

Bill Emerson!

By Henry C. Rowland

SYNOPSIS. Sylvia, heiress of Hiram Gates, the millionaire, disappears while on a boat. A reward of \$100,000 is offered for her safe return. Matthew Holmes' speed boat is wrecked while he is on his way to intercept his niece, Jerry Taylor, in a fire extinguisher. Landing at the Putney place, he is greeted by three ferocious dogs and a mysterious foreman. He turns the extinguisher upon all four and leaves. Much to his surprise he is greeted warmly by Uncle Jerry, who has risen from a supposed death to quarry for a pretty nurse, Miss Upton. Matt's beautiful sister, advances the theory Sylvia has eloped with Sam Sprague, the childlike in preference to being married to Freddie Grisco. Matt argues that she has been kidnaped for ransom, realizing the foreman at the Putney place. Accompanied by the extinguisher, Matt and Nancy visit the place, but find the foreman apparently a bootlegger. Believing they may be holding Sylvia captive, the two trail a suspected ship in the direction of a nearby island. Not long they find the Putney place, but the foreman has fled. Matt goes to the island and is preparing to capture a cabin with his fire extinguisher when he finds Nancy inside. They are caught in the rain while searching for clues, and take refuge in a cavern. Matt is on his way there with a woman who he sees Nancy struggling with men from a boat. The kidnappers, he concludes. They overpowered him, and then he discovers they have mistaken Nancy for Sylvia and himself for the kidnapper. Another boat arrives and a man and a girl, who are the same as the man Nancy saw inside and becomes hysterical with laughter. Matt kisses her to show her out of it, and her hand returns the "kiss" with interest. She reveals that the man and the girl are Sam Sprague and Sylvia, and that they are at swords point. Matt demands an accounting of Sam, and they battle. The cabin is set on fire. Nancy turns to the extinguisher, but Matt has already used it. Matt thinks she has betrayed him. Sylvia, in her anxiety over Sam's hurt, admits her love for him, and Matt leaves Nancy and goes to help him, but he is still obligated toward Sam because of the "kidnaping" of Sylvia.

TENTH INSTALLMENT.

Another Mysterious Boat.

"O DEAR!" cried Nancy at Matt's veiled threat of renewed battle with Sam Sprague. "Haven't we had strife enough?"

"I shouldn't say you ever could have that," said Matt. "Your talent as a trouble maker is only equaled by your capacity for insult." He rose to his feet and started with a truculent air toward where Sam and Sylvia were still exchanging mutual expressions of esteem.

But this belligerent mood met with no hostile demonstration whatever. At sight of Matt, Sam loosed his hold of Sylvia and advanced with a scarred but radiant face, eyes blinking from emotion and ammonia and his big hand outstretched.

"Say, buddy," said he, "let's call it a day's work. You win. I'm your prisoner. Give me your hand. I'm sorry I blew up." He blinked at Matt's reddened eyes. "By gum, you got your dose, too."

There was not that in Matt's nature to reject this glad peace overture. It was evident that Sam at that moment would not have fought with a harbor policeman. His square face glowed with a sort of awestruck rapture and his breath was coming in great gasps.

"Well, Sam," said Matt, taking the outstretched hand, "I'm glad on the whole that it's broken your way. No doubt I was a little hasty in my findings, but we've all been pretty well wrought up over this."

"I know it," Sam admitted contritely. "I must have been absolutely off my bearings. But it's all right now."

Matt then offered his felicitations to Sylvia, who accepted them in a happy if embarrassed manner.

Her gray eyes then passed thoughtfully between Matt and Nancy. Whatever brought you two out here to look for us?" she asked.

"It's a long story," said Matt, "and not entirely a pleasant one. Nancy and I have been more rivals than colleagues in this business."

"Rubbish!" said Nancy, who, true to her usual technique of not missing anything that happened to be said or done, had joined the group. "I thought you might be out here somewhere and told Mr. Holmes, and he tried to slip out here and get ahead of me." She looked at Matt. "Since you've managed to thrash around and burn the cabin down, let's all go back to our cave, where we can be partly out of the wind and rain. It's a sort of penthouse in the rocks under the bank. When is your boat coming, Sam?"

Sam looked intensely uncomfortable. "Well, to tell the truth," said he, "I told Jim not to come back until tomorrow evening."

Matt whistled softly. "What cheer, la-di-da?" he asked.

Nancy wrinkled up her little nose. "Poor cheer, buddies," said she, and looked very serious. "It's going to rain all night and we've got no shelter but a sort of caved out place in the bank, and not a blessed thing to eat—and I'm nearly starved."

"We've got lots of eat," said Matt. "While you were trying to put out a blazing house with household ammonia I rescued my blanket roll and the sack of grub. There's no trouble about the eat, unless I'm wrong there's no end of drinks not very far from here, if we could only manage to connect with it."

"What's that?" asked Sam, with a look of burning interest.

"Let's get out of this," said Matt, "and I'll tell you about it. Nothing doing now because the tide's too high. Let's go."

He shouldered the provision sack, while Sam picked up the blanket roll, of which Matt had not found need to avail himself, the cot having been well supplied with bedding. Then, as an afterthought, Matt walked over and picked up the extinguisher.

"What's the good of that?" asked Nancy. "I've pumped it dry."

"As an old campaigner," said Matt, "I provided against such an emergency. There are two spare bottles of ammonia in the blanket roll."

Sam looked mystified, and Matt, being now in a laughing mood, explained briefly the qualities of his weapon.

Sam laughed and rubbed his eyes. "Well, I guess I got you wrong, Matt," said he. "While not intended as an offensive or defensive arm," said Matt, "it serves excellently well for such a purpose, as we can both honestly testify. Think how it would discourage a burglar. Any child or woman could use it—in case of tyranny, on nurse or husband, but," he glanced at Nancy, "there should be a little preliminary practice on a dummy. You really ought to equip your shipyard with them. Sam. Festoon the corners of your buildings. This was not a fair test on the 'hanty, because the contents had been adulterated. Now, let's get out of this."

With Matt as guide, they proceeded to the stony penthouse where he and Nancy had bivouacked. Matt unstrapped his blanket roll, while Sam quickly kindled a fire, when the place immediately assumed all the aspects of a camp of cowboys. Matt's sack disgorged an array of delicacies at which Nancy looked with astonishment.

"I see where I shall have to run up a



Bill Emerson, leaning over the side of the boat intent upon his work, hauled to the surface of the water a bulky object.

delicatessen bill when I get back," said she. "You must have planned to spend about a month out here. But I suppose that you would probably have changed your mind at the end of twenty-four hours."

"It was my idea," said Matt. "that if I ran on anything suspicious which would seem to indicate a probability of the bootleggers returning, the only thing for me to do would be to squat right down beside it and wait. Everything comes to him who waits, but as it has turned out, there was rather more coming to me than I had altogether counted on. Besides, I have always been an advocate of Puddinhead Wilson's theory: 'If you see a chicken that ain't roosting comfortably, take it, 'cause if you don't want it yourself you can always find somebody that does, and a good deed ain't never forgot.'"

"I must say," said Nancy, "that you do yourself pretty well. Pork and beans, and sardines and caviar, and boned chicken and ripe olives, and pale de fois gras and Edam cheese, and gherkins—"

"The salt air always gives one an appetite," said Matt apologetically, "and a good campaigner always figures out how much he is apt to need and then takes twice that amount. Besides, I thought it might come on to blow or something."

With a little fire burning cheerfully and a pot of clam broth steaming on the edge of the coast (Sam and Matt having dug out the clams about twenty feet farther down the beach), the situation promised such improvement that, despite the adverse conditions of weather, a journalist reporting the event might have written with perfect truth, "A good time was had by all." But the restless member of the coteria, whose name was Nancy, was by no means satisfied with the validity of their title guarantee to content.

"This whole business is going to be pretty hard to explain," said she reflectively.

"All the more reason for cutting out the explanation," said Matt. "After all, reputation is a word, not an actual fact."

"I thought it was about time for another stir," said Nancy. "But it seems to me that our position is rather dubious. Matt and I have established our case before the family, and Mr. Gates and Donovan, and Todd the constable. They all know that we have been following up these blues together."

"Besides," said Matt in support, "we're relations. It's a family affair."

"Quite so," mimicked Nancy. "But as things have developed, it's all right for us and it would be all right for Sylvia if she were to appear to have been rescued and we were to carry back Sam in irons or something and hand him over to justice. But for Sylvia and Sam to go back and announce that they had come to an understanding and were going to be married would look—well—"

"Fishy," said Matt.

"Well, then," said Sam gloomily, "you can go ahead and carry the back in irons and hand me over to justice. I don't care what happens now."

"No more do I," cried Sylvia, "and Sam is certainly not going to be carried in irons and handed over to justice."

"You wouldn't have to press the case against him," said Matt, then looked at Sam. "How did you manage it, anyhow?"

"Well," said Sam, "I had this boat which was due to be delivered in Bar Harbor before the end of the month. My brother and I started to take her down there, and then I decided to have a final word with Sylvia if I could manage it. Mr. Gates and I had a row about Sylvia last month. He's got it into his head that this Grisco dude would make her a better husband, and he told me to sheer

off. So I ran in there after dark with the idea of having it out with the old man and Sylvia, too. If it could be done. Then, just as luck would have it, we came on her paddling around in her canoe, and I halted her and asked her to come aboard for a few minutes' talk, and she came. I guess we both lost our tempers, and the upshot of it was I made up my mind to carry her off."

"Then if you obeyed that impulse," said Nancy, "how did the cabin happen to be all put in order?"

"That had nothing to do with my kidnaping Sylvia," said Sam. "I hadn't the least idea that the cabin had been fixed up. Somebody must have had that done with the idea of coming out here to camp. I carried Sylvia out to sea, hoping that I might be able to make her see reason and agree to marry me. But she swore from the first that she was going to marry Grisco, and I swore she wasn't. So when it looked as if it might take some time to persuade her, I had Jim land us here, and sent him in to the yard with the boat to take on stores and fuel for a long voyage, and send a note to John Gates to tell him she was safe."

"How safe?" Nancy asked.

"Safe with me," said Sam doggedly. "He could take that any way he wanted to."

"Sounds like a wide order," said Matt.

"Where did you propose to go?"

"Hadn't quite made up my mind," Sam answered. "Just cruise down to the eastward. I decided that if in ten days' time she couldn't be made to see things as I wanted her to, I'd bring her back and face the music." He leaned forward with a strained look in his face. "I'd felt for a long time that if I couldn't have Sylvia I didn't care much what happened."

"Pretty rough on Sylvia, wasn't it?" Matt asked.

"Yes," said Sam, "but as I figured it out there was no man living that could ever love Sylvia as much as I did, or make her a better husband," he looked at them defiantly. "The proof of it was that I was willing to go to jail for the rest of my life if I missed out. I knew that Sylvia had cared for me ever since she was a little girl, and would have kept on caring if her father hadn't made a pot of money and got set up about it, and Sylvia got her head turned by this Grisco fellow. I banked everything on being able to persuade her that I was right. It wasn't as if I'd had nothing to offer her. My yard is a big growing concern, and she'd never have lacked for anything that Grisco could have given her. He's got no edge on me unless it's in never having had to work for his living. My people have lived on this land and done their part to make the country what it is ever since the first of them came ashore about two hundred and fifty years ago."

Matt looked at him with an admiration which he made no attempt to conceal. Here, apparently, was the same spirit that had faced indomitably the carving of a foothold on a rugged and inhospitable shore, and, once planted there, successfully defied all efforts of nature and politics and tyrannical laws to dislodge it, but had grown and burgeoned and gripped wider and deeper into the soil with the ratiocination of some rugged and tenacious yet fruitful growth of which the yield gave back a generous tithe over what it withdrew.

But it was a plant amply provided with thorns and some of these had now resisted the invasion of its rights, and the result of this might easily have proven its destruction. Sam had counted on this, however, and was prepared to face it. There was to Matt something admirable about this attitude, and to judge from Sylvia's expression as her eyes

rested on her stalwart uncompromising suitor, the same vision had been vouchsafed to her.

But Nancy, who not long before had voiced this very idea to Matt, and expressed a partisanship which had seemed to him unwarranted, swung now to the opposite point of view.

"That's all very well for you, Sam," said she, "but if you'd loved Sylvia as much as you claim, you would have considered her welfare first, and you couldn't have helped but see that, while things might have gone pretty bad for you in case of failure, it might have been just as hard for her in a different way."

"I thought of that, Miss Upton," Sam answered, "but I didn't count on failure, and he added with a sort of boyish frankness, 'that's a word that I've never admitted as applying to me—until about an hour ago.'"

"Well," said Matt, "all I can say is you're a mighty lucky chap. Good old extinguisher!"

Nancy looked at him with that peculiar curling of the lip that Matt had now learned to regard as a sort of temperamental barometer.

"There you go jumping at conclusions," said she. "It's all very well to tell Sam that he's in luck, but where does that get Sylvia? What are people going to say when they learn that Sam carried her off by force, and at the end of three days brought her back in love with him?"

This query proved a faecal. It was plain enough to the impetuous Sam what "folks would say." The problems presented by Nancy baffled even Matt's ingenious mind. He was quick to appreciate that, while in fiction such an episode might be glossed or smoothed in some manner by a clever deist, or other tricky invention, yet in real life the truth had an unfortunate habit of invariably leaking out. Nancy appeared to have seized upon the only possible solution, which was to bring Sam in a prisoner. But there were many serious objections to such procedure as, even if no legal action were to be taken against him, the damage to his and Sylvia's future position must nevertheless be very great.

For a few moments they pondered this question, then Matt said suddenly: "Look here! Why not stick it on the bootleggers after all?"

"How stick it on the bootleggers?" asked Nancy.

"Easy enough," said Matt. "So far everybody thinks that Sylvia butted in on their operations and they grabbed her. Well, all we've got to do is to tell about our excursion night before last and that we picked up a dew and came out here, and found her in the cabin, where they'd marooned her with supplies enough to last until she might be able to signal some passing boat. Then Sam learned about her disappearance and was on his way back to join the search and got here about the same time we did. That part of it's true anyhow," he included proudly.

Nancy looked at him, with less than her usual scorn. "There are moments," said she, "when a fiction writer is rather handy to have about."

"Strikes me," said Sam, "that it's a good sound idea."

"What if the bootleggers should be caught?" Sylvia asked. "I might be called to testify against them."

"No danger," said Matt. "Besides, all you'd have to do would be to say they weren't the ones. About half the population is bootlegging these days."

The dreary rain continued, yet it was a cheerful little foursome which faced the prospect of a night's very rough camp in the

semi-cave. Matt and Sam made several trips to the ruins of the cabin in quest of its charred fragments.

"A man that's been up against the extinguisher could follow this trail in the dark now," said Matt as they were digging down their last load in the gathering gloom of the close of a perfectly hard working day. "I must have done about twenty miles of route marching since I landed on this island of Unrest last night. For a while I thought that my greatest enemy was going to be the tedium of loneliness in an abandonment of desolation, which goes to prove that you never can tell. It's actually turned out to be the liveliest place I've struck since I got back from the war a couple of years ago."

"Hold on! Mat," said Sam, and stopped short in his tracks. "Maybe it isn't over yet."

Matt fetched up willingly enough, for his load was heavy and he was tired. Then from the direction of the cave came the muffled but staccato report of that sort of big heavy but dependable one cylinder make and break motor which the smaller fishing craft of all that part of the coast find best and surest for their arduous, dangerous, and poorly paid service in supplying society with the food-stuff least appreciated and than which there is none of greater value—which is fish.

"Now here, Sam," said Matt, "is where, after great trial and tribulation, I may finally manage to score. That must be the bootleggers coming back after their stuff. Let's drop this cordwood and beat it down to camp and douse the fire. Follow me, old scout. I'm a licensed guide for this popular resort. It's a wearing billet, but it's going to have its compensations."

"On our way, brothers," said Sam, and flung down his load.

Again history repeated itself. Matt, by this time thoroughly informed of the topography of the region, took the same trail which he had followed when rushing to the rescue of Nancy. And not so very long ago he leaped from the ledge of the bank, spilled himself in the loose sand, and scrambled up as Sam followed his Fairbankian stunts. They arrived breathless at their bivouac, where Nancy, an apt pupil in the science and art of strategy, had already covered the camp fire with scooped up handfuls of loose wet sand.

Peering around the corner of their retreat, they discovered a small sloop rigged boat of about six or seven tons gliding up to the spot where the trawl line was led ashore.

"I know that boat," said Sam. "She was built in our yard about thirty years ago—about the time that I was born. She belongs now to a young fellow named Bill Emerson. I thought he was driving for the garage, and here he is out doing a little job of bootlegging."

There flashed immediately across Matt's retentive memory the name of the driver of his flivver, confided him in a loquacious moment.

"Well, I'll be darned," said he. "Is that really Bill? He told me he'd quit fishing and gone in for driving cars. Bill's all right, but he talks too much. I must say, though, Sam, that he spoke mighty well of you. He said, 'Everybody likes Sam, if he does get rough sometimes.'"

"Did he?" said Sam thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Matt, "and he stood up for the Gates family, too. But he's got no use for Freddy Grisco. Well, it's too bad that Bill should be running a side line like this."

"O, everybody's doing it," said Sam moodily. "I suppose I ought to go down and collar Bill—"

"You leave Bill alone," said Matt. "Bill's a good boy, and if he can turn a hard earned dollar by helping to relieve the house famine, let him go to it."

Nancy interrupted this championing of Bill. "Well, of all the bootleggers that ever mixed up in the affairs of the community, you certainly take the prize, Matt," said she. "Is there anybody at all in it that you don't happen to know all about?"

"I've explained all that before, Nancy," said Matt. "We writers naturally try to learn all we can about human character and motives wherever we encounter them. In the present case I agree with you that we'd better lay off Bill. The truth is, I've taken quite an interest in him. I'm going to send him to a skin doctor of my acquaintance to see if he can't do something for his acne."

Sam stifled a chuckle. "Matt's got Bill all right," said he. "Now let's watch him and see how big a business he's really doing."

"Don't worry about that," said Matt. "From what Nancy and I saw the other night, it's no piker trade." He turned to Nancy. "You see, Nancy, while impulse may be a risky thing to obey blindly, it does sometimes get you somewhere after all."

"I'm waiting to see," said Nancy. "I really hope you're right, because up to this time it seems to have resulted in just one fiasco after another."

"Well, that may be," Matt admitted, "but anyway I got us out here, and it has led to a better understanding between Sam and Sylvia." He rubbed his hands with such a satisfaction as might have been expected of an illustrious namesake who, after being visited by the disbeliever of clients and the scorn of official and officious colleagues, was able eventually to reveal himself in his true qualities of an unerring sleuth.

"It's all very well to ridicule instinctive deduction, but it does sometimes happen that it works out in the end despite fortuitous circumstances which may occur to discredit the observer."

Matt took his glasses and leveled them on the solitary figure in the sloop, who had picked up a long pole, apparently a boat hook, and was evidently attempting to secure the drift of line which Matt had previously discovered.

Nancy for the moment was silenced by this diatribe on the part of a colleague who up to this moment she had covered with scorn and obloquy. Sam also appeared to be impressed. For he was looking at Matt with that respect which a hand worker who has become, by his entirely a brain worker is apt to bestow upon the individual who has been the latter from the beginning and whose efforts had been applied simultaneously in both directions.

"I guess you've scored, Matt," said he, "like you said you would before we got through."

"Well, it's about time," said Matt. "I don't know any more why it was so impossible to get anything out of him about the people in the old Putney place. Every time I tried to pump him he shot off at a tangent, like the extinguisher a little while ago, and wouldn't talk about anything but the Gates family."

"What did he think about my disappearance?" Sylvia asked.

"He said that you were sure to be found, because you were a champion swimmer and expert canoeist, and he claimed that everybody wished you'd marry Sam Sprague and not that Grisco cuss."

"Well, it's nice to please everybody," said Sam, "especially when it starts in with your self."

"I'm afraid that's about as far as Mr. Holmes ever gets," said Nancy. "Look, that boy has got the line and he's hauling it in. Now, why couldn't we have done that?"

"Because he's right over where it's anchored," said Matt. "A dozen men couldn't haul in a fifteen pound anchor with a good hold a hundred yards away, but a small boy could snuff it up from just over it."

Sam was staring at Bill Emerson with covetous eyes; for, although a young man of good habits, like most strong and staid individuals, he enjoyed his glass at times—and this was one of the times. It was tantalizing to stand there at the edge of the cave and watch the weedy youth in the little black sloop hauling from the depths such a luxury as had now become not only dangerous to get but even more so to drink when got, and Sam felt there could be no such risk to eyes or stomach in what was at the end of that tarred hemp line the boy was hauling in so nonchalantly.

"I'd like to go down there and hold him up for enough to drink your health and Sylvia's," said Matt enviously, "but since he knows you all so well and I've already had a sample—I've checked himself, for he was about to say of his freedom in imparting local gossip—but on second thought said no particular reason for giving away his source of information."

"A sample of what?" asked Nancy with a work of quick suspicion.

"Booze whisky," said Matt, turning the corner on two wheels. "Some time ago I was color blind for about a month as the result of having been persuaded to accept the hospitality of a chance acquaintance."

"I don't think it would do any harm if you were to go down there alone," said Sam. "You could say that you've come out here to comb the island for Sylvia."

The same thought had occurred to Matt. Moreover, it seemed to him that since now he had no longer any intention of putting in a claim for the reward he might at least be justified in making a little profit out of information which he had come by so arduously.

"All right," he answered. "The rest of you keep out of sight and I'll go down and see what I can do."

"You stay here," said Nancy. "We don't want that stuff nor to be mixed up with it."

"Speak for yourself, my dear," said Matt, and before the indignant girl could raise a detaining hand he stepped clear of the shelter and started down the shore.

Bill Emerson, leaning over the side of the boat intent upon his work, did not discover the approaching figure until he had hauled to the surface of the water a bulky object which appeared to be a fish or lobster car. Then, having caught a turn of the line, he unhooked the block of the throat halyard, slipped this into the right around the crate, and, seeing the running end, was starting to haul the car up aboard with the aid of his double tackle when Matt came within his line of vision.

The startled boy desisted from his task and stood staring at Matt, who was about fifty yards distant.

"Hello, Bill," called Matt affably. "Found some sunken treasure?"

Continued Next Sunday.
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