

THUNDER FROM THE STANDS

by Vincent Richards

CHAPTER VII
Synopsis
Len Rollins, tennis ace, dreamed of helping win the Davis Cup for America. Then he fell in love with Grace Worthington, rich and socially prominent. Grace was willing to defy her family and marry him if he would give up tennis. He did—partly because of his love for Grace, partly because of a badly injured ankle. He and Grace were married. Later his ankle improved so much that the doctors told him that he could play, and he gets a chance to join the Davis Cup team. He tries to persuade Grace to go to Europe with him.

He took her hands in his, pleaded, "Please come across with me, Grace. Don't you see—can't you feel—that I need you?"

"Then you've decided definitely to go even if I don't?"

"But you'll go, darling."

"You're evading the question, Len. Will you go even if I don't?"

His expression changed suddenly. "I'm the man of this family," he said in a low tone, "not you. And you're going to do what I want, or else. I'm going to Europe. And I'm going to play on the United States Davis Cup team. And you're going with me. Now let's cut out all the nonsense."

She asked, "What was the job Mr. Justin spoke to you about?"

"Something about managing the sports department of a store in Indianapolis. It will wait, of course, until we come back."

"It would mean a promotion?"

"Yes. But I'm not much interested. I want to get into the other line—selling. More money in it."

She moved out of his arms, staring at him dumbly, for she knew this was the end.

She came toward him slowly, a bit hesitantly, to where he sat behind the wheel of Charlie Hughes' Ford roadster. He threw the side door open and she climbed in next to him.

He said: "These past two weeks have seemed like two years. I've missed you, Grace." The car, free of the Worthington grounds, headed toward the open ribbon of the smooth road. "You want to continue like this?"

"You are going, then?" She kept watching the road.

"Yes. But suppose I stayed home and took that job out West?"

"I'd go with you if you still wanted me."

"Of course I'd want you. I fell in love with you the moment I saw you. I'll always be in love with you—no one else. Why isn't it possible for me to have you and still play?"

"We've gone over all that before; let's not talk about it."

"When I come back, what then?"

"It will all be over if you go."

"Then," he said, "this is the last time!"

She did not appear to hear him. He was only vaguely aware of the rapid motion, of the soft fanning wind. He was driving very fast, the accelerator pushed way down. But he did not realize it. There was a sign post with a caution to motorists informing them that the road was under repair. But he never saw it. He was thinking: How silly! How close and yet how far away she is from me. A few feet only—yet miles, miles...

The last time! Divorce—he could return to his old life—could be rich too—fifty thousand dollars. He'd never have to work again. He could invest it and live modestly, happily on the income. Happily? Without Grace? The light car bumped, swerved, went on; his foot remained pressed to the accelerator, his hands hard on the wheel. Too late he saw the bend in the road and the man in dirty overalls wearing a red flag.

Another car came around the bend. He jammed on the brakes. A huge hole yawned ahead. It was close, too close. He cut the wheel sharply, foot still on the accelerator, and he heard the sharp intake of Grace's breath as the roadster careened crazily toward the side of the road. He was conscious of a short, frightened scream at his side. And then nothing.

Overlaid legs rose above and around him; something wet and salty was on his mouth. He put his hand to his face and drew it away covered with blood. One of the overalled figures knelt down beside him and began wiping his face and head with a cool, wet cloth. "All right, buddy?"

He nodded. He felt weak, shaken. He sat up, his eyes fastened on the laborer's lined face, looked around, then jumped to his feet, eyes wild. "Where's Grace?"

"She's all right, buddy. Take it easy."

He staggered, but regained his balance. There was a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach; the cut in his mouth burned and would not stop bleeding.

"Where is she?" he demanded, his wild glance sweeping over the group.

"She's all right," the man repeated. "That car that was coming around the bend when you—they took her down the road. But she's all right."

"Where'd they take her?"

"Down the road. There's a hospital."

Len glanced at the Ford lying in the ditch torn and crumpled, then at the men.

"Who'll take me?" His mouth hurt when he spoke.

One of them wearing khaki said: "Okay, I'll take you."

At the hospital they would not let him see her. He was her husband? Surely if he was her husband he would understand. Mrs. Rollins needed immediate attention—"I'll wait," he said. "Where's a phone?"

The nurse nodded toward a desk. "When you've finished," she said looking at his mouth, "you'd better have that cut stitched up." But he didn't hear her.

He called Easthampton and reached Mrs. Worthington. In a few words he explained what had happened. She didn't waste time condemning him but cut off with a terse, "We'll be right out."

He waited in the hall. Of course, he wouldn't go to Europe now. Tomorrow he'd get in touch with Justin and accept that Indianapolis job. He and Grace would start life all over again—together.

No, he couldn't leave Grace here in this hospital and ever expect to find peace of mind again. Why, this was his test! Grace always had claimed he loved the game more than he loved her. He'd prove now how wrong she'd always been. Yes, this was his great opportunity—the crisis in their lives—and he would not fail her. He would never, never fail her!

A tall, slight man wearing a white tunic approached. "You're the husband of the young lady who was just brought in here? Will you come this way, please."

Len followed the doctor down a hall. "She's not—she's all right, isn't she?" he asked shakily.

"She asked for you."

Was the doctor's evasion deliberate? Good God, if anything serious had happened!

They turned off the hall into a large room and then into a smaller one. There were three beds. Two of them were empty. Grace, covered by a white sheet, lay upon the other, pale and wan, her head and one arm in bandages. She smiled weakly up at him as he entered. He crossed the small room rapidly and fell to his knees beside the bed. "Gracie darling, I'm sorry. So terribly, terribly sorry! How do you feel? Are you badly hurt? His voice was hoarse, a whisper; his wet eyes pleaded forgiveness.

She said softly, "A cut head, but not a big cut, Len. And this arm they tell me is bruised, and there is perhaps a slight internal injury. Nothing to worry about, though, really. In a couple of days I'll be up and around again, good as new."

He kept searching her face. Was she telling him the truth? Was she really hurt no worse than she claimed?

"I telephoned your mother."

She nodded. "I suppose she'd have to know."

"Yes, I thought so. They'll be here soon, I imagine."

She smiled tremulously, placed her unbandaged hand over his. "Don't let them frighten you, Len. It might have happened no matter who was at the wheel."

"It was my fault." How difficult it was to talk, breathe even when your throat contracted like this and the backs of your eyeballs stung. "I was thinking—of something else."

"I know," she said. "So was I. I was thinking," she murmured, "how beautiful those two years were."

"Other years will be as beautiful."

"It's too late now."

"I'm seeing Justin tomorrow."

"It's no use, Len. You must go abroad. If you stayed now it would be from remorse, not because you wanted to."

"That isn't true. Honestly it's not!"

"You go to Europe. You must go, now. When you return we'll—"

"Yes?"

"I don't know what we'll do, Len. Perhaps—"

"Maybe if we both have time to think it over some solution will present itself. You still love me, Gracie, don't you?"

"Very much, Len. And you?"

He raised her hand to his bruised lips, kissed it gently. There were voices behind them.

Mr. and Mrs. Worthington disregarded him, stood looking down upon their only child. Len withdrew to a far corner of the room. He would not go to Europe, of course, even though she had not been seriously injured. His mind was made up.

He remained overnight at a nearby tourist house and spent practically all of the next day

with Grace. At last it was time for him to leave for New York. The boat was sailing at midnight and he would have to go to the apartment first to get his clothes.

Some of the color had returned to Grace's face and this encouraged him somewhat. But at the last minute he protested that he did not want to go, that the team could keep the cup for all he cared. But she insisted that he should not change his plans.

"You can't do anything for me here," she told him, "and I probably wouldn't be allowed to go out to Indianapolis for a while anyway, after this. Besides, I'll not be pitted."

They were alone when he said good-bye, and for the first time since she had left him the coolness that had become so strong a barrier between them was gone. There was something frightened, desperate even, in the way she wished him "bon voyage." It startled and puzzled him a little. With her one good arm she clung to him, held his head close to her, pressed her lips against his with abandon. Her face was wet against his. But when he drew away to look at her she smiled. He kissed her again lingeringly, passionately.

And then he was walking down the short hall and out into the street, experiencing a sudden wave of self-disgust that was new to him. It remained, disturbing, condemning, while an inner voice kept crying over and over again, "cad, cad, cad."

He did not once look back toward the hospital, but continued swiftly and surely toward the train that would take him to New York and the boat that was sailing at midnight for Havre.

The ocean did not seem blue, the cool salt air was lacking in the sweet and invigorating qual-

ities he had been told it possessed, the stars at night were dim.

In the deck chair beside him reclined, not Grace, but Don Clark. . . . and so you go out and bust up Charlie's best, Rolls Rough," Don was saying. "Why, you mug, suppose you were in that hospital with your wife. Then what? Our chances for the cup'd go blooey."

Dave Swanstrom joined them. "Any word from your wife, Rollins?" the non-playing captain asked. "How she's getting along or anything?"

Len shook his head. "I imagine she's all right, though, or

I would have heard. Thanks."

Swanstrom sat down on the edge of Clark's chair. Staring out into the ocean he said: "One of you two guys has to upset the apple cart over there. If either of you can manage to beat Le-feuve I think we'll bring back the cup."

(Continued Next Week)

The Pirauha, a fish with teeth which infests the South American rivers in the Amazon valley is only a few inches long. It attacks man and animals in large numbers and is very dangerous.



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TODAY AND FRIDAY—
NELSON EDDY
Jeanette MACDONALD
In a Thrilling Drama of Adventure and Songs!
"NEW MOON"
News — Admission 10c-30c
SATURDAY—

THEY DEALT FROM A DECK STACKED COLD AS ICE—BUT CASSIDY CALLED THEIR BLUFF!

CLARENCE E. Mulford's
"THE SHOWDOWN"
featuring WILLIAM BOYD
Serial - Selected Shorts — Adm. 10c-30c

A crooked "Baron"... a lovely girl... a ruthless band of killers—and the West's ace adventurer matches wits and bullets with the toughest rustler crew ever to terrorize the range!

MOVIES
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Next Week—
MONDAY-TUESDAY—
NEW THRILLS TO COMPARE WITH TRACY'S GREATEST!

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News - Short — Admission 10c-30c
WEDNESDAY—
"YOU ARE NOT SO TOUGH"
Serial - Shorts — Admission 10c-15c
COMING SEPT. 23-24—
"WATERLOO BRIDGE"
LYRIC THEATRE