

"THE FIGHTING TRAIL"

NOW SHOWING AT THE HAPPY HOUR

(Continued)

"The sooner he's under lock and key the better!" Causley called back to the crowd, and a moment later the car turned a corner and was gone.

"Very odd, wasn't it?" said Gwyn. "You must have hypnotized him, Hogan. But I don't understand it yet!" As the words passed his lips he choked and started. Comprehension swept over his forehead like a flash of rain, a realization more acute than physical torture. Von Bleck had the deed! Causley had tricked him! The ownership of the mine and all it meant to the nation would pass into the hands of the enemy!

He fairly dragged Nan and Hogan to the auto, explaining as he went, look the wheel! It was a race for the greatest prize on earth. They swept down the road like a flying projectile, faster and faster, and faster yet, as they struck the downgrade and rushed on. Nan's ears hummed and rang, with the pressure of the wind. Gwyn shielded his face with his hands. Hogan, his eyes narrowed to mere slits, crouched tense and motionless over the wheel.

At the top of a rise they glimpsed the car of the sheriff only half a mile ahead. They were gaining. . . . And then occurred one of those tricks of fate that so often twist our hopes. A little thing it was—a wood-cutter felling a tree. But both cars were on the same stretch when the wheel struck home, and the great oak began to fall across the road. It was a desperate chance, but Von Bleck was desperate enough to meet it.

"Drive on!" he commanded. "More speed!" And Causley's car shot out from the swiftly descending shadow as the tree crashed to the ground.

Hogan's brakes were grinding fire as he drew up with a jolt that almost threw the occupants from the car.

They had escaped death by the narrow fraction but danger meant nothing now. The heavy tree lay like a prostrate giant across the path. Sick with the sense of defeat, Gwyn watched the approach of the other cars that had followed from the wreck. Then came a horseman—two of them. They saw a fire came to at least. The riders had hardly dismounted before Nan and Gwyn were in the saddles, picking their way for and between the broken foliage, and then dashing on up the road. But the first glimpse they had of the commissioner's office was all too convincing that their race had been in vain. The sheriff's car, with Von Bleck grinning from

the tonneau, was just rolling off down the street, and Causley himself stood in the doorway.

"I'm sorry," said the Commissioner, "but I can do nothing for you." The sheriff gave him a significant glance, and he went on. "You see, they have the title deeds and have staked out a claim. Possession it nine points of the law."

He was an old man, the Commissioner, a cringing soul to whom the petty clerkship meant the very means of existence. He owed that job to Causley, and paid the debt by sacrificing his honest convictions when the sheriff said the word. Nevertheless a look of mingled discomfort and regret showed in his face as he watched Nan's plucky effort to restore her husband's courage.

Hogan drove up at the door as they emerged, the brave piece of bounding on the rear of his car still flapping in the wind. The placard above it read:

For Sheriff
"SQUARE DEAL" HOGAN
It was Nan that saw the opportunity not Gwyn. She pointed eagerly. "Look, dear, look! Half the voters in Lost Mine were at the wreck today. They saw a good example then of the Causley brand of justice, and now is our chance to show the people that he really is a scoundrel. I'm going to make a speech!"

Standing in the back of the bright red machine, one hand above her head and hair flying in the wind, Nan made a picture that drew the sympathy of every man in the crowd. Swept away by the emotion of a great cause, eyes bright almost to tears, she told her story with dramatic effect. Even the Commissioner, listening behind his closed door, could sense the rising enthusiasm in it. He read a significant message for himself.

"Who will vote for Hogan?" she cried, and the call was greeted with a gusty chorus of approval. Hats waved wildly as she swept looking down into the surging sea of faces about her impromptu platform.

"Good work, little girl!" called a big fellow over at the edge of the crowd. "Right! We're for you!" came the answering shout from another.

Nan raised her hand for silence, ready to continue her speech, but as the cheering subsided the distant rapping of rifle fire came to their ears. Mingled with this single shot came now and then what sounded like a sustained volley. The firing seemed to come from the direction of the mine.

When Von Bleck drove off he did so with a definite purpose. Now that he had the deed recorded he must also gain possession of the mine. With the double claim of title and possession he knew there would be no danger of his plans hanging fire. But he must have both to be safe. Straight to Brown's saloon he drove, and there in the rear room, gathered in a tense circle around the rolling dice, he found his hand whiffing away the time at their accustomed pursuits. They sprang up as he entered, eager at the prospect of another fight.

"Well," announced Von Bleck, "this afternoon we'll capture the mine. Get busy now; I want results this time. Have a drink on me and get to work! I will join you later." Five minutes afterwards the band was on its way to the attack, with Rawls in command. Von Bleck, Shoestring and "One-Lung" re-entered the car and drove to the station, where a long heavy box was taken aboard and carried off into the seclusion of the forest near the track.

Back at the mine Casey's men were preparing the midday meal. The two men who had been left as sentries came in from their posts, and everyone was settling down for a comfortable hour when Rawls first shot knocked the kettle from its hook. Taken completely by surprise, Casey's men were so demoralized that instead of defending the engine house they took shelter behind an ore train outside.

"Take the engine house," shouted Rawls in command, and half a dozen of the bandits dashed in through the door and took position to defend the entrance.

But Casey was not trying to take the engine house just now. He worked along the side of the train until he reached the engine, mounted the step and crouched behind the cab.

"Hold tight," he called. "Lie down behind the ore in the cars!" He and with this he grasped the throttle and started the train. Protected by the piles of ore, which served as a sort of entrenchment, Casey's men beat off all attacks as the train gained headway and moved faster and faster toward the incline.

But Rawls was alive to the situation. What he desired was not a retreat, with the possibility of a counter-attack, but a decisive victory, a

stunning defeat of Casey's entire force. Another train, with its engine pointed in the opposite direction to that in which Casey was established, stood on a siding. His decision was instantaneous. Summoning his men, to climb aboard he backed the train on to the track and started in pursuit.

The race was even till they struck the grade, and then Rawls' train, with every car loaded, had a greater motive power than any engine—gravity. As the two trains slid down the mountain the distance between them lessened. Both sides were firing as rapidly as the center of human fingers could load and press the triggers. Narrower and narrower grew the intervening space till, the trains seemed to couple and lock. And now back and forth over the swaying ore cars there waged a hand-to-hand battle. First one side would take the upper hand, then the other, in a desperate rush would carry the fighting back.

But this could not last. As Casey turned the bend leading down to the burned bridge he knew in his heart that defeat was very close. Outnumbered, his men would be virtually surrounded as soon as the train came to a stop. The only way out was across the bridge itself, trusting to a higher power than the charred supports and sleepers would bear their weight. Word was therefore passed along that all hands were to make for the bridge as soon as the engine halted. A moment later Casey closed the throttle, and calling his men to follow, leaped to the ground and started over the flimsy framework toward safety. It was a costly operation, but most of the men had made their way unharmed to the center of the bridge and were holding off their assailants with fair success when a new enemy appeared in the rear.

Von Bleck, Shoestring and "One-Lung" had mounted a rattling gun on the front of an engine and were bearing down on Casey from the other side of the bridge. The fire had been less severe on this side, and the engine crept over the sleepers with its deadly weapon pouring forth flying fusillade of bullets. It was only by swiveling their bodies underneath and hanging by the beams that the stout-hearted little band of defenders could save themselves.

Election Day dawned bright and clear, and Hogan, his red machine conspicuous with campaign banners, was greeted with cheers wherever he went. The events of the day before had turned the tide, and Causley's defeat was a foregone conclusion. But the candidate dropped his campaign smile for hearty laugh when he suddenly came upon Casey, twisting his hat with boyish embarrassment before a young lady's praise.

"Isn't he—I mean it—perfectly lovely?" she exclaimed with enthusiasm as Hogan drove up. "Do you know what Mr Casey did last night? Captured a brand new rattling gun. Von Bleck had shipped from the East isn't that simply magnificent!" She was beaming on the big Irishman with frank admiration clapping her hands and murmuring those girlish exclamations which prove so often fatal to any man's self-possession. Casey welcomed the newcomer as a providential diversion.

"The Von came too far, that's all," he explained. "We worked along the side of the engine, and the gat couldn't turn on such a wide angle. But they still have the mine, and a gang of men is working now re-building the bridge. Gwyn and I decided we're not disturbing them. And now tell me how the election is going."

"Fine," grinned Hogan. "Mrs Gwyn here is the best little politician I've seen in many a day. And by the way, old man Taylor, the poor old skeleton that keeps the deeds, told me this morning he had changed his mind about the title to the mine and corrected the records in her ladyship's favor. I shouldn't wonder if he were something of a politician himself, eh?"

By noon the ballot was almost complete, with Hogan leading by a safe majority.

"Well," he told Gwyn, "since your wife fought for me I'll repay the favor. The boys are having a holiday to-day, and I don't know any kind of celebration that'd please 'em better than a stiff little scrap. Let's drive those bandits out of the mine before supper time. What do you say?"

Hogan cupped his hands and gave a shrill signal. In a few moments every man on the block had gathered to know what it was all about.

"And I have to say is this," he told them. "Gwyn and Casey and I are going after the bandits at the mine. Anybody with a good gun who wants some excitement is invited. The line forms on the left."

Half an hour later the new sheriff and his first posse were on their way up the mountain.

(Continued next week)

The Stowaway

By LOUIS TRACY,
Author of "The Pillar of Light," "The Wings of the Morning" and "The Captain of the Kansas."
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(CONTINUED.)

"Mademoiselle without doubt is the daughter of monsieur the captain?"

"No," said Hozier rather curtly, turning to ascertain how Iris had disposed of herself in the interior of the cavern. It was his first experience of a South American dandy's pose toward women, or, to be exact, toward women who are young and pretty, and it seemed to him not the least marvelous except of an hour crammed with marvels that any man should endeavor to begin an active flirtation under such circumstances.

He saw that Iris was seated on a camp stool. Her face was buried in her hands. A wealth of brown hair had loosened her tresses, and the unavoidable rigors of the passage from ship to ledge had shaken out every hairpin. The tan-o-shanter cap she was wearing early in the day had appeared at some unknown stage of the adventure. Her attitude bespoke a mood of overwhelming dejection. Like the remainder of her companions she was endeavoring to avoid observation from the chief island of the group, the very nature of the apparently inaccessible crag in which he and his associates were hiding—each and all of these things spoke volumes.

Hozier did not attempt to disturb the girl until the dapper officer produced a glass and poured a small quantity of wine into a tin cup. With a curious eagerness he anticipated the other's obvious intent.

"Pardon me, monsieur," he said, seizing the vessel, and his direct Anglo-Saxon manner quite robbed his French of its usual grace. The involuntary broke down, and he added more earnestly in English: "I will persuade her to drink a little. She is rather hysterical, you know."

The Portuguese nodded as though he understood. Iris looked up when Hozier brought her the cup.

"Is there no water?" she asked plaintively.

"We have no water, mademoiselle," the officer said. Then he glanced at the group of bedraggled sailors. "And very little wine," he added.

"Be quick, please," put in the elderly Portuguese with a finge of impatience. "We have no second cup, and there are wounded men!"

"Give it to them," said Iris, lifting her face again for an instant. "I do not need it. I have told you that once already. I suppose you think I should not am sure our friend did not mean that."

Coke growled. "Risk in steamship to an anchorage and sending her ashore for water? There seems to be a lot of mad folk loose just now on Fernando Noronha, but I'm not one of 'em, an' that's as much as I can say for any of you—damme if it ain't."

"Who are you, then? Who sends you here?"

"I'm Captain James Coke of the British ship Andromeda—that's 'oo I am—an' I've been 'ere, or leav'ings to the river Plate, by David Verity & Co. of Liverpool."

It must not be forgotten that Coke shared with his employer a certain unclassical freedom in the pronunciation of the ship's name. The fog "u" apparently puzzled the other man.

"Andromeda?" he muttered. "Spell it!"

(Continued next week)

"My godfather, this it an asylum for sure," grunted Coke, in a spasm of furious mirth. "A-n-d-r-o-m-e-d-a. Now you've got it."

"You are unlucky, Captain Coke, most unlucky," the other said. "I regret my natural mistake, which, it seems, was shared by the authorities of Fernando do Noronha. You have blundered into a nest of hornets, and as a result you have been badly stung. Let me explain matters. I am Dom Corria Antonio de Syva, ex-president of the republic of Brazil. There is at this moment a determined movement on foot on the mainland to replace me in power, and with that object in view efforts are being made to secure my escape from the convict settlement in which my enemies have imprisoned me. I and two faithful followers are here on hiding. My friend Capitano Salvador de Sousa Benavides, and he of Fernando do Noronha, you have blundered into a nest of hornets, and as a result you have been badly stung. Let me explain matters. I am Dom Corria Antonio de Syva, ex-president of the republic of Brazil. 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