

The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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[Continued from last week.]

CHAPTER XVII.

EVEN after Helen had been out for some time she could barely see sufficiently to avoid collisions. The air, weighted by a low hung roof of clouds, was surcharged with the electric suspense of an impending storm, and seemed to sigh and tremble at the hint of power in leath. It was that pause before the conflict wherein the night laid finger upon its lips.

As the girl neared Glenister's cabin she was disappointed at seeing no light there. She stumbled toward the door, only to utter a half strangled cry as two men stepped out of the gloom and seized her roughly. Something cold and hard was thrust violently against her cheek, forcing her head back and bruising her. She struggled and cried out.

"Hold on, it's a woman!" ejaculated the man who had plinked her arms, loosing his hold till only a hand remained on her shoulder. The other lowered the weapon he had jammed to her face and peered closely.

"Why, Miss Chester," he said. "What are you doing here? You came near getting hurt."

"I am bound for the Wilsons', but I must have lost my way in the darkness. I think you have cut my face." She controlled her fright firmly.

"That's too bad," one said. "We mistook you for"— And the other broke in sharply. "You'd better run along. We're waiting for some one."

Helen hastened back by the route she had come, knowing that there was still time, and that as yet her uncle's emissaries had not laid hands upon Glenister. She had overheard the judge and McNamara plotting to drag the town with a force of deputies, seizing not only her two friends, but every man suspected of being a vigilante. The victims were to be jailed without bond, without reason, without justice, while the mechanism of the court was to be juggled in order to hold them until fall, if necessary. They had said that the officers were already busy, so haste was a crying thing. She sped down the dark streets toward the house of Cherry Malotte, but found no light nor answer to her knock. She was distracted now, and knew not where to seek next among the thousand spots which might hide the man she wanted. What chance had she against the posse sweeping the town from end to end? There was only one; he might be at the Northern theater. Even so, she could not reach him, for she dared not go there herself. She thought of Fred, her Jap boy, but there was no time. Wasted moments meant failure.

Roy had once told her that he never gave up what he undertook. Very well, she would show that even a girl may possess determination. This was no time for modesty or shrinking indecision, so she pulled the veil more closely about her face and took her good name into her hands. She made rapidly toward the lighted streets which cast a skyward glare and from which through the breathless calm arose the sound of carousal. Swiftly she threaded the narrow alleys in search of the theater's rear entrance, for she dared not approach from the front. In this way she came into a part of the camp which had lain hidden from her until now and of the existence of which she had never dreamed.

The vices of a city, however horrible, are at least draped scantily by the mantle of convention, but in a great mining camp they stand naked and without concealment. Here there were rows upon rows of criblike houses clustered over tortuous, ill lighted lanes, like blow flies swarming to an unclean feast. From within came the noise of ribaldry and debauch. Shrill laughter mingled with coarse, maudlin songs, till the clinging night reeked with abominable revelry. The girl saw painted creatures of every nationality leaning from windows or beckoning from doorways, while drunken men collided with her, barred her course, challenged her, and again and again she was forced to slip from their embraces. At last the high bulk of the theater building loomed a short distance ahead. Panting and frightened, she tried the door with weak hands, to find it locked. From behind it rose the blare of brass and the sound of singing. She accosted a man who approached her through the narrow alley, but he had cruised from the charted course in search of adventure and was not minded to go in quest of doormen; rather, he chose to sing a chantey, to the bibulous measures of which he invited her to dance with him, so she slipped away till he had teetered past. He was some longshoreman in that particular epoch of his inebriety where life had no burden save the dissipation of wages.

Returning, she pounded on the door, possessed of the sense that the man she sought was here, till at last it was flung open, framing the silhouette of a shirt-sleeved, thick-set youth, who shouted:

"What 'n'ell do you want to butt in for while the show's on? Go round front." She caught a glimpse of disordered scenery, and before he could

she thrust a silver coin into his hand, at the same time wrenching herself into the opening. He pocketed the coin and the door clicked to behind her.

"Well, sneak up. The act's closin'." Evidently he was the directing genius of the performance, for at that moment the chorus broke into full cry, and he said, hurriedly:

"Wait a minute. There goes the finally." and dashed away to tend his drops and switches. When the curtain was down and the principals had sought their dressing rooms he returned.

"Do you know Mr. Glenister?" she asked.

"Sure. I seen him tonight. Come here." He led her toward the footlights and, pulling back the edge of the curtain, allowed her to peep past him out into the dance hall. She had never pictured a place like this, and in spite of her agitation was astonished at its gaudy elegance. The gallery was formed of a continuous row of compartments with curtained fronts, in which men and women were talking, drinking, singing. The seats on the lower floor were disappearing, and the canvas cover was rolling back, showing the polished hardwood underneath, while out through the wide folding doors that led to the main gambling room she heard a brass lunged man calling the commencement of the dance. Couples glided into motion while she watched.

"I don't see him," said her guide. "You better walk out front and help yourself." He indicated the stairs which led up to the galleried boxes and the steps leading down on to the main floor, but she handed him another coin, begging him to find Glenister and bring him to her. "Hurry, hurry!" she implored.

The stage manager gazed at her curiously, remarking: "My! You spend your money like it had been left to you. You're a regular pie check for me. Come around any time."

She withdrew to a dark corner and waited interminably till her messenger appeared at the head of the gallery stairs and beckoned to her. As she drew near he said: "I told him there was a \$1,000 filly flagin' him from the stage door, but he's got a grouch an' won't stir. He's in number seven." She hesitated, at which he said, "Go on—you're in right," then continued reassuringly: "Say, pal, if he's your white haired lad, you needn't start no rough house, 'cause he don't flirt wit' these dames none whatever. Naw! Take it from me."

She entered the door her counselor indicated to find Roy lounging back watching the dancers. He turned inquiringly—then, as she raised her veil, leaped to his feet and jerked the curtains to.

"Helen! What are you doing here?" "You must go away quickly," she gasped. "They're trying to arrest you."

"They? Who? Arrest me for what?" "Voorhees and his men—for riot or something about last night."

"Nonsense," he said. "I had no part in it. You know that."

"Yes, yes—but you're a vigilante, and they're after you and all your friends. Your house is guarded and the town is alive with deputies. They've planned to jail you on some pretext or other and hold you indefinitely. Please go before it's too late."

"How do you know this?" he asked gravely.

"I overheard them plotting."

"Who?"

"Uncle Arthur and Mr. McNamara." She faced him squarely as she said it and therefore saw the light flame up in his eyes as he cried:

"And you came here to save me—came here at the risk of your good name?"

"Of course. I would have done the same for Dextery." The gladness died away, leaving him listless.

"Well, let them come. I'm done, I guess. I heard from Wheaton tonight. He's down and out, too—some trouble with the 'Frisco courts about jurisdiction over these cases. I don't know that it's worth while to fight any longer."

"Listen," she said. "You must go. I am sure there is a terrible wrong being done, and you and I must stop it. I have seen the truth at last, and you are in the right. Please hide for a time at least."

"Very well. If you have taken sides with us there's some hope left. Thank you for the risk you ran in warning me."

She had moved to the front of the compartment and was peering forth between the draperies when she stifled a cry.

"Too late! Too late! There they are. Don't part the curtains. They'll see you."

Pushing through the gambling hall were Voorhees and four others, seemingly in quest of some one.

"Run down the back stairs," she breathed and pushed him through the door. He caught and held her hand with a last word of gratitude. Then he was gone. She drew down her veil and was about to follow when the door opened and he reappeared.

"No use," he remarked quietly. "There are three more waiting at the foot." He looked out to find that the officers had searched the crowd and were turning toward the front stairs, thus cutting off his retreat. There were but two ways down from the gallery and no outside windows from which to leap. As they had made no armed display, the presence of the officers had not interrupted the dance. Glenister drew his revolver, while into his eyes came the dancing glitter that Helen had seen before, cold as the glint of winter sunlight.

"No, not that, for God's sake!" she shuddered, clasping his arm.

"I must for your sake or they'll find you here, and that's worse than ruin. I'll fight it out in the corridors so that you can escape in the confusion. Wait till the firing stops and the crowd gathers." His hand was on the knob when she tore it loose, whispering hoarsely:

"They'll kill you. Wait! There's a better way. Jump." She dragged him to the front of the box and pulled aside the curtains. "It isn't high, and they won't see you till it's too late. Then you can run through the crowd."

He grasped her idea, and, slipping his weapon back into its holster, laid hold of the ledge before him and lowered himself down over the dancers. He swung out unhesitatingly, and almost before he had been observed had dropped into their midst. The gallery was but twice the height of a man's head from the floor, so he landed on his feet and had drawn his revolvers even while the men at the stairs were shouting at him to halt.

At sight of the naked weapons there was confusion, wherein the commands

of the deputies mingled with the shrieks of the women, the crash of overturned chairs and the sound of tramping feet, as the crowd divided before Glenister and swept back against the wall in the same ominous way that a crowd in the street had once divided on the morning of Helen's arrival. The trombone player, who had sunk low in his chair with closed eyes, looked out suddenly at the disturbance, and his alarm was blown through the horn in a startled squawk. A large woman whimpered, "Don't shoot," and thrust her palms to her ears, closing her eyes tightly.

Glenister covered the deputies, from whose vicinity the bystanders surged as though from the presence of lepers. "Hands up!" he cried sharply, and they froze into motionless attitudes, one poised on the lowest step of the stairs, the other a pace forward. Voorhees appeared at the head of the flight and rushed down a few steps only to come abruptly into range and to assume a like rigidity, for the young man's aim shifted to him.

"I have a warrant for you," the officer cried, his voice loud in the hush.

"Keep it!" said Glenister, showing his teeth in a smile in which there was no mirth. He backed diagonally across the hall, his boot heels clicking in the silence, his eyes shifting rapidly up and down the stairs where the danger lay.

From her station Helen could see the whole tableau, all but the men on the stairs, where her vision was cut off. She saw the dance girls crouched behind their partners or leaning far out from the wall with parted lips, the men eager, yet fearful, the bartender with a half polished glass poised high. Then a quick movement across the hall suddenly diverted her absorbed attention. She saw a man rip aside the drapery of the box opposite and lean so far out that he seemed in peril of falling. He undertook to sight a weapon at Glenister, who was just passing from his view. At her first glance Helen gasped, her heart gave one fierce lunge, and she cried out.

The distance across the pit was so short that she saw his every line and lineament clearly; it was the brother she had sought these years and years. Before she knew or could check it the blood clattered forth.

"Drury!" she cried aloud, at which he whipped his head about, while amazement and some other emotion she could not gauge spread slowly over his features. For a long moment he stared at her without movement or sign while the drama beneath went on, then he drew back into his retreat with the dazed look of one doubting his senses, yet fearful of putting them

to a test.

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[Continued on page 3.]

Notice.
On Monday, May 1, 1908, at 12 m., the county will meet at Pudding Swamp for the purpose of letting for the lowest responsible bidder of said swamp. The county reserves the right to reject all bids.
S. J. SINGLETARY,
County Supervisor.

Notice.
Notice is hereby given that the county commissioners will meet on Friday, May 1, 1908, instead of the first Monday in said month. All claims must be presented previous to this date.
S. J. SINGLETARY,
County Supervisor.

Read the Farmers & Merchants Bank's ad. this issue.

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