate mockery.

Helen was too bewildered and humiliated to make much out of this vision and involvement attack except the fact that Cherry Malotte accused her of a part in this conspiracy which every one seemed to believe existed. Here again was that hint of corruption which she encountered on all sides. This might be merely a woman's jealousy, and yet she said Struve had told her all about it—that a bottle of wine and a pretty face would make the lawyer disclose anything she could believe it from what she knew and had heard of him. The feeling that she was groping in the dark, that she was wrapped in a mysterious web of secrecy, came over her again as it had so often of late. If Struve talked to that other woman, why wouldn't he talk to her? She paused, changing her direction toward front street, revolving rapidly in her mind as she went her course of action. Cherry Malotte believed her to be an actress. Very well, she would prove her judgment right.

She found Struve busy in his private office, but he leaped to his feet on her entrance and came forward, offering her a chair. "Good morning, Miss Helen. I was busy, but I have a fine color, considering the night you passed. The judge told me all about the affair, and let me state that you're the bluest-jeans girl I know."

She smiled grimly at the thought of what made her cheeks glow and languidly loosened the buttons of her jacket. "I suppose you're very busy, you lawyer man?" she inquired. "Yes, but not too busy to attend to anything you want."

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people's world; and, on the other hand, you can't sit still, and you come to me. Suppose I tell you I had the papers you brought to me last spring in that safe and that they told the whole story—whether your uncle is unimpeachable or whether he deserved hanging by that mob—what would you do, eh? What would you give to see them? Well, they're there and ready to speak for themselves. If you're a woman you ought not to tell your uncle that. Will you trade?"

"Yes, yes! Give them to me," she cried eagerly, at which a wave of crimson rushed up to his eyes and he rose abruptly from his chair. He made toward her, but she retreated to the wall, pale and wide-eyed.

"Can't you see," she flung at him, "that I must know?" He paused. "Of course I can, but I want a kiss to bind the bargain to apply on account."

"You're a panther," she said loathingly. "Graceful and elegant brute, that," he laughed. "Affectionate and full of play, but with sharp teeth and sharper claws. To follow out the idea, which pleases me, I believe the creature owes no loyalty to its fellows, and hunts alone. Now, when you first met this dog, he belongs, won't you come and tell me about it? That dog leads into an outer hall which opens into a street. No one will see you or me."

As she hurried along she wondered dazedly why she had stayed to listen so long. What a monster he was! His meaning was plain, had always been so from the first day he laid eyes on her, and he was utterly conscienceless. She had known all this; and yet, in her proud, youthful confidence, and in her need, every hour more desperate and urgent, to know the truth, she had dared risk herself with him. Withal, the man was shrewd and observant and had divined her mental condition with remarkable sagacity. She had failed with him; but the bird now knew her, and she had not the faintest idea of how she had been found out.

"I think you're mistaken. He must have been joking." For some time she led him on, talking, talking of many things in a way to make him wonder at her new and flip-pant humor. He had never dreamed she could be like this—so untruthfully close to familiarity and yet so maddeningly aloof and distant. He grew bolder in his speech.

"How are things going with us?" she questioned as his warm, gray eyebrows moved. "I can't talk, and Mr. McNameara is as close-mouthed as can be lately."

He looked at her quickly. "In what respect?" She summoned up her courage and walked past the ragged edge of uncertainty. "Now, don't you try to keep me in short dresses too. It's getting wearisome. I've done my part, and I want to know what the rest of you are doing. You said that you knew a great wrong."

"What do you want to know?" he asked cautiously. "Everything. Don't you think I can hear what people are saying?" "Oh, that's it! Well, don't you pay any attention to what people say."

When they were inside, Cherry Malotte stood and gazed at her visitor with inscrutable eyes and stony face. "It isn't easy for me to come back," Helen began. "But I felt that I had to. You can help me, I hope you will. You said that you knew a great wrong."

"What do you want to know?" he asked cautiously. "Everything. Don't you think I can hear what people are saying?" "Oh, that's it! Well, don't you pay any attention to what people say."

She recognized her mistake and continued hurriedly. "Why shouldn't I? Aren't we all in this together? I object to being used and then discarded. I think I'm entitled to know how the scheme is working. Don't you think I can keep my mouth shut?"

"Of course," he laughed, trying to change the subject of their talk. But she arose and leaned against the desk near him, vowing that she would not leave the office without clearing some part of this mystery. His manner strengthened her suspicion that there was something behind it all. This dispirited, brilliant creature knew the situation thoroughly, and yet, though swayed by her efforts, he remained chafed by caution. She leaned forward and smiled at him.

"You're just like the others, aren't you? You won't give me any satisfaction at all." "Give, give, give," said Struve cynically. "That's always the woman's cry. Give me this—give me that. Selfish sex! Why don't you offer something in return? Men are traders; women users. You are curious; hence miserable. I can help you, therefore I should do it for a smile. You ask me to break my promises and risk my honor on your caprice. Well, that's womanlike, and I'll do it. I'll put myself in your power, but I won't do it gratis. No; we'll trade."

"It isn't curiosity," she denied indignantly; "it is my due." "No; you've heard the common talk and grown suspicious, that's all. You think I know something that will throw a new light on a new shadow on everything you have in the world, and you're worked up to such a condition that you can't take your own

was being done. I have suspected it, but I didn't know, and I've been afraid to do it on my own people. You said I had a part in it—that I'd betrayed my friends. Wait a moment," she hurried on, at the other's cynical smile. "Would you tell me what you know and what you think my part has been? I've heard and seen things that make me think oh, they make me afraid to think, and yet I can't find the truth! You see, in a struggle like this, people will make all sorts of allegations, but do they know, have they any proof, that my uncle has done wrong?"

"Is that all?" "No. You said Struve told you the whole scheme. I went to him and tried to expose the story out of him, but—" She shivered at the memory. "What success did you have?" inquired the listener, oddly curious for her cold smile.

"I don't ask me. I hate to think of it." "Cherry laughed cruelly. "So, falling there, you came back to me, look for another favor from the wail. Well, Miss Helen Chester, I don't believe a word you've said, and I'll tell you nothing. Go back to the uncle and the lawless lover who sent you, and inform them that I'll speak when the time comes. They think I know too much, do they?—so they've sent you to spy? Well, I'll make a compact. You play your game, and I'll play mine. Leave Glenister alone, and I'll not tell on McNameara. Is it a bargain?"

"No, no, no! Can't you see? That's not it. All I want is the truth of this thing." "Then go back to Struve and get it. He'll tell you; I won't. Drive your bargain with him—you're able. You've fooled better men—now, see what you can do with him."

Helen left, realizing the futility of further effort, though she felt that this woman did not really doubt her, but was scorned by jealousy till she deliberately chose this attitude. Reaching her own home, she wrote two brief notes and called in her Jap boy from the kitchen. "Fred, I want you to hunt up Mr. Glenister and give him this note. If you can't find him, then look for his partner and give the note to him." Fred vanished, to return in an hour with the letter for Dexter still in his hand.

"I don't catch his fellow," he explained. "Your name says he's gone, come back, maybe one, two, seven days." "Did you deliver the note to Mr. Glenister?" "Yes, ma'am." "Was there an answer?" "Yes, ma'am." "Well, give it to me."

The note read: Dear Miss Chester—A discussion of a matter so delicate as both the doctor and the lawyer would be useless. If your inclination is due to the incidents of last night, pray don't trouble yourself. I don't want your story, and you're sure. ROY GLENISTER. As she read the note, Judge Stillman entered, and it seemed to the girl that he had aged a year for every hour in the last twelve, or else the yellow afternoon light limned the sagging hollows and haggard lines of his face most unpleasantly. He looked in voice and manner the nervous burden under which he labored.

"Alec has told me about your engagement, and it lifts a terrible load from me. I'm mighty glad you're going to marry him. He's a wonderful man, and he's the only one who can save us." "What do you mean by that? What are we in danger of?" she inquired, avoiding discussion of McNameara's announcement. "Why, that mob, of course. They'll come back. They said so. But Alec can handle the commanding officer at the post, and, thanks to him, we'll have soldiers guarding the house hereafter."

"Why they won't hurt us." "Tut, tut! I know what I'm talking about. We're in worse danger now than ever, and if we don't break up this organization, there'll be blood—thick—that's what. It's a menace and they're trying to force me out of the bench so they can take the law into their own hands again. That's what I want to see you about. They're planning to kill Alec and me—so he says—and we've got to act quick to prevent murder. Now, this young Glenister is one of them, and he knows who the rest are. Do you think you could get him to talk?"

"I don't think I quite understand you," said the girl, through whitening lips. "Oh, yes, you do. I want the names of the ringleaders, so that I can jail them. You can worm it out of that fellow if you try."

Helen looked at the old man in a horror that at first was dumb. "You ask that of me?" she demanded hoarsely at last. "Nonsense!" he said irritably. "This isn't any time for silly scruples. It's life or death for me, maybe, and for Alec too." He said the last craftily, but she stared at him.

"It's infamous! You're asking me to betray the very man who saved us not twelve hours ago. He risked his life for us." "It isn't treachery at all. It's protection. If we don't get these fellows, they'll get us. I wouldn't punish that young fellow, but I want the others. Come now, you've got to do it."

But she said "No" firmly, and quietly went to her own room, where, behind the locked door, she sat for a long time staring with unseeing eyes, her hands tightly clutched in her lap. At last she whispered: "I'm afraid it's true. I'm afraid it's true."

She remained hidden during the dinner hour, and pleaded a headache when McNameara called in the early evening. Although she had not seen him since he left her the night before, bearing her faint promise to wed him, yet how could she meet him now with the conviction growing on her hourly that he was a master rogue? She wrestled with the thought that he and her uncle, her own uncle who stood in the place of a father, were conspirators. And yet, at memory of the judge's cold blooded request that she should turn traitress, her whole being revolted. If he could ask a thing like that, what other heartless, selfish act might he not be capable of? All the long, solitary evening she kept her room, but at last, feeling faint, slipped down stairs in search of Fred, for she had eaten nothing since her late breakfast.

Voices reached her from the parlor, and as she came to the last step she froze there in an attitude of listening. The first sentence she heard through the close drawn curtains breathed all quibus at eavesdropping. She stood for many breathless minutes drinking in the plot that came to her plainly from within, then turned, gathered up her skirts, and slipped back to her room. Here she made haste madly, tearing off her house clothes and donning others.

She pressed her face to the window and noted that the night was like a close hung velvet pall, without a star in sight. Nevertheless, she wound a heavy veil about her hat and face before she extinguished the light and stepped into the hall. Hearing McNameara's "Good night" at the front door, she retreated again while her uncle slowly mounted the stairs and passed before her chamber. He called her name softly, but when she did not answer continued on to his own room. When he was safely within she descended quietly, went out, and locked the front door behind her, placing the key in her bosom. She hurried now, feeling her way through the thick gloom in a pause, while in her mind was but one frightened thought: "I'll be too late. I'll be too late."

[TO BE CONTINUED.] A Methodist Minister Recommends Chamberlain's Cough Remedy. We have used Chamberlain's Cough Remedy in our home for seven years, and it has always proved to be a reliable remedy. We have found that it would do more than the manufacturers claim for it. It is especially good for croup and whooping cough. Rev. James A. Lewis, pastor Milaca, Minn., M. E. church, Chamberlain's Cough Remedy is sold by English Drug Co.

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