

# \$100,000 Reward!

## By Henry C. Rowland

### TWELFTH AND LAST INSTALLMENT.

#### Uncle Jerry Hits 'Em Up.

THE weather had undergone one of those swift and glorious changes of midsummer in that region, when the atmosphere, having been washed and purified by the rain, came forth the northwest wind, which dries and infuses the atmosphere with a sort of electrical energy.

Looking from his window, it seemed to Matt that every leaf and flower and blade of grass had undergone a sort of fairy care which had brought out colors so brilliant as to be prismatic, and that every natural object contributing its drop to the flood of beauty was sweeping the landscape and seascape with a radiance which thrilled.

In this glittering vibration the most ordinary objects took upon themselves that quality of beauty which thrills the hearts of children with a sort of exuberant delight as they rush out for the first time in the morning to absorb the scents and colors of that gladdest day of all, which should be today. Yesterday is shot always with its memory of regrets, and we really never reach tomorrow, which is a doubtful fleeting thing. The glorious day, the wonderful day, is today, when it is early and before we have had time to mar it with our errors, great or small.

Matt, having in many ways preserved in himself the soul of a child, now profited by that joyous rush of juvenile sensation which is when the forces are on the upward curve of the parabola and the eager mind is seeing one after the other or lovely images. He was one of those soldiers who has viewed the aspects of war less in its horrors than by the contrast of these frightfulnesses to sweet and happy things. It is in the nature of some individuals to be cast down by a dreary aspect, and it is in the nature of others to see by virtue of this dreariness something gladsome and delightful, just as being whirled in a swift train through a vicinity of filth and dirty snow and foul streams and blasted trees and vegetation decayed by the poisonous products of factory chimneys is not such a bad thing as the sweet homeliness of our destination. The train rushes past and leaves the dirty suburbs and carries us to the fresh outer country where we are to greet the things which most we love.

It was with that feeling that he had led the touring car standing at the door and Murphy with a glowing face such as should be worn by a faithful retainer when washed by a sudden wave of glad events in the family which he serves. Murphy was one of the old time Irishmen whose lexicon of duty contained no such word as holism. He was pleased and proud to serve "rue quality," and he did not bother to prefix an "e" to this latter word. The family's fortunes were Murphy's fortunes, and their misfortunes would never have sent him seeking another place. He had driven Uncle Jerry's touring car before he drove his own, and in his heart preferred the former.

Uncle Jerry's marriage had not aroused his jealousy because he believed that May had saved the life of the master to whom he was so devoted, and he was partisan to Nancy because he much approved her own driving. He had seen the latter day slacker who assisted in the running of the household machinery.

"Good morning, sir," said he to Matt, "and where to, sir?"  
"Railroad station, Murphy," Matt answered. "My little job is finished, and I am off."  
"Sure, now Mister Matt, you're not lavin' us," said Murphy with concern.  
"Fraid so, Murphy," Matt answered.  
"What with Mr. Gates and Constable Todd and Detective Donovan and Luke Simmons, this place is apt to be too hot to hold me. I can stand abuse, Murphy, but my sensitive soul shrinks from ridicule." He stepped into the car.

"Then where is your baggage, sir?" Murphy asked.  
"Here," said Matt, and laid the extinguisher on the back seat beside him. "Step on it, Murphy, before anybody comes."  
But as had happened once or twice before, he was a little late in obeying his impulse, for at that moment Nancy, looking rather like one of the large white roses in full bloom, under the break of the stoop, came sailing around the corner of the house, golden hair shimmering, white arms flashing, white stockings ankles twinkling, and called to Murphy to wait. She shot at Matt a look which was half defiant and half something else.

"Well, where are you going now?" she demanded.  
"Down the road a piece," said Matt.  
"I'll go, too," said Nancy.  
"Where have I heard that song before?" said Matt, "and where are May and Uncle Jerry?"  
"There now, Mister Matt," said he, "and what was I to do? 'Tis Miss Nancy runnin' the place just now, under authority of the master and Mrs. Taylor, and were I to disobey her she would fire me."  
"All right," said Matt, with a nervous look at the front door, "then please get out and let me be it."  
"But can't you help me out?" snapped Nancy.

Matt sprang down, then turned to assist her, but Nancy took her time about it, and as she lingered the big frame of Uncle Jerry loomed up in the front door.  
"Come in, nephew," he called harshly. "I've been talking to Hiram Gates about this new fangled extinguisher of yours, and he's decided to take an interest in it. He wants to see it."  
"Well—some other day, uncle," Matt began weakly, but Uncle Jerry cut him short.

"You see I didn't want to make you cry again."

"I'm stronger this morning," Nancy answered.  
"So am I," said Matt. "That's how I found the courage to beat it, this way."  
"You may call it that," said Nancy, "but it looks a slanting look at Matt. 'Now you wouldn't have done that, would you?'"

"O, yes," said Matt. "I'd have told him the truth—over the telephone. How about Freddy Griscom?"  
"He's gone off mad. You'll probably meet him on your train. I called him up and told him that I wished to enter a claim for my share of the reward."  
"What did he say?"  
"I couldn't hear it all. Central cut him off. But I should say that we'd have to collect it through the courts."  
"Well, that proves him a piker. Sylvia will be much happier with Sam. 'Everybody likes Sam even if he is a mite rough when riled.'"

Uncle Jerry looked perfectly well this morning, said Nancy. The prospect of a fight seemed to have a wonderful tonic effect. I'm afraid that you inherit your quarrelsome nature from your mother's side.  
"Your own sweet disposition is not without its dash of tabasco," said Matt. "Now May is kind and gentle. I got an even better slant of her character last night. She portrayed two of the most endearing qualities in a wife. First she gave me a kiss, then a long drink. I needed both."  
"You had already helped yourself to the first with no particular consideration for the feeling of others," said Nancy.  
"I sent you an apology for that, by May," Matt answered, "and I now repeat it."  
"I put it down to impulse," Nancy said, "and nerves and fatigue. I was pretty well done up myself. But now that you're leaving for good and we probably shall not meet again, it does not matter much. She was a peculiar timbre to her voice as she added, 'we've said a good many disagreeable things to each other since the beginning of this ridiculous affair, and of course we weren't at all ourselves last night, so what if we just consider all that we've said to each other and others stricken out of the records.'"

Matt shook his head. "No," said he, "I don't think I'll agree to that. I was right enough last night after I got into the house and sat down and had a smoke and a chance to think things over."  
"Ank drink," said Nancy.  
"I had only tasted the drink to refresh my memory rather than my thirst when I told May what I did. She suggested it would be rather sporty of me to tell it to you myself and see what happened."  
Nancy turned slowly and looked at him with curious intensity in her eyes.  
"Well, why didn't you," she asked, "instead of turning tail and trying to bolt off this way?"  
"Because I felt sore and ashamed about the way I've made a fool of myself since I landed in my sinking launch at the old Putney place. The only thing about the whole business that I'm not sorry for is having squirted that squirt of a secretary."

"You brought Sam and Sylvia together," said Nancy.  
"Yes," said Matt, "but I can't claim much credit for that. About as much as a hunter might if he tripped on a vine and fell down and his rifle went off and the bullet went through the head of a tiger he didn't know was anywhere about. As a matter of fact, that joyous event was the result of my doing my level best to tear Sylvia away from him."  
At this bitter moment the smoothly running car arrived at the Gates place. "If you can't mind," said Matt, "I'll let you out at the gate and continue on my way."  
"I very much mind," said Nancy. "You can let me out at the door."  
"I'd rather not go in," said Matt.  
"I fall to see that you have any prior opinion on this car," said Nancy.  
"Uncle Jerry put it at my disposal," said Matt. "Please don't interfere with his desire to speed the parting guest. But if you insist on being set down at the door I'll get out here and wait. Stop, Murphy."  
"Keep on, Murphy," said Nancy. "Don't stop."  
Matt leaned forward. "Murphy, I tell you to stop."  
Nancy leaned forward and gripped Murphy by the shoulder. "Keep right on," said she.  
"Stop!"  
"Keep on!"

Under these commands and countermands the car began to perform a series of buck jumps which caused the bodies of Matt and Nancy to jerk violently back and forth. The bewildered Murphy, in trying to obey both, effected a sort of compromise. But probably finding it impossible to please both, and the vote being a tie, he may have been influenced to some extent by his own judgment in the matter, for, while not flatly disobeying Matt, as the disturbing stoppings and startings testified, yet he kept on going, jerked through the gates, and then, at Nancy's final imperative "Keep on, I tell you," yielded to superior moral coercion and held more steadily for the porte-cochere, there to fetch up with a final jolt which could not have been good for tires or machinery.

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"Godamighty!" cried Mr. Gates, and lurched back.

"Come in!" he barked. "You're a hall of a salesman. He wants to see it now and ask you some questions about putting it on the market."  
Nancy shot Matt a look of malice, and for some reason he felt suddenly convinced that he was the victim of a fell conspiracy and that there was nothing to do but fall for it. He reached for the extinguisher, then turned and went up the steps with knees that felt a little wabby.  
"This way," said Uncle Jerry, and shoved him ahead into the study, where a couple of days before Matt had talked so confidently to Mr. Gates and the policeman. The room was at this moment vacant—that is, except for Matt, who did not feel that his presence affected the vacancy perceptibly.  
"Sit down," growled Uncle Jerry, and Matt obeyed, seating himself on the extreme edge of a chair, with the extinguisher between his knees.  
"Wait a minute," commanded Uncle Jerry, and went out, leaving Matt to his reflections. Several minutes passed. Matt waited nervously, still sitting on the edge of the chair and slightly toiling in. His hypersensitive ears seemed to catch the sounds of distant laughter. The big clock chimed, and Matt thought with despair of the train which he had purposed to catch. Then a heavy step sounded on the parquet of the hall without. The doors were flung open and Mr. Gates bulked on the threshold. But it was a different Mr. Gates from the gentleman whom Matt had interviewed. With figure erect and a glow on his ruddy face, which was that of an English country squire, and a flash in his eyes, still slightly congested, he plunged at Matt with both hands outstretched.  
"My dear boy!" he cried in a deep and resonant voice. "I knew you were right. You've got a head on your shoulders worth all these fool detectives and reporters. You were the only one to give me hope, and, by the way, you justified your theories by bringing back my daughter," and he gripped both of Matt's nervous hands, the extinguisher falling to the floor as Matt rose, with no effort to deny the warmth of praise which his reason told him to be as untrue as it was unmerited.  
As he was being pumped handled by the joyful parent Uncle Jerry grasped by the doorway wearing the sardonic grin which was about as near as Matt had ever seen his uncle come to a smile.  
"Why don't you kiss him on both cheeks, Hy?" he asked, and then to Matt: "Let's see that darned extinguisher."  
Matt stooped and picked it up. Uncle Jerry took it from his hands and surveyed with pleasure its polished brass and nickel exterior. Anything mechanical and bright and shiny never failed to make its strong appeal to Uncle Jerry. Just as it might to a savage or a child.  
"Is it charged?" he asked, "with the real put-out-the-flame stuff?" He read the trademark on the side: "Flame Out."  
"Yes, uncle," Matt answered. "Just now it is all loaded for its principal function, which is to extinguish fire. But it has occurred to me that we might also devise a special burglar charge. It would be far better than any pistol. In the first place, you could scarcely miss him, on the principle that it is easier to get on your mark with a hose than with a gun. Also, it would take him alive. And if by any chance you happened to get one of the family by mistake, or a guest walking in his sleep in some part of the house where he had no business, the result would not be fatal. There might even be a mitigated dose to be employed on beggars, peddlers, summons servers, and duns."  
Uncle Jerry chuckled. "Do you think it would really nip a bad fire in the bud?" he asked.  
"I know that it would, uncle," Matt answered warmly, "and without the slightest damage to rugs, carpets, curtains, or clothes. I've seen it demonstrated time and again."  
A mischievous look came into the deepest eyes of the convalescent. "Well, then," said he, "let's see it demonstrated now. A practical demonstration—Hy?"  
"Why—er. Yes—o. course," said Mr.

Gates, looking a little startled and uneasy, for he knew the eccentric nature of his boyhood's friend.  
But neither he nor Matt was quite prepared for what followed. With a quickness of hand scarcely to be expected of one snatched so recently from the jaws of death through the arms of a bride, Uncle Jerry struck a match and, before the other two could determine the rash act he was up to, held the flame against the lace curtain of the long window. It flared up with a sudden rush of shooting flame.  
"Godamighty!" cried Mr. Gates, and lurched back.  
But Matt, that creature of impulse, did not lose his head. With a motion of his thumb he released the safety catch, took three paces to the rear, and with a deft manipulation of some graceful exponent of the cue set and jet the length of the blazing curtain. And this one jet sufficed. As if by magic, or like the flash of the photographer's magnesium powder when taking a banquet scene, the brilliant glare went out, to leave only some charred fringes of curtain and portiere and a smudge of darkened woodwork.  
Uncle Jerry let out a whoop of joy. "Goeh all hemlock!" he cried, with a slap of his hands, while the badly startled Mr. Gates, to whom the house belonged, breathed softly. "Geeshshaphat!"  
These exclamations were echoed by others from the doorway, and Matt looked around to see standing there, with eyes a great deal like those of the banqueter's aforementioned friend, the photo of the festal scene is printed, May, Nancy, Sylvia, and Sam. The latter, of a subdued and chastened yet happy demeanor, rather suggested the habitually faithful dog which, in a moment of temptation, having yielded to the impulse to kill a sheep, has been caught in the act, corrected, and forgiven.  
Curiosity had drawn them to the open double doors of the study to see what was going on, and they had seen.  
"Well, of all the mad, crazy, dangerous stunts," commented Nancy, who was under the impression that it was Matt who had so radically demonstrated his invention, when Uncle Jerry cut her short.  
"Shut up, you sassy baggage," he rasped. "I did that." And Nancy shut up, while Matt's eyes went to her with a malicious look which seemed to hold the query: "Who's looney now?"  
Uncle Jerry was rubbing his hands and beaming at Mr. Gates with all the enthusiasm of a boy who has just successfully set off a brilliant firework.  
"There, you see, Hy!" he cried triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you Matt wasn't the fool we all thought him? Now are you satisfied?"  
"Satisfied ain't quite the word, Jerry," croaked Mr. Gates, whose mouth was slightly dry. "I'm not quite strong enough for that sort of crazy stuff just now."  
"Well, you saw how the thing works. Are you ready to back it?"  
"To the limit," said Mr. Gates fervently. "But I'd have done that anyhow if the damned thing had been loaded with gasoline. You needn't have convined me to death."  
"Well, I wanted to convince," said Uncle Jerry.

"O, all right," sighed Mr. Gates; "don't mind me. Just take it down to the hayloft or the gas tank or any other darned place." A bright idea seemed to flash across his sorely tried mind. "Take it down to Sam's shipyard and light the shavings in the planing house."  
"Go as far as you like, Matt," said Sam cheerfully. "You have my order now for a full equipment."  
Uncle Jerry was handling the instrument delightedly.  
Mr. Gates looked at him with fresh anxiety, then turned impudently to May.  
"Take him home, dear lady," said he, "and send for a husky keeper."  
Nancy looked at Matt, then edged a little closer.  
"Insanity must run in the family," she whispered, but, unfortunately for her, a bush had fallen at this moment, and Uncle Jerry's quick ears had caught her words.

"Insanely doesn't. Misery," said he, "but nerve does."  
"I guess that will be about all now," said Uncle Jerry. "Come on, May, lets go. I want to take this thing home and play with it." His sinewy hand fell on Matt's shoulder. "You come back to the house and stay there, nephew," said he. "When I finish my experiments I'll talk over the business part of it," and without bothering to take any formal farewell he went out with May.  
Matt, thus left at the mercy of Nancy and the others, listened in something of a daze to Mr. Gates' appreciation of his services, and rather grudging declaration that after all, he guessed Sam would make his daughter a better husband than Griscom, when all is said, weighed considerably short of a ton. Then Nancy suggested that they had better be going back. They went out to discover that Murphy, for some mysterious reason, had taken his departure.  
"Now, where's that Irishman got off to?" Matt demanded.  
Sylvia offered to send them home in the Gates car, but Nancy declined.  
"No," said she, "after all this excitement I'd like to quiet my nerves by a good walk. It's only about a mile across the neck." She looked at Matt, and it seemed to him that for the first time since their meeting there was a softening in her blue eyes and a sort of invitation. "You can ride home if you like," said she, "but I'm going to walk."  
"I'll go, too," said Matt.

So they set out on a path which led through the Gates orchard, then entered a park which was rather in the nature of a park with solemn stately oaks so widely spaced that the ground grew through areas of brilliant light and softly tinted shadow.  
About halfway they came to a spring which had been cared for and stoned, and was edged about with mossy bank, while cress had been planted in its overflow.  
"I'm tired and thirsty," said Nancy, "let's get a drink and sit down and rest for a minute. Where's the gourd?"  
The gourd had disappeared, whether carried off by boys or picknickers who had neglected to return it, or destroyed by some enemy to society such as unfortunately exist. The surface of the crystal basin was too far below its coping to admit of leaning down to drink, at least with any comfort or satisfaction, and there were no proper leaves with which to shape a cup, and Matt's hat was a cloth one. Curious to see if Nancy would accept such a goblet, Matt rinsed his hands in the overflow, then dipped them with waterman's skill and raised them filled with wood.

"I don't see how you do that," said Nancy, "my fingers always leak it out," and to Matt's infinite surprise, she bent her ruddy golden head and drank. "Dear, but that's good! Some more, please."  
Matt for some reason was swept by a sudden warm wave. This is apt to happen to a young man very much in love when the object of his adoration, from scoring all some enemy to society such as unfortunately exist, unexpectedly accepts one of a certain intimacy. For there is unquestionably something very intimate in the act of taking food or drink directly from the hand of another. To eat right out of my hand, is no idle expression of close and friendly relationship, old as the ages, and to drink from them means even more. No woman could possibly thus drink from the hands of a man for whom she felt the faintest shade of antipathy. More than that, it is doubtful if a dainty or fastidious woman could thus serve herself from the hands of one with whom she did not feel herself united by some bond of sympathy. It is in a way more personal than a kiss because that caress might be perfunctory or, to get back to our theme, impulsive.  
Some powerful emotion, elusive and sweet, swept over Matt as Nancy in drinking from his cupped hands bent her golden head directly under his face and so close to it that her hair brushed his cheek. It seemed to him that some intoxicating perfume which had nothing to do with the odor of even the most delicate cosmetic came from it. This aroma was rather like that of some fairy flower which, as happens in a fairy tale, might become endowed, not only with a soul, but incarnate in a physical body. If he had not been too much in a maze to analyze this impression, he might have thought of it as a "Nancy perfume." All lovers will understand immediately what is meant by this. So would all dogs, and describe it much better if they had the faculty for description. For a dog will tell you that just as no face in any way resembles the face they love, and no voice has the timbre of the voice they love, so can no scent, however subtle, have the scent of the one they love.  
None of this psychology had time to ordain in the mind of Matt, because at that moment he was feeling rather than thinking. In fact, he felt as though he never wanted to think again, at least cold-bloodedly. He was overwhelmed with delight that Nancy should not only be willing to drink from his hands but even relish doing so, and ask for more.

She looked up from her draught and smiled at him, and Matt was conscious of an extraordinary impression of change in her, as though he had given her some mystic potion by which all previous relations between them had been abruptly altered.  
"For gone was the antagonism. Gone was the offensive defensive proportion in which they had previously stood, so that instead of feeling on his guard with her or even the necessity of guarding her against herself, there seemed to have been mysteriously established a comradely sentiment and one from which they might view all things with a mutual instead of a jealous vision.  
But it was more than this. The strong, insistent eyes of the pair had passed through a phase which left them and their separate interests, first mutual, then with a sense of duality. Friends may be mutual, but only lovers achieve that divine emotion of duality. There was a forest bird trilling its soft nesting notes in the tree tops overhead as

"I'm not very," said Matt. "But I found out last night that you were. I told May so. Did she tell you?"  
"Nancy," Nancy answered. "Neither May nor I believe much in repeating what people say."  
"Well," said Matt, "then I believe I'll follow her advice, after all, and tell you myself. I think you are the sweetest, bravest, truest-hearted girl in all the world. I was going to tell you that, and I want you to marry me, and quick. Will you, dear?"  
He reached for the small hand which at about that time the day before had landed with such a solid swing upon his ear. But astonishing changes of sentiment can happen within a day, and this vigorous exclamation, no longer militant, now nestled flutteringly in Matt's clasp. Nancy looked into his eyes with that intense questioning which requires a more convincing answer than any framed by the lips alone. She was trying to reach the deeper truths which were inscribed behind Matt's eyes.  
"How am I to know that this is not another rush of impulse, Matt?" she asked.  
"Well, if it is, sweetheart," said Matt, "then it's one that has weathered a number of hours of the hardest thinking I've ever done in my life, though I'm afraid that isn't saying much."  
"Still," Nancy murmured, "no mere impulse lasts that long, does it?"  
"Mine don't," said Matt. "Their life cycles have never been more than a few moments—after that the forces set in motion may take any time to blow themselves out."  
"Then it really isn't impulse at all?" Nancy asked.  
Matt shook his head. "If so, it's an impulse that is going to keep on and on, like the impulse that makes the lides go up and down."  
A little smile formed on Nancy's lips, and it was the smile unlike any which Matt had ever seen before. There was no acrobatic twist at the end of it, and it held a tenderness such as he could not have guessed those red, rebellious lips knew how to wear.  
"I'll have to consider that a little," Nancy said.  
"You're sure that you're not thinking about that subsidy your uncle offered for getting rid of me?"  
"Sure," Matt answered with conviction. "Honestly, Nancy, I'd forgotten all about it. That shows what an improvident beggar I am. I'd even lost sight of the fact that I've really nothing to offer you but an unpaid income tax."  
"There's the extinguisher," said Nancy. "O, hang it all," said Matt, "the extinguisher's a perfectly good asset for the remote future, but I don't see how I can possibly wait for you that long. All the same, I suppose that's the best I can hope for. For all my nerve, it's not quite up to asking you to marry me on the prospect of the extinguisher."  
He loosened his clasp of her hand, but this, like a kitten clinging to one's coat, declined to be dislodged. The small strong fingers twined round those of Matt.  
"The extinguisher is a good side line, Matt," said she, "but we're going to do something better than that. You've done it already several times, and you can do it again."  
"But, Nancy," Matt protested, though feebly, "that's not enough for you to go on. I shouldn't have spoken. I didn't mean to speak—that is, right away."  
"Impulse has its advantages, Matt," said Nancy softly. "Besides, Uncle Jerry is not the sort to go back on his bargain."  
Matt looked uncertain and much distressed.  
"All those material considerations went out of my head after being shipmates with you for a little while," said he. "If you were mine, Nancy, nobody could possibly give me anything else."  
"Well, I love Nancy," that needn't interfere with their giving them to me."  
Matt brightened. "That's so," he answered. "After all, they do owe you a lot. If you hadn't gone out in the launch and dragged me with you, there's no telling what might have happened. And if only we could once get fairly started, there's nothing in this world could stop us."  
Nancy drew a little closer, then looked up into his face with a radiant smile and swimming eyes.  
"Of course, there's not, dear boy," said she. "So let's start."  
Her face was so close to his, red lips parted, and the breath coming in little gasps between them. It was too much for Matt. In fact, he would not have been Matt if he had not obeyed that impulse. There happened then one of those things to make a whole lifetime of dreadful misery well worth the living.  
There is this advantage to a retropose nose whatever the traits said to accompany it. It leaves the lips available at such critical moments as these, and in the kissing of such a girl as Nancy, who does not take the business lightly, when once engaged upon it becomes a whole world and perfectly absorbing occupation. The little bird sang louder, then fluttered lower to look.  
When presently the bargain was all arranged, sealed, signed, and witnessed by the little bird, Matt drew in his breath deeply, for he had need of air.  
"After that, sweetheart," said he, "I'm all equipped and accoutered to go over the top of things."  
"I'll go, too," said Nancy.  
[The End.]