

\$100,000 reward!

By Henry C. Rowland

CHAPTER I.

AS the middle of a most unprofitable summer approached Mr. Matthew Holmes was dismayed at being unable to discover any possible means, honest or merely customary, for paying the next remittance of his income tax, or of evading such an obligation.

In previous situations of the sort, where the creditor had been other than Uncle Sam, some impulse had invariably arisen from the swift working of Matthew's active mind by which the crisis had been passed with more or less safety. Matthew had no very clear idea of what course the law might take in the present situation, and he had avoided inquiry on the subject, preferring not to know until the blow fell.

He had always made it a maxim of his busy life never to let his thoughts dwell on the approach of a catastrophe which could not possibly be helped, just as he had always believed firmly in acting on impulse. The latter philosophy had got him into a good deal of trouble at times, but had also got him out of it again, and it had saved a great deal of wear and tear on his nerve, which was of the finest temper.

Matt was a very much unattached young man, an orphan with neither sisters nor brothers, but with two uncles, both of whom now appeared to have turned him down: Uncle Sam, who can be generous or relentless, according as his hundred million and odd nephews and nieces take advantage or disadvantage of the opportunities he offers for honest success, and Uncle Jeremy Taylor, a maternal uncle of Matt's, who had always disapproved his nephew's inclination for easy money, this, come by honestly, but without commensurate effort.

The trouble with Matt was a frequent one in these expensive days, spending before his debts were paid. After making a good deal of money out of a rather silly novel which made an even sillier play, and a moving picture which was so slenderly motivated as to prove not the slightest tax to the minds of the millions who enjoyed it, Matt had leaped to the conclusion that he could keep on doing that sort of thing indefinitely, and with the same commercial success. But something had jammed the cogs. Immediate subsequent efforts had got cogulated and refused to filter through the artistic appreciation of publisher, producers and the G. A. P.

Meanwhile Matt had made a number of expenditures, which seemed justified to him at the time, but which were not of a sort to appeal to a soulless internal revenue service as sufficient reason for his not squaring up. The last book had proved a fiasco, the new play gasped out its first infant breath in the dog town where it had been cradled, and Uncle Jeremy Taylor, on his death bed as all had thought, fooled the doctors and others by an unexpected display of stamina.

Uncle Jerry, a confirmed bachelor, past middle age, had fallen in love with his young and pretty nurse. The stimulant of this emotion had proved in the nature of an elixir of life, which all deep thinkers must admit it is. The death bed was hung with orange blossoms instead of crepe, and Uncle Jerry, who had been a miserly gully of certain assurances of a post-obit character, had expelled him from his avuncular affection and from his bank account.

Calling a meeting on ways and means with himself, Matt could see no lighthouse shining through the murk. He was a young man of good birth and breeding, extensive connections and his habits while often expensive, had never been vicious or shiftless. He had chosen the profession of literature because he was an easy writer and possessed no lack of whimsy and imagination, and he had shown considerable promise, especially of commercial success.

Old Man Gloom was sitting at Matt's side in his chummy rounder as he spun out over the turple, his errand being first to leave the car, recently disposed of to a friend at the Yacht Club Garage, then to take a small speed launch, likewise recently disposed of to the same friend, and proceed to Uncle Jerry's. Matt for all his optimism would scarcely have ventured to approach his uncle with no more than a plea for financial aid in the matter of his income tax. Neither would he have thought it worth while to try and interest the hard headed financier in the fire extinguisher alone. Uncle Jerry could scarcely be expected to worry about the honor of a family name which did not happen to be his, he being Matt's maternal uncle, nor had he any further need to interest himself in promoting schemes of any sort.

But Uncle Jerry, like most rich men who have passed through many years of lonely bachelorhood, had his fads and fallings, and Matt in frequent visits to his home had discovered his frailty. The harsh and cynical millionaire had never managed to outgrow a boyish passion for toys and games. If some important business man were to approach him now in his convalescence with the most excellent schemes he would unquestionably have been met by the curt refusal even so much as to listen to the proposition. But if some pedlar or camelot could get near enough to show him a new fangled and ingenious mechanical toy, such as a vest pocket wireless, or amateur water telephone, or electric dog clipper, the chances are that Uncle Jerry would have invested immediately and played happily with his new game for several days. Matt knew the house to be full of such contraptions, and as a matter of fact this falling is not an unusual one. Matt was discerning enough to feel that an advance on the defenses of Uncle Jerry's bank account was a strategic movement to be conducted much as one would approach the Sultan of Morocco or the King of Abyssinia, not with serious and tiresome protracting schemes, but with something to catch his eye and tickle his fancy.

It seemed to Matt that his new patent extinguisher was an admirable weapon for such a gas attack. He had seen it amply demonstrated in comparison with other devices of the sort, and was really convinced that it hit them better for efficiency and ease of manipulation and volume of material for a sustained assault upon the flames. He planned to persuade his uncle to let him light a bonfire and then experiment on it himself. This, he thought, would be just the sort of thing to fit the mood and whims of Uncle Jerry, and playing thus merrily together to soften the heart of his uncle in Matt's regard.

The Jeremy Taylor estate was an imposing one on the shore, but Matt's immediate destination was the yacht club, where he proposed

to leave the car for its recent purchaser. Thence he intended to make his way to Otter Rocks, his uncle's country home. In a small speed launch no longer his, but the use of which would not be denied him, especially as he did not intend to go through the formality of asking for the loan of it.

The first part of this program was carried out successfully enough. He left the little car in the garage, figuratively kissed it good-bye, thinking with a heavy heart of the many chummy days which he had spent in it, then, no hand staying him, was aboard the speed launch, and a few moments later was tearing a wide slash in the still waters of the bay. About half way to his destination he cut in close to a little rocky promontory, part of a smart country home, and at this point catastrophe overtook him. There came from under the motor a sudden grinding, clashing, splintering sound, and as Matt snatched off the current and took a dive into the engine to investigate the water began to well up into the bottom of the boat.

"My word!" groaned Matt, aghast at this final calamity. "Old Man Gloom sure got in with me, and he's taking this shallop for good." So far as Matt could guess, a connecting rod or other part of the machinery had fetched away and ripped a hole in the bottom. Immediate steps were necessary for the salvage of the craft. Just in shore, about three hundred yards away, was a little cove, with a pretty boat house and a landing stage. Matt figured that he had barely time to paddle the boat in and beach her before she sank, and this he now attempted with haste and the vigor to be found in a pair of arms and shoulders which had made him a place in the "Varsity Boat" through four years at Harvard. No gondolier with a promise of a double fare ever stirred the water more strongly than did Matt, and with such success that the stricken speed launch took the ground a few yards below high water mark before she sank.

"Well," thought Matt, philosophically, for his nature was such as looked ever at the brighter side of things, "Billy (the boat's purchaser) ought to be mighty glad of this. If it hadn't happened now it would probably have happened on Sunday when he was well off shore with his latest girl, and he'd have lost the boat, and they might both have got pneumonia."

Matt did not know at whose estate he had landed, but from what he could see of the big brick house, surrounded by splendid elms which might have been a hundred and fifty years old or more, and the general type of the building, concluded that it must be an old colonial mansion house added to and modernized. His eyes were caught immediately by a detail which seldom falls to arouse the hospitality of the free born if not free living American, especially when aggressively displayed in blatant letters freshly painted and so placed as to seem shoved into the face of the passerby, as if to accuse him of the thought before the deed. This was a sign on the front of the boat house, "Private Property. No Landing Permitted." And this was buttressed, as one might say, by similar warning nailed to the trees at the top of the bank, "No Trespass Under Penalty of the Law."

It cannot be said that these inopportune indications disturbed Matt greatly. He was too glad to get ashore before the little craft, no longer his, sank under him to plunge him into a fresh sea of liabilities. He was more annoyed at being unable to get immediately ashore without a wetting above the waist, as it might be an hour or more before the tide fell enough for him to manage without at least wet feet, the boat being about half full of water. There seemed to be nobody about, and although the landing stage was a busy place he had the general appearance of being unoccupied. There were no boats in evidence, no tracks on the foot or gangway, and such windows as he could see through the trees were closely shuttered.

Observing these signs of the place being as yet unattended for the summer, it occurred to Matt that in such cases there could be no objection to his undressing from the waist down and walking ashore with the anchor. But to avoid possible embarrassment for himself and others, he first gave forth a lusty shout, after the manner of foregone generations, when the wayfarer or messenger rode up to a blinded building.

"Hello, the house!" he bawled, and this greeting bringing no response for several moments he repeated it, but with the same lack of result.

"Here goes—" thought Matt, and peeled. He waded ashore with the most essential part of his costume, placed it on a rock, and returned to get the anchor. To do this he had to get aboard the boat and rummage in the fore-locker, and he had just succeeded in clearing the coil of line when his attention was attracted by a curious growling, snarling sound.

Matt looked up and saw that which gave him pause. Standing by the rock where he had left his clothes and snuffing at them in a hostile manner was a bulldog of the Danes. Behind the big brute were two police dogs of the boldest species. They were standing stiff legged, and as Matt's eyes fell on them they flung back his inspection in a silent and sinister fashion, which seemed to say, "Not yet, but soon."

The situation was embarrassing, but it became even more so when several lusty yells from Matt brought no other response than ominous noises from the Danes, which sounded like a giant gargling his throat and fixed and baleful stares from the lanky eyes of the two police dogs. There was something sinister and forbidding about the silence of these canines, and Matt argued to himself that if a barking dog does not bite, then, conversely, one which does not bark must have a waiting gnaw in his jaws, and while he might have beaten off the police dogs with his car he doubted that he could make much of a showing against all three.

Getting desperate, Matt began to strike the automobile horn with which the boat was equipped, but the loud, rapidly repeated blasts brought no response whatever. It seemed incredible to Matt that nobody at all should be within hearing, a caretaker or gardener, for the grounds though not elaborately kept up, appeared to be in such order as they might have been put by an agent for the renting of the place, and the disagreeable fact of the dogs assured the presence of somebody to care for them.

But if these faithful animals had the best of Matt in force majeure, so had they also that of being better equipped for an endurance test of this sort, and Matt finally decided to paw up a few stones and try the effect of such artillery. As a sort of test of the efficiency of this he reached in a forward locker for a monkey wrench, which he hurled with good aim at the Danes. The effect was not encouraging, for the big brute merely sidestepped, and then, with a deeper gurgle, plunged defiantly out chest deep in the water, where it stood with bared fangs



Nancy was undeniably pretty, and she had a mind of her own; in fact, Uncle Jerry said she "supplied the mind for everybody in sight."

facing him defiantly. Incensed at this counter-offense, Matt reached under a thwart for the boat hook, intending to use this as a lance, and at this moment his eyes fell on the first extinguisher in which he hoped to interest Uncle Jerry. Here seemed a proper weapon, and, arguing that if such an implement could stifle the oxygenation of flaming gas, it would certainly produce the same result for the breathing apparatus of a dog. Matt plucked it up without further hesitation, tucked up the skirts of his silk shirt, and slipped over the side into the water three feet deep, which is to say exactly half its altitude.

As he waded determinedly within range of this squirt the garglings of the Danes were raised in pitch and volume. The animals showed no signs of retreat, but on the contrary, appeared inclined to launch a counter-offensive. Within twenty feet, Matt aimed his weapon, and it seemed to him that he caught for the first time an expression of indecision on the dog's face. Matt began to work the piston, and at the second thrust the jet struck the Dane in the muzzle. The result was (to Matt) gratifying in the extreme. There was a sort of explosion from the big chest, sniffling, agonizing coughs, and the dog, like a valiant soldier for the first time encountering gas, retreated from a position no longer tenable. Matt followed him up, economizing his ammunition. The police dogs moved forward on straight stiff legs and got their heads, when they, too, retreated in disorder, though not to any great distance.

But now assured of the invulnerability of his position, Matt returned to the launch, picked up the anchor and carried it ashore. He then proceeded rapidly to dress, the dogs watching this operation at a respectful distance.

Having obtained a footing on enemy soil, the next move was to traverse it as an armed force, and this Matt proceeded to do, flanked by the defenders, who seemed to feel that since, unable to prevent the actual violation of their territory, the best they could do was to escort the invader across it. Thus advancing with an occasional turn to direct his squirt gun at a dog which seemed inclined to approach, Matt held on in orderly fashion by a path which led up from the boathouse toward the stables and garage. As he approached he observed to his anger and surprise a man standing in the doorway. From his dress it was evident that this individual was not a servant, but one of the tenants of the place, for he wore stylish gray flannels and a soft white hat of French felt. He looked to be about Matt's age or a little older, was well built, rather squarely so, while his complexion, black curly hair, and little pointed mustache, gave him a certain European appearance, French or Spanish or Italian. He was, in fact, a distinctly handsome young man.

But such attractive qualities as he possessed were entirely lost on Matt, who, if up to this moment vexed at his inhospitable reception, now became incensed to think that this person should have been so near at hand and utterly regardless of his vociferous appeals for aid.

Matt walked up to within a few paces, not failing to keep a wary eye upon the dogs, which, however, appeared to have turned over their responsibility and squatted upon their haunches to await developments.

"Well," said Matt, "you're a nice sort of a fellow to skulk here and leave your brutes tear a man to pieces."

The other eyed him coldly. "Landing here is forbidden," he said. "This is a private estate, not a yacht club. You had better get back in your boat and clear out, or I'll have you arrested."

"Look here, you swine," said Matt. "Something in my motor carried away and tore a hole in the bottom of the boat. I got her to the beach just before she sank. Anybody has a right to land anywhere in case of accident. You might at least have had the decency to come down and see what was the matter."

The young man shrugged. "I was not interested," he said. "We have been annoyed by trespassers, and the dogs are trained to keep them off."

"Well," said Matt, "now that I've explained the case, the least you can do is to show a little helpful interest."

"What do you want?" asked the young man.

"I want to telephone to the nearest garage for a car to take me away from this hospitable spot," said Matt, "and I shall have to leave my boat on your beach until I can send somebody to patch her up and tow her away."

To Matt's surprise the simple and unvoluble request not only failed to produce the compliance which the most ordinary civility would have seemed to require, but a look of anger and suspicion appeared for a moment on the face of the other. Nor was this all, for Matt got the quick impression of a feeling fear in the young man's dark brown eyes.

"I cannot be responsible for your boat," said he. "I have come here only for the day, and am leaving immediately."

"Good," said Matt. "In that case I shall take the liberty of asking for a lift to the nearest place where I can get transportation of my own."

the other placed himself in a manner to obstruct his entry.

"This phone is not connected," he snapped. "You had better go. These dogs are very savage."

Matt eyed him balefully. "I've found that our already, thanks to you," he said, "but let me tell you, Mr. Skunk, they haven't any edge on me at this moment. Now step aside, or you may get something you won't like."

The clear olive skin of the young man seemed to pale a trifle, and he said, "If you attack me they will tear you to pieces."

"Will they?" asked Matt, to whom surrounding objects were beginning to assume a reddish tinge. "Well, let's see if you're right." He raised the extinguisher, and, regardless of the possible damage to sight or complexion, shoved down the piston.

The jet struck his adversary in the throat, less by kind intention than a slight inaccuracy of aim. But it was quite enough. The choking fumes produced a similar reaction to that displayed by the big Harlequin Dane. He let out a sort of bleating, gurgling, coughing splutter, flung his hands up over his face, and, leaping aside, retired swiftly out of range, falling back on the support of the dogs, which regarded him as though to say:

"We know what that is like. We, too, have suffered. Here be a sort of human polecat."

The young man glanced back malevolently over his shoulder, then laid a hurried course for the house, when a dog, as if feeling their responsibility relieved, and reasoning perhaps that where the master was discomfited there was not much show for mere canine support, followed dejectedly at his heels.

Matt went to the telephone to discover, as he had supposed, that his adversary had lied, for there was an immediate response, and, being given the garage, he was promised a car within a quarter of an hour. Stating his accident, he described the place where he had landed, and was informed that it was the "old Putney Place." He then telephoned to the Yacht Club and gave instructions that steps be immediately taken for the patching up and removal of the launch. Then, having had quite enough of the warm social atmosphere of the old Putney Place, he made his way on the high road, not seeing a soul in transit, and, seating himself on a stone wall directly opposite, lighted a cigarette and stared thoughtfully at the forbidding mansion, half hidden by the sheltering elms.

For, as his anger began to dissipate, its place was taken by puzzled reflection. Matt found it impossible to imagine a reason for such outrageous treatment as he had received. It was incredible that any normal person of genteel or other appearance should behave in such a manner to a man in his plight unless some uncommon motive lay behind the almost criminal hostility. The dogs might have chewed him up. What if he had landed without knowing that such brutes were at large and been attacked by them half way across the grounds and with no means of defense?

Matt was turning this problem in his mind when a flivver came bucketing down the road and fetched up with a jerk opposite where he was seated. The driver, a lank youth, distinguished principally as a sort of culture medium for pimples, took a final drag at his cigarette, flicked it in the direction of Matt, and asked: "You want the phone for a car?"

Matt acknowledged the responsibility and got in beside the acne victim, whom as a local resident he desired to question a little. Having given "Otter Rocks" as his destination, the cogs were engaged and they started down the road. Matt as a sort of preface to his questioning explained the nature of his compulsory debarkation upon a hostile shore, purposely omitting to mention its hostility.

"How lives there now?" he asked.

"Some new folks," answered the youth, defly steering with his elbow as he lighted a fresh cigarette. "Dunno their names—furriners, I reckon. He took an inhalation which must have saturated him to his astral body and asked irrelevantly, "How'd the news?"

"No," said Matt. "I've just been shipwrecked here. What's happened?"

The boy turned, shot out a telescopic arm, which he seemed able to lengthen and shorten at will, fumbled a little in the rear, then said indifferently:

"I hadda paper, but she must a-blowed under the car. Gates' darter went out for a paddle in her canoe last night and ain't showed up since. They live down the road a spell. He's a big millionaire. Folks say he made it proffiteerin' in the war."

"Too bad," said Matt absently, his mind still clinging to his recent adventure. "Ticklish things, canoes. What make you think they're foreigners?"

"I didn't say he was a furriner," replied the boy. "I said folks claim he's a proffiter."

"O," said Matt. "I understand. Well, that's worse than being a foreigner. But there's nothing to prevent a man from being both."

"Nothin' furrin about 'em," said the boy. "I reckon she mighta lost her paddle and got blowed off shore. Breeze was pretty pearf from the nor'west."

"O," said Matt. "You're talking about this little girl in the canoe. Do you think she's drowned?"

"No—because they ain't found the canoe yet. I reckon she'll be picked up out in the bay. A canvas canoe is so goldarned light that the least puff'll spin 'em off to lo'ard. But it takes a lot to swamp one if you set down in the bottom."

"Have you ever seen any of those people back here?"

"Seen 'em comin' to town ever since I was knee high to a fiddler crab," answered the boy. "She's as pretty as a new seaboat, but folks say she's got right uppish since her father made his pile."

"I mean the people in the old Putney place," said Matt.

"O, them!" said the boy disdainfully. "No, I dunno nawthin' about 'em, and don't want 'em. Ain't got no use for people that keep had dogs and plaster up their place with 'no trespass' signs. When the Putneys lived there, they never minded folks landing and walkin' across to the road. But this furrin bunch have stopped it. Salem Tarr 'lows they ain't got no right ter close a right of way. He aimed to land there a couple weeks ago, but the dogs cum down and skared him off."

He dropped the topic as distasteful and with an abrupt change to one more interesting, said: "Folks say she's gonna marry a young fellow named Griscom. He's a millionaire, too. Some people seem ter get it all, don't they? I reckon Sam Sprague must be terrible cut up. He grew up with Sylvy Gates and always sweethearted her, but I guess she don't think he's good 'nuff now the old man's made such a pile."

"What is Sam Sprague?" Matt asked with a momentary flash of interest in the local gossip.

"Sam's the best boat builder in these parts. Got right smart of a shipyard now. He cum by his money honest, bulldin' small boats for the government durin' the war, but the sea is the like, and he built 'em good ones, too. Didn't skimp nothin' neither in work nor material like some of those goldarned gaffers. Sam's all right. Though folks say he's a puff arter when he's riled, and I reckon Sylvy Gates wouldn't a married him, anyhow."

Matt had listened unconsciously to this anthology, his mind having reverted to that which interested him more. "How long have they been there?" he asked.

"About fifty years, I reckon. Old Hiram Gates had the biggest sail loft in Boston and another in Gloucester. Then he had a rope walk."

"O, to hell with Gates," cried Matt, then, realising the futility of irritation, reached in his pocket, drew out his slim roll, and peeling off a dollar bill offered it to the driver. "Now look here, buddy, I'm not interested in the fortunes and misfortunes of the Gates family just at this moment. I'm sorry to learn that Sylvy's been blown off shore in her canoe, but the sea is calm and no doubt she's been picked up by this time. Slip this in your jeans and try to give me a dollar's worth of information about the people living in the old Putney place. Come on, now, search your bun."

The boy looked sulky, but pocketed the bill. "I told you already I don't know nawthin' about 'em," he said. "They rented the place for the season and come here make a month ago. Folks say that they got sump'n to do with one of these here furrin 'missions."

"How many in the family?"

"I dunno!" The boy's voice was reluctant, as though he felt he was scarcely earning his dollar, but his next scrap of information paid for this in good measure, for he volunteered:

"Don't see why folks want live on the shore if they don't care for the water. These people ain't taken the trouble to slide a boat overboard. They take more to car ridin', I reckon. They got two big limousines 'bout the size of a truck with them double wheels behind. Folks passin' say they meet 'em on the road all hours the night."

Matt pondered this morsel. "It was curious," he reflected, "that over the water did not care for boating should desire to rent a shore estate, and then, although the water was an important feature, had not so much as a row-boat in evidence. The float had probably been rigged out before they had rented the place, but he had noticed that the house was hermetically sealed, though the ways leading up to them were greased as though they had been got ready for the boat or boats to slip down."

And why the two big limousines, with their double hind wheels, a feature which one does not see often in America, though frequent in Europe? But don't care for the water? Matt with a solution of the problem. These people were very likely rich South Americans attached to some embassy or legation. As folk accustomed no doubt to a sort of real setting in their own country, where they might have inhabited some grand hacienda under a system of peonage, they possessed a haughty intolerance of the intrusion of folk of ordinary degree.

"Where is the Putney family?" Matt inquired.

"They bin in Europe for the last year. They're old timers, too, and some kin to the Gates. I reckon Mr. Gates must be nigh crazy if they ain't picked up Sylvy yet. Don't calculate she's drowned, though, becuz she can swim like a seal. Chances are a puff hit her when she was a mite off shore, and in tryin' to swing the canoe so's to pint into it she bruk her paddle."

"That sounds like a good theory," said Matt, now willing to take a little interest in the anxiety of the Gates family. "She might have been too far out to try for the shore in her clothes."

"Reckon so," said the boy; "havin' grown up along shore, she'd know better than to leave the boat. She's sart'n sure to get picked up with the crowd that must be lookin' fur her. Now if Sam Sprague was to home he'd have every boat in his yard, and not for no ten thousand dollar reward, neither."

"Where is Sam?" asked Matt languidly.

"Down east somewhere, I reckon. Folks say he was out cut up at Sylvy's keepin' company with this hyer New York feller that he packed up and went off mad for a spell."

"Sylvy's fiance must be pretty upset if he's heard about it," said Matt.

"Reckon so. Folks say they can't see what she sees in that young feller now that she don't need his money, and that she'd do a durned sight better to marry Sam Sprague. Everybody likes Sam, even if he is a mite rough sometimes, but I reckon Sylvy's sorta set up and wants a husband that's got more style. Old Man Taylor a friend of yours?"

"No," Matt answered. "Anything but. He's my uncle."

"Don't say." The boy looked at him with a new respect. "Well, it was a plum surprise to everybody when he got well all of a sudden and up and married. Folks say he looks ten years younger."

(Continued Next Sunday.)