

Joseph Rowland!

By Henry C. Rowland

SYNOPSIS.

Matthew Holmes' speed boat is wrecked while he is on his way to meet his uncle, Jerry Taylor, in a new fire extinguisher landing at the old Putney place. He is greeted by three furious dogs and a mysterious stranger. He turns the extinguisher upon all four and leaves the scene. Sylvia, the daughter of Hiram Gates, the millionaire and founder of Putney Island, has disappeared while canoeing. Matt is greeted warmly by Uncle Jerry, who has risen from his supposed death to marry May Upton, his pretty niece. Matt had been in disfavor with both, but now "Uncle Jerry" regards him as a rescuer, as beautiful Nancy, his wife's sister, is "running the place." But as soon as Sylvia has been drowned or has eloped with Sam Sprague, the shipbuilder. Matt declares she has been kidnapped for ransom, having in mind the fortune at the Putney place. They find a reward of \$100,000 has been offered for Sylvia's return. Accompanied by the fire extinguisher and Nancy, Matt visits the Putney place and sees a launch slide out. "Sylvia is being taken away," he thinks. But the launch takes no passenger. Soon it returns and three men load its cargo of wooden cases into two limousines. Whiskey runners cry Matt and Nancy, and go home. Nancy advances the theory the bootleggers may be holding Nancy captive, and the two trail a suspected "bootlegger" ship to a nearby island. Then they turn back, much to Nancy's disgust. Next day they find the Putney place, but too late. The bootleggers have fled. Matt goes to the island to trace the bootleggers. Finding his wife and the driving rain, he limits up a cabin, but as soon as he sees a light, it is Nancy, who has refused to be left behind. Matt and Nancy find footprints in the sand and a row, which, they suspect, leads to bootleggers' cove. The rain begins again and they seek refuge in a cavern. Matt is bringing in supplies when he finds a boat beached and sees two men struggling with two men, while two more are approaching. The two men are bootleggers. They overpower him after he has nearly blinded Nancy with the sand closed extinguisher.

EIGHTH INSTALLMENT.

Thrills and Surprises.

Nancy's words of Matt's could have produced the same effect as the look of blank astonishment which overtook his face as the meaning of these words sank into him. He stared dumfounded at the captain of the smack, then at Nancy.

"Good Lord," he gasped, "they think Sylvia's!"

"Well, why shouldn't they?" cried Nancy. "They've been searching for her, and they found me here alone in this cave. I told them they were wrong, but they were too excited to listen. If you hadn't been in your usual frantic rush to jump at a conclusion you might have made them understand."

"All the same, they are the bootleggers we ran into night before last," Matt began, angrily, when he was interrupted by the grizzled captain.

"Who are bootleggers?" he demanded, fiercely. "Not us, putney gentlemen. We're honest men and make a beer and wine we drink our-selves."

"You've guessed wrong again, Sherlock," said Nancy, cuttingly. "These men look like good, square, substantial fishermen. I don't believe they've had anything to do with the bootleggers at all."

"Datta what, Meen," said the captain with a vigorous nod. "Nights before last we come outa here and anchor to wait for da fog to clear. Next day I go ashore and finda sign in da paper."

He took a black, shiny wallet from an inner pocket and extracted a newspaper clipping which bore the marks of greasy thumbs. Unfolding this, the fishing skipper thrust it under Matt's nose. Nancy stepped up to look at it over his shoulder.

It was an article which gave more details of Sylvia's disappearance and in which the reward for her safe recovery was officially offered. There was a close description of the missing girl, her physical appearance and costume, with a portrait of her which was announced as the nearest to her general appearance at the time as could be had.

Nancy glanced at this with an exclamation of surprise, for no doubt because the photograph had been taken recently and in the same sailor gown Sylvia had been wearing on her disappearance Mr. Gates had given the reporters a print which included Nancy also, and the compositor had failed to cut this out, contenting himself with the caption, "The missing girl, Miss Sylvia Gates," then in parentheses, "left."

Both portraits were clear and distinct likenesses, that of Nancy to be recognized as readily as Sylvia's.

"So that's the reason you were so determined to drag me off," cried Nancy to the skipper.

"Sure thing, Meen," said he. "Here is your picture in da paper, and here I find you in da island sittin' on da rocks. What I gotta think?"

"But don't you see," said Matt, "that underneath it says—left."

"I no read da English," growled the disappointed captain, and a look of gloom spread over his square, swarthy face as he saw the great reward slipping through his net. "I see da face and da da young lady in da rocks on da beetle island way offa da shore."

Matt could not in all justice blame the honest fellow. The fishermen, on the off chance that the missing girl might have been driven on the island, and not knowing how thorough a search of it might have been made, had decided to look it over for themselves, and it was natural that with a portrait fixed on their visual memory they had leaped to the conclusion that the bedraggled girl sitting alone and dejected in a niche of the rocks must certainly be she. In their excitement and exultation they had paid no heed to her protestations, no doubt assuming these to be in the nature of ravings as the result of a mind deranged from fright and hardship or from their rough appearance. They had decided to return her with all dispatch, and on encountering Matt's frenzied rush had leaped to the conclusion that he must be her abductor.

An emphatic explanation and the legend of the portrait soon convinced them of their error, when, being simple, honest men, they bravely swallowed their disappointment and offered their apologies. Nancy looked at Matt with a bitter, scornful face.

"And you might have blinded them all," said she. "If you'd been able to manage it, just as you nearly managed to blind me. That's what comes of your inspired impulses."

"I've got to admit you are right," said Matt, dejectedly. "Well, since this seems to blow up the theory that brought us here, I suppose we might as well ask them to set us ashore."

"You can do as you like," said Nancy, "but now that I'm here I'm going to wait for Murphy."

"What's the good of that?" asked Matt.

"Never mind," said Nancy. "I've got a theory of my own."

Matt perceived immediately what was in her mind. The rehabilitation of the cabin required some explanation. If Sylvia had been abducted, there was the possibility that captors might have anticipated a search of the island, but might yet bring her there when they felt safe to do so. This seemed very little to go on while yet offering some slight cue.

"Then I'll stay with you," said he.



Blue Ribbon Fiction

The next maneuvers were most puzzling to account for. The big man scrambled out and offered his hand to the girl, who appeared to disdain it as if in anger.

"We seem to have changed our tune," said Nancy. "I must say I think you owe these men something to pay for your vicious and unwarranted attack on them."

Matt thought so, too. His blows had fallen heavily, although quite warranted in a violent offensive at sight of Nancy being dragged away; still, the fishermen were acting with honest purpose. He took from his pocket the roll of bills with which Uncle Jerry had supplied him, peeled off two twenties, and handed one to each of the men who had bowed over in his onslaught.

"That's to pay for your eyes—and your jaw," said he. "Our launch is coming for you pretty soon, so we'll wait here for it."

There being not much else to say, the sorely disappointed fishermen took their departure, when Matt and Nancy returned to the cave.

"I'm afraid this cooks it," said Matt dejectedly.

"You nearly cooked me," said Nancy. "Why were you so long?"

Matt reached in his pocket and handed her the thermos.

"I stopped to make you some hot tea," said he. "Thought it might cheer you up while I was getting a fire started."

Nancy looked a little mollified. "You are the most thoughtfully thoughtless person I ever knew," said she. "What happened to your old extinguisher anyhow?"

"The noise must have got plugged with sand when I threw it down," said Matt. "Lucky thing it did as matters turned out—I mean for the fishermen," he added, hastily.

These latter had returned aboard their smack, which was now putting off under power. Matt looked thoughtfully after it.

"All the same," said he, "this doesn't explain that line to the shore."

"Why didn't you tell them to haul it up?" Nancy asked.

"Didn't think about it, to tell the truth," said Matt. "My mind was too occupied with other things."

"That seems to be the trouble with your brilliant brain," Nancy retorted. "It seizes one idea and rushes at it like a salmon trout at an artificial fly."

"And then I get the gaff," Matt muttered.

"Well, anyhow, we know there were some bootleggers because we saw them land the stuff, and this island is just in the right place to serve them as a depot. We may yet run a haul if they don't come before Murphy gets here."

Nancy rose. "I think I'll go back to the cabin and lie down," said she. "My eyes are now smart and I've had about enough excitement for one day."

"Did they hurt you?" asked Matt, solicitously.

"No, but you did. I wouldn't say that thing on a dog. Speaking of dogs, I saw a big Newfoundland on that smack. It must have been the one we heard the other night."

Matt growled. "There goes the last shred of evidence against those people," said he. "Just the same, if you'll kindly lend me a hairpin I'll get the good old extinguisher in working order again."

"Then for heaven's sake, diffuse it with some water," said Nancy. "There's no telling on whom your impulse might lead you to use it, and if a little spray from it can do what it did to me, the solid stream might blind somebody for life."

"All right," said Matt, rather chilled at his narrow escape from having possibly done this very thing. He cleared the nozzle with the hairpin Nancy handed him, then pumped out a few jets, and unscrewing the cap, fixed up the cylinder with water from the bucket of this superfluous commodity that he had brought on his first trip from the cabin.

"I'll go back with you and get a bite to eat, then return and take up my permanent residence here until we leave this Isle of Dreams. You won't be afraid to pass the night alone there, will you?"

"No," said Nancy, "but you might leave me the extinguisher."

They shared the tea, then, feeling consider-

ably refreshed, set out across the moor. Matt remarking that before long he should have worn a path.

They walked back on to higher ground. The weather showed no signs of changing, though it had grown light and the drizzling shower for the moment ceased. Then as the gray sea came in sight for a distance of two or three miles out, Matt let out a yell which was followed by a groan.

"Look there!" said he. "Here comes another outfit."

For just emerging from the wind flung haze was a small vessel of the sea going motor cruiser type, about fifty feet in length, full bodied and spacious, with high bows and roomy cabin accommodations—almost a houseboat, in fact, such a type of floating home as is much in vogue for winter cruising in southern waters, and combining safety, comfort and speed. It was apparently heading to cut in close to the eastern end of the island and might, for all they knew, have no intention at all of stopping there, but by laying a course for any point in shore.

"That's not the boat we got a glimpse of," said Matt, "but it might be the one to bring the booze here for the other to distribute, though I don't see just why they should want to take the trouble of trans-shipping their stuff."

"Perhaps it's the campers coming back," said Nancy, with a worried look. "I must say I'd never counted on anything like that."

A short lapse of time seemed to prove the truth of this catastrophe, for the yacht passed around the end of the island, cutting in close with the assurance of a pilot to whom those waters were familiar, then rounded up under the lee of the slightly higher ground where the cabin was placed, and came to anchor in good shelter about two hundred yards off the shore.

The pair of sleuths, dejected at this new development and the compulsion of sharing the snug cabin even with harmless campers, made their way cautiously along the moor. A big bowlder offered an ambush from behind which they might reconnoiter the strangers. They saw a dinghy dropped into the water, and a man step into it; then Matt gasped.

"Look! a girl!" "Isn't that one in the yellow slicker a girl?"

Nancy stared eagerly. A second figure in a long oilskin overcoat and sou'wester pulled down practically to hide the head was getting into the boat. Another person, unquestionably a big man, followed her. The first then picked up the oars, shoved off the boat, and started to pull in to the rocks with the short, jerky fisherman's stroke. Nancy turned to Matt with a face which had suddenly paled.

"It's a girl or woman," said she, "but I can't see her face."

"A hundred to one on Sylvia," said Matt. "They carried her off shore until the search was over, and now they've brought her back here. Let's see what happens next."

But the next maneuvers were most puzzling to account for. The big man scrambled out and offered his hand to the girl, who appeared to disdain it as if in anger. She clambered out unassisted, and the two made their way amongst the loose bowlders and up toward the cabin. Once or twice the girl stopped and flung out her arms as if in furious protest. The man in the dinghy who appeared to disdain it as if in anger, was not bothering to hoist out the boat, he occupied himself getting in the small ledge anchor. The other two made their way toward the cabin, walking some distance apart.

"Now he'll be coming to get the booze," said Matt. "But I wonder he didn't get there first so the other fellow could lend a hand, and there's not a thing I can do to prevent."

"O, bother the booze," said Nancy, im-

patiently. "If that is really Sylvia, you've got quite enough to do ahead of you."

But, contrary to all expectation, the man in the cruising boat, having brought his anchor to the bow, went aft, and a moment later there came a churning of water under the stern, when the swift little craft swung off shoreward, presently to disappear in the penumbra of the driving rain. Matt and Nancy stared at each other bewildered.

"Now, what's the meaning of that, Sherlock," she said. "Why should they leave them there with no chance of escape?"

"I'm afraid your first guess was right," said Matt, diamally. "That may be some chap and his wife with a taste for solitude—he looked about with a grim smile—'paradise a dexa, I don't think. Perhaps they're honeymooning.'"

"Then from those gestures of hers," said Nancy, "I should say the moon was in the wrong quarter."

"They're going to get a job when they see our duff," said Matt, and this prophecy was immediately fulfilled. The pair had disappeared in the direction of the cabin, which then was not visible from the swale where Matt and Nancy were watching. But now the man suddenly appeared upon a knoll, waving his arms and gesticulating violently at the disappearing boat. These semaphoric signals were either undiscovered or disregarded, however, as the course of the departing craft was not altered, and almost immediately it dissolved in the aqueous solution of the atmosphere.

"He's discovered that the place has other tenants, and it's put a crimp in him," said Matt.

"He's not the only one," said Nancy. "This thing has put a regular marcel wave in me. I didn't bother about the reputation part of it before."

"But that you see that abstract quantity doing a fadeout, it assumes some little value after all."

"It surely does," said Nancy. "I can't go there and let those people see me. They'd be certain to find out about me later, and then good-by, Rep. I've been promised a professorship in England in a fashionable girls' school, and I can see what that's worth now. There's only one thing about it, Matt, I've got to hide out."

Matt shook his head. "You can't," said he. "In the first place, there's no place to hide, and the second, you'd perish of exposure. Better the snug cabin without a character, than the cold, cold field with a wobbly one. Besides, it might be Sylvia, after all."

Nancy wrung her hands in despair. "It's nothing of the sort," said she. "They wouldn't dare leave her here like that. They're much more apt to have landed her as you said. It's a couple come out here to camp and they've had a fight."

"Perhaps," suggested Matt encouragingly, "our being here might jeopardize her own rep, and they'd be only too glad to enter into a secret treaty."

To his consternation Nancy burst into tears. Matt was profoundly sorry for her. Nancy's brief shower of tears passed quickly, though that of the elements continued in a sort of businesslike way that promised to make a thorough day's work of it, and no doubt a night's of it for that matter.

"Darn it!" said Nancy, presently. "I suppose there's nothing to do but to go up and face the music. It's raining harder every minute, and I never yet had a waterproof that was anything like proof. This thing of mine doesn't shed the water, but merely filters it."

"Well, then," said Matt, "let's sneak up and reconnoiter. Mind you, Nancy, it's not as if we'd come out here for our health or for love in a cottage, like those two."

They made a little detour along the shore so as to approach the cabin from the rear. Nancy scolding bitterly at this precaution; then climbing the bank they executed a flanking movement, until under the cabin's lee.

"You peep in the window," said Matt. "and see if it's anybody that you know."

Nancy obeyed in silence. Matt, watching

her, observed the sudden tautening of her features as she thrust her head cautiously around the edge of the window's rim. Her pretty profile was presented, and it seemed to Matt that this hardened like a cameo. Then her head was quickly drawn away and she staggered back, and into his supporting arms, for her knees appeared to be buckling under her. Matt drew her behind the cabin.

"Good heavens, Matt," she gasped. "It is Sylvia!"

Matt felt for an instant as though he had swallowed an alarm clock which had gone off on landing under his ribs.

"Jumping James!" he breathed. "Are you certain?"

"As certain as I am that I am I. She is sitting in front of the fire drying her skirt, and she looks like a newly captured tigress."

"Did you see the man?" asked Matt.

"No," said Nancy; "he must be in the little room."

"Look again," said Matt, and loosened a strap of the haversack in which reposed the extinguisher.

Nancy repeated her espionage. But this time Matt was at a loss to account for the singularity of her expression. Her pretty chin dropped to leave her mouth agape, and so it remained for some moments, when, to Matt's further bewilderment, she closed it with a snap, swallowed once or twice, then lurched back to where he stood, and clapping her hands over her face, sank down behind the cabin in such a gust of evidently hysterical laughter that Matt feared the excitement had overwhelmed her grip upon herself.

"Nancy," he whispered anxiously, and gave her a little shake. "My dear girl. Stop it. You sit here and I'll go in and put that kidnaper where he belongs."

Nancy struggled to her feet. Then, still jerking convulsively, her strong little hand fell on his wet wrist.

"Come," she choked, "come quick or I'll burst. Come down here under the bank where I can have my laugh out without their hearing it."

So violent was Nancy's paroxysm that Matt, now thoroughly alarmed, was obliged partly to carry her. They reached the edge of the sandy bank, partly lost their balance, or at least Matt did, for Nancy had no longer any equilibrium at all, went down pell-mell, and landed in a tangled heap at the bottom, which was fortunately soft sand.

The disorder of this retreat appeared, if possible, to lend fresh force and volume to Nancy's convulsions of mirth.

Nancy appeared to have passed the limits of all self-control, and Matt, while intensely worried (as bachelors invariably are under such alarming conditions) could not greatly wonder at this nerve storm.

First, grief and distress at what seemed to be the tragedy overtaking her dearest and most intimate friend, then the nocturnal expedition to the old Putney place and the sinister encounter with the dogs, and observation of the bootleggers' maneuvers. Quickly followed the offshore scouting of the enemy craft, a return in which shipwreck was several times missed by a hair's breadth.

Then had come the disappointment of finding the birds flown, the discouraging encounter with Donovan, and the offering to the stricken parent of hopes which were so insecurely based.

And now here was this discovery of Sylvia in the flesh, and so far as one could tell, unharmed, but in the custody of some ruffian of whose intentions toward her she could form no true picture.

The girl's condition seemed then to go from bad to worse. She struggled to her feet and would have collapsed again if Matt's athletic arms had not encircled her. Thus supporting her, he gave her a vigorous shake.

"Stop it!" he cried. "You're scaring me to death!"

"I can't—I can't," wailed Nancy, and started in on a fresh paroxysm.

"You stop that!" cried Matt desperately; "they'll hear you!"

"I—I—don't care!" shrieked Nancy with so piercing a note that Matt's alarm was augmented, if possible. Her cloth hat had fallen off, and her head with golden hair tumbling about her ears lolled back against his encircling arm. Despite his great concern, Matt was also conscious of the demoralizing quality to her uncommon pretenses.

"Now stop, and tell me what it's all about," he commanded sternly.

But this adjuration had about the same effect in abating Nancy's stamped emotions as might have had the extinguisher if charged with gasoline in putting out a fire. And then Matt, as a last resort and as it seemed a sort of instinctive one, stooped down and kissed her.

The effect of this was all that could be desired, rather more, in fact, for Nancy's exhaust came under such swift control as to be alarming. She stopped short, freed herself with a sudden violent effort, then swinging at the angle of Matt's jaw, landed there a slap which would have pleased an athletic trainer.

"How—how do you dare?" she cried, and faced him, tense and sweating.

"That's better," said Matt. "Now stand fast, or you'll get another."

"You brute," said Nancy, and drew the back of her wet hand across her lips.

"Desperate situations require desperate measures," said Matt. "If you've gone so much longer you'd have shaken yourself apart."

"I'll shake you apart before I get through with you," said Nancy.

"Well, something had to be done," said Matt. "If you lose all control of yourself I've got to take measures to get you back where you belong." He looked into her flashing eyes, and observed the set of her white even teeth. "And I must say, you seem to be there," said he. "Now let's try to forget the treatment long enough for me to learn what sent you so completely off your track."

"I'll tell you nothing," said Nancy, and turned her back.

"All right," said Matt, grimly, "then I'll go and find out for myself."

He stepped past her, taking the extinguisher from the sack as he did so. Nancy gripped him by the shoulder.

"Hold on!" she said. "I suppose I brought it on myself by slipping my self-control when alone with the sort of man you've shown yourself to be."

"We'll discuss that later," said Matt. "Carry on, then, and be quick about it. Because somebody's going to pay for that side swipe and mighty soon."

"Listen, you idiot," said Nancy. "That is Sylvia in the cabin and the man that has kidnapped her—is—is—is—" she began to choke again.

"Look out," warned Matt, "or you may get another dose. I've got as many of those in the clip as I have shots in the extinguisher—and then some."

This warning checked effectually what might have been another outburst. Nancy swallowed once or twice like a little girl fetched up by a round turn.

"Well—is—who?" Matt demanded.

"Sam Sprague!" said Nancy.

It took a second or two for this statement to percolate its way to Matt's inner consciousness, but even then it was adulterated by a good deal of foreign matter.

"Sam Sprague," said he, trying to remember what he had learned about this rough actor from his former informant, "Sam Sprague! So he's in the business, too, is he? Well," he rubbed his chin, "everybody's doing it nowadays—but I'd scarcely have thought it of Sam."

"Doing what?" demanded Nancy.

"O, bootlegging—and stealing girls and other outdoor sports."

Nancy ground her heel into the sand.

"Nonsense, stupid!" said she. "Sam hasn't anything to do with this bootlegging stuff."

"Then he's in a worse business," said Matt.

"He's nothing of the sort. He's told Sylvia right along that he's been going to marry the fool of a Freddy Griscoon, and being a good deal of a man he's gone and played a bold stroke to prevent it."

"O, he has, has he?" growled Matt. "Then our ideas about boldness must agree as much as our notions about other people. If you call it boldness for a big husky brute of a man to waylay and capture a young girl just out of college and carry her off to sea and then back to a desolate arctic of sand and moor and nearly kill her father with grief and worry, then, I suppose Sam's is a bold and dashing stroke."

"That brutal male stuff sounds well from you," said Nancy.

"I didn't bring you out here," said Matt. "I did my best to keep you from coming here. But since you insist on coming, I started to throw a fit of hysterics at the crucial moment. It was up to me to shock you out of it. It was a choice between that and using the extinguisher. If Sylvia had been playing fast and loose with Sam, he wouldn't do so much to blame. But, although not officially announced, folks say that she was practically engaged to this Griscoon Johnny."

Nancy seemed a little subdued by Matt's unflinching earnestness and righteous anger. "I'm not quite sure," said she, "that Sylvia could be considered entirely innocent of the charge of playing fast and loose with both of them."

Matt looked at her, searchingly. "If that is really true," said he, "then she's got what was coming to her. But that doesn't excuse the rotten mean trick on her father."

"The chances are," said Nancy, "that Mr. Gates will get word that she is safe sooner after that beat reaches shore. I remember now seeing it in Sam's shipyard one day when I went there with Sylvia. It had just been finished for some one's order. What I think is that he may have been brooding over Sylvia's marrying Griscoon and determined that it was better to take a chance than to have her ruin both their lives, Sylvia's and Sam's."

"In that case," said Matt, "the symptoms would seem to indicate that he has lost his bet. Serves him right, too. This Viking stuff wouldn't be so bad if it could be confined to the two principally concerned. But Sylvia might go home and find her father on his death bed as a result of this, and a jolly kind of old father, too."

"I must admit that part of it seems pretty raw," said Nancy. "The chances are that Sam intended to send word that she was safe, but hadn't counted on the big fleet of boats patrolling off shore."

"Well," said Matt, "he'll soon have a chance to tell all that to the judge," and at the sudden harshness of his voice Nancy glanced quickly at him with the first pang of actual misgiving which she had yet felt in his cheerful presence.