

Forward!

By Henry C. Rowland

SYNOPSIS.
Young Matthew Holmes' speed boat is wrecked while he is on his way to meet his uncle, Jerry Taylor, in a patent fire extinguisher. Landing at the Putney place, he is greeted by three ferocious dogs and a surly mysterious foreigner, and turns the extinguisher upon all four. Soon he is taken away in a ruse and hidden by one Bill Emerson, who has thrilling news. Sylvia Gates, daughter of Hiram Gates, the millionaire, and fiancée of Freddie Grierson, has disappeared while out in her canoe. Much to his surprise, Matt is met by Uncle Jerry, who has been told that his supposed death had married May Upton, his pretty nurse. Matt has been in disfavor with both because, according to legend, he has been kidnapped, and so stoutly defends his theory that Nancy will find him over to the gate road, where they learn \$100,000 reward has been offered for Sylvia's safe return. That night Matt, convinced the mysterious foreigner's true name is the kidnapers, loads his fire extinguisher into a motor-cycle and is just starting out when he meets Nancy, saying, "I'm going, too."



Matt and Nancy could distinguish the dusky, wolfish forms as they circled warmly about the extinguisher and stepped forward.

THIRD INSTALLMENT.
The plan was therefore put into immediate execution. Uncle Jerry started for the house in a somewhat crumpled manner, brusquely declining Matt's assistance and stating that the stab of lumbago would quickly pass. Nancy and Matt walked down to the garage, the girl with a chip on her shoulder, as one might say, and Matt with the amiable insouciance of a dog fox trotting warily beside a new made vixen acquaintance. Arrived at the office, which was new and spacious and housed at this moment a sedan car, also new, a touring car of some years' earlier model, and a Ford for marketing and domestic service, Matt's eyes lightened a little to discover also a motorcycle with a side car standing in a corner.
"Whose perambulator is that?" he asked.
"Mine," said Nancy, and added a little shortly, "a graduation present from May and Mr. Taylor." Her blue eyes brimmed suddenly again. "Sylvia and I came here from college with it."
"Used to ride a motorcycle myself," said Matt. "More fun than a car, but wearing if anything gets out of whack."
"We'll take the sedan," said Nancy, and, stepping into it, seated herself at the wheel. They rolled out upon the road, after having covered some furlongs in silence, Matt ventured to remark in his pleasant voice, "Uncle Jerry seems astonishingly fit."
"Why shouldn't he be?" replied Nancy.
"He's got the best care that is humanly possible and a companionship that he always secretly longed for and—" she turned and fixed Matt with a challenging stare, "and love."
"That," said Matt, "is undeniably evident," and at the kindling look in the girl's blue eyes, he added, "While Uncle Jerry is not really old, and underneath his affected harshness he is kind and lovable, and he is and was and always will be a cultured gentleman and very much of a man."
Nancy's red lip curled a little, but the hardness of her eyes appeared to soften.
"That sounds well from you," said she, "when a few months ago you hoped that he would die."
"I did not hope that he would die," said Matt evenly. "I was informed by the highest and most expert authority that he was dying, and I made my plans accordingly. Anybody would have done the same."
"Then," said Nancy, ignoring his remark, "you tried to prevent his marrying May."
"I plead guilty," said Matt. "It was impossible for me to know that May might be able to save his life and I was unable to perceive the sense or justice of a death bed marriage. I considered that as his nearest of kin my expectations from him had more ethical right than those of his trained nurse, whatever her merits."
"May knew that she could get him well, and that the doctors were wrong," said Nancy.
"Well, I didn't," Matt retorted. "A layman is more apt to take the assurance of leading specialists than of a nurse—especially when the latter doesn't see fit to offer any."
"You might have gone about it more decently," Nancy murmured.
"That'll do, Nancy," said he. "Now, see here. Suppose Uncle Jerry were to die suddenly, and May find herself a very rich widow. Then what if she got ill and the doctors gave her up and on her death bed she wanted to marry some young cub of a medical student who had been detailed to her bedside care. What would you do about it?"
"I'd—
"I'd—
"Say it out," said Matt. "Honestly, now, what would you do?"
"I don't know," said Nancy coldly, then the corners of her lips curled up a little. They quivered as though wrestling to hold down a smile. "But whatever I saw fit to do I'd make a better job of it than you did."
"Quite so," said Matt. "Until today I have been telling myself that the only thing to criticize about my efforts was their dismal failure."
"Why until today?"
"Because I've changed my mind," said Matt. "I'm glad now it all turned out precisely as it has."
Nancy glanced at him with disbelief. "Why?" she asked.
"Because for the first time I believe what you say, that May really loves Uncle Jerry, and I'm rather fond of the old boy myself. I'd really a lot rather have Uncle Jerry than his money. But when I believed it was all up with Uncle Jerry it seemed to me that I had a right to the money instead."
Nancy looked at him again, flushed, frowned, took another look, and did not appear to be convinced.
"I wish that I could be sure you are telling the truth," said she.
Matt's eyes hardened. "It's not at all necessary," said he, "and after all, I doubt if you would be able to manage it."
"Why?" Nancy asked.
"Because," said Matt deliberately, "it is practically impossible for an individual whose honesty holds the slightest flaw to believe in the truth of his own statements."
Nancy turned this maxim in her mind, and to judge from the expression of her face and the slowly rising fog of crimson which swept over it, found it absolutely indigestible.
"I think, Mr. Holmes," said she, "that after that we have nothing more to say to each other."
"As you like," said Matt indifferently, "only permit me to point out that you asked for it and you got it."
For about a mile there was no noise save the purring hum of the machinery. Then, as though having gradually worked herself up to a sublime gesture of self-immolation on the altar of justice, Nancy turned to Matt and said:
"I apologize, Mr. Holmes."

"I have the honor to accept your apology, Miss Upton," Matt answered cheerfully. "I beg, therefore, to retract my own last observation."
"And you really believe that May married him because she loved him and was sure that she could make him well again?"
"Of course I do," said Matt heartily. "You see, Nancy, while the blending of May and December is generally acknowledged as a treacherous combination, it does not apply in the case of your sister and my uncle. He is still a far cry from December, and she is June rather than May. O, come," he went on in his pleasant voice, "Uncle Jerry is only fifty and odd, and his wife about thirty, I should say."
"Thirty-two," Nancy murmured.
"Well, that's a couple of years better. Uncle Jerry is a big, strong man who perhaps because of his very vitality managed to stand off the slam that most concentrated business men of his sort get in the forties. He's in September rather than December, and you get lots of June days in September."
"If you could write as well as you talk," said Nancy grudgingly, "you wouldn't have to take up selling fire extinguishers."
"Thanks," said Matt, always ready to denigrate the rough hunk, "but perhaps my smooth talk might sell more extinguishers than my faltering pen did books. Besides, it is a more elevating profession selling extinguishers, the dens protectors of the home, the guardian geni of the little ones while they sleep. The defender of life and property against the fire devil and the confusion of the sneaking hood with arson in his heart and the rampant Red with his brandished torch. It is hard to think of anything nobler than the distribution of extinguishers like mine."
With such pleasant converse Matt sought to distract his companion's mind from her anxiety until they reached the newly pretentious Gates estate. Nancy and Matt parked the car behind a string of others and went to the front door, where Nancy was informed by a man servant stationed there as a sort of sentry that Mr. Gates was in his study in consultation with an aviator who had arrived and was to be sent out to skim the surface of the Bay.
The young aviator came out as they were standing there, Mr. Gates following him, and at sight of his daughter's chum the harassed father held out both hands.
"Can we speak to you a moment privately, Mr. Gates?" Nancy asked. "This is Mr. Holmes, Mr. Taylor's nephew."
"Yes, come right in," said the stricken father, giving Matt a limp hand and a nod. He led the way into his study and offered them chairs, then sank into one himself.
"This strain has nearly finished me," said he, "but I can't rest until something definite is reported."
Nancy leaned forward. "Has any one suggested that it might be a case of kidnapping?"
"O, yes," he answered, wearily. "That's all been threshed out and thrown in the discard. In the first place, Sylvia would have kept close under the lee of the shore with that puff breeze coming off the land, and as the night was fine after the shower in the afternoon people were moving about and somebody would have heard her scream. She's a big, strong girl and could not have been grabbed up like a child without a struggle." He looked at Matt. "As you probably know, the properties adjoin along the shore and the houses are not far apart. Besides, if she's been kidnapped the chances are that we'd have got some news of it in the course of the day and been warned not to interfere until a ransom had been paid. We fear the worst." He slumped down in his chair with a haggard, mottled face.
"But she's such a splendid swimmer and so used to her canoe," Sylvia protested.
"The best of swimmers sometimes come to grief," muttered Mr. Gates.
"But the canoe, sir," said Matt.
"What we fear is this," said Mr. Gates. "When the wind happens to be strong or puffy, Sylvia was in the habit of putting it down and keep it from blowing off. We think that she may have broken her paddle while making a vigorous stroke and pitched overboard, causing the canoe, which is filled and sank. Then in swimming ashore she may have been taken with cramp, for the water is still very cold and she had just eaten a hearty dinner."
Matt shook his head. "I don't believe it, sir," said he. "If what you describe had happened, the canoe would have spilled her out and righted itself. I know something about canoes. And a girl in such good training as your daughter would not have got a cramp."
Mr. Gates seemed to revive a little and looked at Matt with a sudden interest. "Then what do you think?" he asked.
"I am positive that she has been kidnapped, sir," said Matt, and forgetful for the moment that the sum of his worldly possessions would not have constituted a very interesting wager, he added, "I'd bet my last dollar on it."
"Well," said Mr. Gates heavily, "let's hope and pray you're right. But if you are, we ought to learn something about it within the next few hours. Of course, it's possible that she may have broken her paddle and been blown off shore, but in this case it is almost certain that the swarm of boats out there would have picked her up or the canoe if she had fallen out of it. But on the off chance of her having been abducted, I have just issued an offer of fifty thousand dollars for her immediate return and no questions asked, and her fiancé, Freddy Grierson, has backed it with another fifty."
"I think that money will be collected, Mr. Gates," said Matt, and there may have been some curious inflexion to his voice, for both the stricken parent and Nancy looked at him with a quick, puzzled inquiry. Matt leaned forward in his chair. "I base this belief on my own knowledge of canoes and canoeists," said he. "As I have just pointed out, the mere fact of there being ballast in the canoe would whip it up instantly before it had time to fill if your daughter had pitched out of it. And although you hear a great deal about cramp, it is actually rare and usually happens to thickly muscled people. Take my word for it, Mr. Gates, your daughter is alive and is going to be restored to you."
There was such a ring of conviction in his voice that the face of the father showed a sudden gleam of hope. He thrust out his hand—the tears gushed into his eyes.
"By God, my boy," said he, "you bring back my hope."
Nancy rose. She was looking intently at Matt, and her expression was far from approving. "I think we'd better go, Mr. Holmes," said she. "You seem to know what you're talking about, and I trust you're right. But if you are, we ought soon to know for certain, as Mr. Gates has just said."
They went out and walked in silence to their car. As they moved away Nancy burst out explosively.
"It's all very well to be optimistic, Mr. Holmes, but when a man has begun to adjust his mind to a terrible blow, I question if it's right to offer so positive an assurance as you did. It makes the final knowledge of the truth even more fatal."
"But I am positive," said Matt. "I was never more positive in my life about any-

thing of which I did not have the actual proof."
"I don't think you've got enough to go on," said Matt grimly, and lapsed into a silence which was unbroken until they reached the garage. Here Nancy got out rather sulkily and, ignoring Matt's presence, started to walk up to the house. Thus aloof she did not observe Matt's lingering to inspect the motorcycle nor his pausing at the door of the garage to slip one of the three keys from the ring which was pendant from the padlock. Then, appearing to a work bench just inside the door, he ran his eye along a rack of tools and, with a look of satisfaction, selected from these a small "crate bar," which is a jimmy with a hooked end, and dropped it into the side car of the motorcycle.
If Matt's host or hostess or fellow guest observed his preoccupation at dinner, they ascribed it to the tragedy which had cast a negative reply. Then, as none of them had the heart for such amusements as cards or billiards or music, or even conversation, they retired early. The elderly butler, an old friend of Matt's, had supplied him with some of his uncle's things, and after waiting until it seemed to him that the household had quieted for the night and taps sounded, as one might say, Matt partially undressed, then clothed himself again in a suit of dark gray golfing tweeds.
His next maneuvers might have puzzled the spying eye, had there been one. He was thoroughly familiar with the house from former pleasant sojourns there, and he now went out into the hall and made his way to the housemaid's closet, flashed an electric torch about, and immediately found that which he sought—a bottle of household ammonia. Returning to his room, noiselessly as he imagined, Matt unscrewed the top of the extinguisher and replenished its contents to the mark with the pungent cleansing fluid.
What he failed to observe, however, not having eyes in the back of his head, was a door that opened softly at the end of the hall a little beyond the housemaid's closet, and a piquant face which peered out, while a pair of bright blue eyes watched his maneuvers in mystification.
A few minutes later Matt, with the extinguisher under his arm, slipped out of his room again down the back stairs, through the pantry and dining room, where, opening one of the long French windows, he stepped out into the night. It was dark and still, with no moon, but stars twinkling brightly through the clear soft summer air. Matt started across the lawn for the garage, reached in his pocket for the piffed key with which he had provided himself, unfastened the padlock, and entered. And, scarcely had he done so when another dark gray figure slipped through the same long window, fitted silently across the lawn, and, coming to the garage, ambushed itself behind a farther corner.
Matt wheeled out the motorcycle, then turned to close the door to the garage. As he did so Nancy stepped out from behind the corner, and as Matt turned he repressed

with difficulty a startled yelp at finding that he was not alone.
"Well," said Nancy in a voice which would have been sharp if not suppressed, "what's the meaning of this? Are you a Ruffies or holdup or something just starting off to work, or have you kidnaped Sylvia yourself?" Something in the side car caught her eye, and, glancing into it, she saw the extinguisher and crate bar. "Well, upon my word," said she, "you choose an odd time to peddle your wares, and I must say I like your nerve in helping yourself to my motorcycle. So are you a crook after all?"
Matt groaned. "I might have been warned," said he. "Uncle Jerry told me you had your pug nose in everything."
"That's a peculiarity of pug noses," retorted Nancy. "Now, suppose you tell me what you're up to."
Matt's resolution was quickly taken. "I'm going to collect that hundred thousand dollar reward for the recovery of Sylvia Gates," said he.
Nancy gave a gasp. "Then you had a hand in it?"
"No," said Matt. "But I shall soon have both hands in it, unless my deductions are all wrong."
"Do you think you know where she is?"
"I shan't go as far as that, but I think I know who grabbed her. I'm going to see what I can discover."
"I'm going, too," said Nancy, promptly.
"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Matt. "You might get croaked."
"Now, see here," said Nancy. "Either I go with you or else I go to the telephone and call up the Gates, where there's no doubt a policeman or two, and tell them that I've just caught you sneaking off with my motorcycle and that you have admitted knowing something of the whereabouts of Sylvia."
Matt suppressed a groan. "If you do that," said he, "you might spill the whole job, and there's no telling what might happen Sylvia."
"Then let me go with you," said Nancy. "You're pretty sure to bungle it alone, and if you were to get croaked yourself you might never learn what happened Sylvia."
"There's something in that," Matt admitted. "All right, I'll take you on then. You can wait with the machine while I reconnoiter. We'll call it a fifty-fifty job."
"I'll waive that part of it," said Nancy. "Are you armed?"
"Well, rather," said Matt. "I've got the makings of a gas attack. It wouldn't be the first time today that I've advanced through enemy country and covered my retreat with the good old extinguisher. And I've put an added kick in it."
Nancy sniffed. "So that's what you wanted in the housemaid's closet," said she.
"Quite so," said Matt. "What did you think I was after, the vacuum cleaner?"
"Well, for all the inspired idiots," said Nancy, "give me a writer of modern fiction. Are you always like this?"
"I try not to neglect any opportunity for romantic adventure," Matt answered. "Last time it cost me my watch and roll, and I'd like a chance to get even. Hop in."
"You'd better let me drive," said Nancy.
Matt turned, and, hooking his thumbs in his belt, surveyed her sternly. "Now, look here," said he, "before we start on this expedition in quest of the Silver Gates and which may land me at the threshold of the Pearly Gates, I want one thing distinctly understood. You take your orders from me or it's all off. At least it's all off so far as you're concerned."
There was no mistaking the tenor of this ultimatum.
"All right," said Nancy. "I agree."
"Then come on," said Matt, and started to wheel the machine out of the grounds. It occurred to him that since Nancy's cooperation had been thrust upon him, this might not perhaps be without its value. He did not know with how desperate a hand he might have to deal, and should there be some ambush set, Nancy waiting some distance down the road might at least report his failure to return and bring up reinforcements.
A hundred yards beyond the gates they started the motor and set off. Matt driving and Nancy in the side car, nursing the extinguisher. It did not take them long to cover the stretch of road to the old Putney place, but within a quarter of a mile of this Matt cut off the motor, and there being declivity in their favor, they coasted smoothly almost to the limit of the estate before coming to a stop.
They got down and Matt wheeled the machine into some thick bushes at the side of the road.
"But that is the old Putney place," whispered Nancy.
"Quite so," Matt answered, "but the old Putneys are not living there, just now. A gang of handits have rented it, and I have reason to suppose that they are the ones who have kidnaped Sylvia."
"What sort of reasons?"
"Three big dogs and a well dressed greaser looking cuss that tried to prevent my landing when I hit their beach in my sinking launch."
"There is no longer any question," said Nancy, "about what I have suspected all along—that you are stark, staring mad."
"I was this afternoon when this swine tried to keep me from using his garage phone," Matt retorted. "So were he and the dogs before I got through with them."
"Hopelessly insane," sighed Nancy. "These people are South American diplomats."
"The one I saw didn't show much diplomacy," said Matt, and reached in the side car for his weapon.
"But they are prominent, distinguished people, silly."
"He looked extinguished to me in the last fleeting glimpse I caught of him. Now, look here, I'm running this show, and you agree to obey orders."
"All right," said Nancy. "So on, then, to your destruction. If you'd only told me what your crazy idea was I wouldn't have lost my sleep. But then I might have lost the motorcycle, when you get pinched for attempted burglary."
"If I'm not back in an hour," said Matt. "You may ride back home and dismiss all thought of me as a transient episode in your young life. Or if you have any of that sense which I cannot help but feel lurks beneath your superficial flippancy, you may stop at the Gates and report another member missing from the mess, and picking up the extinguisher he started to walk to the junction of the front and side barriers to the old Putney place. But he had not gone far when he heard a flutter behind him, and turned disgustedly to find Nancy following on Matt halted.
"Do you call this obeying orders?" he growled.
"I can't help it," said Nancy. "A man as crazy as you ought not to be let wander about