

MISS D'ARTAGNAN

By ROYAL BROWN

Illustrated by J. NORMAN LYND.

Standing beside her car, Nancy glanced about her. "What a buck of a place to develop engine trouble!" she murmured. The surrounding scenery consisted of snow and pine forest, for she was stilled in the wilds of Maine. Or possibly the wilds of Canada. She was not quite sure which.

"This," Nancy assured herself impatiently, "is perfectly preposterous. I can't stay here all night. I'd freeze to death. Why on earth doesn't a car come?" Then, as if the good—or bad—fairy that had always seen to it that she got what she wanted had summoned it, a car sped toward her. Nancy planted her feet in its path. "Stop!"

The snow lashed it, half obscuring its headlights. But its driver must have seen her, for momentarily its pace slackened. Then the engine roared anew and the car, leaping forward, would have run her down had she not sprung swiftly to one side.

The habit of caution was ingrained in Wigwagsworth Thayer as his conscience. He had played a very cautious game as end for Harvard—so cautious that he had been chosen for the all-American team two years running—later he had, while flying in France, very cautiously disposed of six Boche planes with a minimum risk to himself.

Cautious had advised Wig, when Nancy had tried to stop him, to put his foot on the accelerator and keep it there. But before he had gone more than a quarter of a mile his conscience began to bother him. Suppose somebody really were in distress.

The thought was to much for him. So he snapped off his lights, stopped his engine, and started back. But cautiously, for he knew this road and its reputation after dark.

Now Nancy had turned back to her car. As Wig came upon her back was to him and he did not recognize her or even her gender. That was because she had, for this trip that was to have landed her in Quebec, garbed herself in brooches and puttees. And in these, with her short coat and close fitting little hat, she looked like a well, exactly like a slim and adorable girl.

There was no excuse save the snow, the place and the time for Wig to mistake her for anything else, or to announce his presence as he did.

"Put up your hands," he suggested, by way of preliminary.

"Instead Nancy screamed. She was frightfully ashamed of that immediately.

"Good gracious!" she snapped. "What do you mean by creeping up on me that way? I had no idea there was anybody around. Why don't you blow your horn—"

"Good—lord!" gasped Wig. "It's you!"

"Yes—isn't the world a small place?" she suggested, satirically. "You are supposed to be arriving at the Somervilles from Boston and I find you on my way to Quebec."

"I'm going to Somervilles now—from Quebec. Didn't Edith tell you?"

"She had, I should be in Boston no more."

In fact, it was on the discovery that Wigwagsworth was to make one of the party her friend Edith Somerville had invited for the weekend in her new country home that Nancy, with chin stubbornly lifted, had headed her car in the direction opposite to that from which the object of her dislike was expected to approach, and had driven boldly into the lowering north.

"They had never stopped to wonder how they got that way. They belonged to the same set in Boston and they had no more chance of avoiding each other than goldfish in the same bowl."

Nancy now eyed him critically.

"You had better give me that revolver," she suggested. "You don't look to me like safe a safe person to have it."

"They were off, both running true to form."

"It happens," he retorted stiffly, "to be nothing but a pipe. I am not in the habit of going armed—"

"Really? I would have thought you wouldn't even venture across the Public gardens without a gun. One of the swans might attack you, you know."

But he, relapsing into tight-lipped silence, had turned to her engine.

"You've burned out your bearings!" he cried at once, almost as if she had committed murder.

And he felt almost that way. He was fond of engines, as some men are of horses.

"Burned out my bearings?" she echoed. "Why, I told the garage man in Portland to see if I needed oil and to put it in if I did."

"I suggest," he advised, "that in the future you look yourself—and see that the oil is actually put in. It is fairly important, you know—or should."

"Oh—pish!" she retorted.

She added, quite as if it were all his fault instead of hers, "What are you going to do about it except talk?"

"Nothing. Except leave your car here and take you along with me until we come to some place where I can drop you."

"How chivalrous! But I'm headed for Quebec, you know—"

"And I'm headed the other way. Sorry, but—"

"You were born that way, I suppose," she commented. "Run along, Wiggy—I'll wait until somebody going my way comes along."

"They call his road Alcohol Alley. You can't possibly stay here—"

"Can't I?" she asked sweetly. "Who is going to prevent me? Oh, don't glare so! Run along. It's after dark and you won't feel safe until you're indoors."

Naturally she knew very well he wouldn't.

But of course he stayed only long enough to cover his engine and then he started after her. The snow swirled around them, the wind was searching and bitter cold. Speech was difficult, but presently he essayed it.

The wind, like a giant hand, thrust the door inward upon its hinges. The hail was pelted dark, yet electric with the shock of a struggle. These endured but for a second that seemed an eternity, reaching a climax in a mighty roar of pain.

Then came Wig's voice, calm and imperturbable, restoring breath to Nancy, transfixed on the threshold.

"Now just hold still, my friend, until the lady gets a lamp," he advised. And added to Nancy, "Bring that

lamp from the window in the other room, please."

She managed to achieve this though the blast from the front door almost extinguished it, for her pains for miles and dump us nowhere—

"Go back!" said Wig quickly. "Just keep that lamp burning and we'll follow."

As she retreated he propelled his prisoner before him into what might be called a living room. As Wig kicked the door closed behind him, she caught her first adequate glimpse of their inhospitable host.

"Oh," she gasped, involuntarily, for he looked—well, simply awful was the best she could manage, descriptively. Wig knew what manner of man he was dealing with. But of that there was no hint in his voice when he spoke.

"First down for Harvard!" he commented. "Please put the lamp on the table and then remove from this

place."

"I do," she retorted and, freeing her arm, proceeded to knock. "Don't

match her as she raised it to knock. "I don't like the looks of this place."

"You'll stay there," he added, grimly. "If I have to tie you. I'm no more enthusiastic about all this than you are but that goes as it lays. That's all!"

"How?" managed Nancy out of abysmal surprise, "could I refuse to accept such a pressing—and flattering—invitation?"

They drove on in silence, a silence that endured until the car stopped. Which it did, within three hundred yards.

"What's the matter?" asked Nancy. "I haven't the slightest idea," he replied, and thrust himself out into the storm to investigate.

Nancy yawned. It was none of her funeral!

"Everything seems to be all right," he said presently. "I don't see—"

"Gas enough," she suggested. "Naturally," he retorted, with all a motorist's contempt for such a question.

But presently he moved around to the rear of the car to investigate.

One glance at his face when he returned was enough for Nancy.

"You haven't!" she announced triumphantly.

"I told the garage man in Quebec to fill my tank," he began. "I—don't see—"

"I suggest," she advised him, that in the future you look yourself—and see that gas is actually put in. It is fairly important, you know—or do next?"

"This was exactly what he was wondering. The obvious suggestion—that there was gas to be had in her tank—did not occur to either.

Nancy was relishing his discomfort too much to think of remedies. As for Wig, he, as always, was too irritated by her to think clearly or consecutively. He was not, in other words, himself.

"I can stop some passing automobile," he suggested.

"But you can't tell until you've stopped it whether it belongs to a bootlegger or a hi-jacker," she reminded him. "And supposing it was a hi-jacker and she stuck one of those sawed-off shotguns under Wig's nose—"

"I wish you wouldn't call me that," he snapped.

"So I've suspected. But it's so perfectly descriptive that I can't help it."

He swallowed something but said nothing. Whereupon she added:

"My feet are cold and I'm hungry."

"I'm sorry. But I doubt if there is a house within ten miles—"

"Look!" she interrupted. "Isn't that a road just ahead? See—there are tracks coming out of it—"

"It's probably only a logging road—"

"I'll bet it leads to a house. And I'm going to find out. Anything is

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