

STORM DRIFT

Ethel M. Dell

CHAPTER 58

BUT EVEN as Turner uttered the words he knew that he wrestled with a power against which he could never prevail. Out of his own heart came the word of command, and he had no choice but to obey.

He spoke to Joe Penny briefly, peremptorily. "You go and get brandy! We shall wait, I'll hold the rope."

He broke free from his stiff inertia and dashed across to the shed. He found a coil of rope in a corner and stung it on his arm. Then he raced out again, meeting Joe Penny as he emerged from the bar.

"You say there are three fellows up there?" he questioned.

"Yes, sir, Jim Walls and his two lads. He's got a bad leg, but his arms are all right. He can heave on a rope. And the boys—they're young, but they can pull too. And I'm pretty hefty—only I've got no head left for them cliff jobs. I'm nearly 70, you know, sir," said Joe apologetically.

Tiggie nodded, and they swung into the path that led most directly to the cliffs of Slimby Point. "Water high, I suppose," he said. "Oh yes, sir. Tide won't be down for another three hours, and you can't take a boat among them rocks, not to get really near 'em. I'll ring up the coastguard at Coombe if you can't do it, sir, but it'll take 'em a long while to get here." Joe Penny glanced at his companion in momentary doubt.

But though his face was hard set, as though carved in stone, Tiggie's answer was reassuring. "I'll do the job," he said.

And as he spoke, very strangely there came a lightening of the gloom around them and a ghostly gleam of sunshine shone down through the veil.

To Tiggie, as he strode forward at the highest speed that poor panting Joe could muster, it was as though in that moment scales fell from his eyes, and the mist was no longer red, but silvery white—touched with the glory of God.

When they reached the edge of the cliff above the Slimby Rock, the mist had gathered again so thickly that no object within a dozen yards was visible. Jim Walls, an old longshoreman with whom Tiggie had had many a pleasant gossip, was there with his two boys of 14 and 15 and the rough apparatus for cliff rescue with which Tiggie was already familiar.

"He's left callin'," said Walls. "Can't hear nothin' but the sea birds now."

Nothing but the shrieking sea birds and the desolate sound of the invisible sea, and the long, searching call of the lightsip siren that seemed to come in its weird persistence from all directions at once!

Tiggie took the flask of brandy from Joe Penny and thrust it into his pocket. He threw the extra coil of rope down, and in doing so discovered the stout ash stick belonging to Harvey still in his hand. He uttered a half-smothered oath and flung the thing from him, far out into the white darkness which received it in silence, giving back no sound.

"Now then!" said Tiggie.

The task before him was one which he had not begun to contemplate in detail. It was only when it came to the point that he realized that being let down the face of an overhanging cliff was a very different sensation from being pulled up it. Something like blank dismay entered his soul as he set himself to the task which filled him with a physical shivering which was new to him. The feeling of unplumbed depth below, the inability to do anything to help himself beyond avoiding unnecessary bumps against outstanding fragments of rock, the isolation in which the mist enveloped him, and the utter powerlessness of dangling at the end of a rope which ill chance might sever at any moment, all went to make an unforgettable impression upon Tiggie's newly awakened imagination which nothing in after life was to equal. Perhaps the violence of emotion through which he had passed served to intensify the horror of the experience, but horror was certainly his prevailing sentiment and it took the utmost resolution of which he was capable to keep it at arm's length.

"Damn it all!" he expostulated with himself. "If Harvey could do it, surely to goodness I can!"

Yes, Harvey had done precisely the same thing for him two nights be-

fore, and doubtless, had he been on the spot, he would have done it again for this man, whom he had so coolly advised him to murder. A funny chap—Harvey! It was difficult to know how to take him. One thing alone was certain. It was impossible to gauge him by ordinary standards, and this descent which was so terrifying to a man of normal intelligence would probably fail to strike any sort of dread into his fantastic soul.

Ah! His feet scraped and jerked upon something solid at last, and he sent a shout to the men above him. He could hear the wash of the waves below him far more distinctly now, but the crying of the sea gulls sounded remote, as though heard through a curtain. He was standing upon firm rock, but great care was needed, for the mist was thicker here and any step to right or left might send him floundering over the edge. Cautiously he felt his way.

And then very suddenly he stopped, for a man's voice came to him out of the void—a feeble, gasping voice. "Here! I'm here!"

Tiggie peered about him. The voice seemed to come from below. He found himself close to the edge of the rock, and went down upon hands and knees, peering over.

"Here!" gasped the voice again. Then he saw in a crevice about eight feet below him a dark, crumpled mass. He pulled on the rope and proceeded to swing himself down.

A few seconds later he was kneeling in a slimy hollow of rock beside the man upon whom he had sworn such deadly vengeance so brief a time before.

He was lying in a heap like a half empty sack, his limbs huddled under him at strange angles, his head sunk between his shoulders. His clothes were in tatters and his face clotted with blood which still oozed from a wound on the temple. His eyes were half closed, but they opened wide at Tiggie's touch, regarding him with a fixed and dreadful stare.

"You—'s it?" he said.

"Yes, me," said Tiggie.

Norman's lips drew back, exposing his teeth. "Didn't expect— you," he muttered.

"Afraid you're badly damaged," said Tiggie, trying to get an arm behind him.

"Damaged!" gasped Norman. "I'm— done for. Don't move me! I'm all— in pieces."

"I've got some brandy here," said Tiggie.

A faint gleam lightened the staring eyes. "Let's—have it!" gasped Norman.

Tiggie opened the flask and put it to the drawn lips. Norman drank with obvious difficulty, concentrating all his strength upon the effort, while Tiggie supported his head and did his utmost to prevent the liquid spilling over.

It took effect very quickly. Something of the wildness passed from his look, and he addressed Tiggie with more coherence.

"What did you come down here for?"

"To help you," said Tiggie.

Norman's lips went back into the old sneer. "Or to finish me— which?" he said.

"To help you," repeated Tiggie steadily.

Norman's eyes met his with a questioning, incredulous look. Then, "Where's the devil who pushed me over?" he asked abruptly.

"What?" said Tiggie.

Norman repeated his words with deliberate insistence. "The devil who pushed me over! Has he come along too—to see the end of me?"

"Good God!" gasped Tiggie. "D'you know what you're saying?"

"Yes, I do know." Contemptuously the answer came. "He got me up there—to meet you. But you were— discreet enough—to keep out of sight."

"What the devil . . ." burst from Tiggie; and then, commanding himself. "No. You're wrong. I wasn't there."

"Oh!" said Norman. "You weren't there." He seemed to consider this for a space, his eyes over which a glassy look was stealing, still upon Tiggie's agitated countenance. "Yes," he said at last. "I believe that's the truth—though you'd have given your eyes to murder me, wouldn't you?"

"Not from behind," said Tiggie with a kind of desperate bluntness.

There was something so fundamental, so terribly real, in the situation that he felt almost stunned by it, as one who contemplates an element too closely to grasp its entire

significance. He was not afraid, but awed to the very depths. For he knew that within the next few minutes he would look upon Death.

Norman's voice, quiet now, and slightly supercilious, had in it more individuality than his look in which expression was waning like a smoldering flame. "No—not from behind. I give you that. You're one of those blundering fools that go head down at everything. It'd take a willer devil than you—to do me in. It was—a willer devil." He paused, as though some obstruction checked his utterance.

"Have some more brandy!" said Tiggie.

He held it again to the livid lips; but they had begun to sag, and swallowing was almost an impossibility. "Poor chap!" whispered Tiggie.

The words escaped him half unconsciously, but they reached the ears of the dying man, and suddenly the waning light returned like a flame renewed. He regarded Tiggie once more attentively.

"D'you mean—me?" he said.

"Yes." With the simplicity that made his soul as the soul of a child Tiggie answered him. "I'm sorry for you—damn sorry."

"Sorry!" repeated Norman as if dazed. The light began to fall again, but the passing spirit paused on the threshold, arrested by that one amazing word, and held it up once more. "Listen!" he said. "Then I'm sorry too—sorry I crossed you— sorry I went after her again—sorry—for—everything. Understand?"

Again something rose in his throat, and the power of speech went out in a rattling sound as of broken machinery. But the light still shone for a few seconds longer, and ere it failed Tiggie's hand came with a warm compassion and grasped the nerveless hand that could not grasp it in return.

"That's all right," he said. "That's all right."

And while he was speaking, Norman died.

Death by misadventure was the pronouncement of the coroner's jury at Coombe, and Tiggie turned and left the court, mutely wondering at the simple logic by which they had arrived at that conclusion.

It had been Joe Penny's doing in the main. The landlady of "The Sea Lion" was in his element on such an occasion, and his theories regarding cliff slides had been expounded at great length. It was an undoubted fact that a wide crack had appeared at the top of the cliff above the scene of the disaster, due obviously to the recent rains, and anybody as didn't know the place and even some as did might quite easily stumble and go over the cliff in a fog. The cliff path hadn't been safe for years and it wasn't likely to get safer as time went on, if you understand my meaning, sir. Why the gentleman had gone up there on such a foggy morning wasn't any mystery either. He'd only arrived the night before and was exploring the lay of the land. They all did it—especially them artists—and it wasn't a bit of use talking. He never talked himself, it was just a waste of time. It was only a marvel to him that fatal accidents weren't more frequent, that was all he had to say about it.

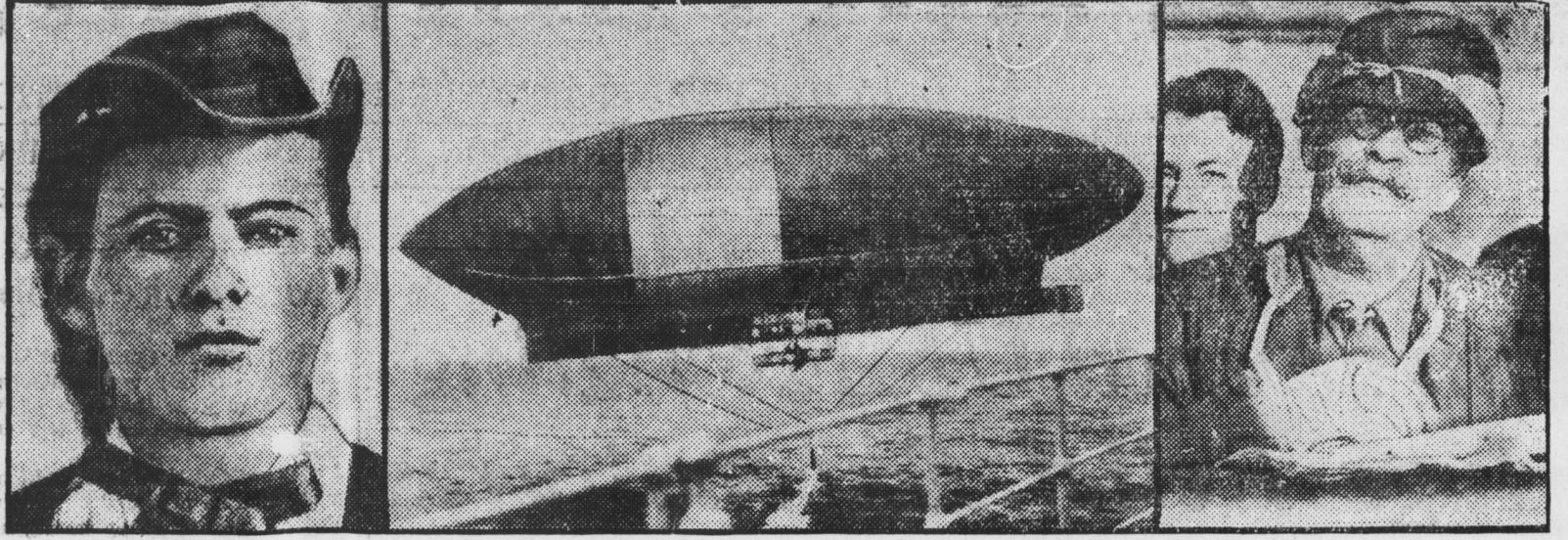
Tiggie's part had been comparatively easy. He had identified the body as that of John Norman, husband of Viola Norman at Cliff Cottage, Farne, who was too ill to appear. He had corroborated Joe Penny's statements regarding his own share in the attempted rescue and had received the coroner's compliments thereupon with considerable embarrassment. As to John Norman's last moments, he had not been questioned very closely. Death by misadventure had been a foregone conclusion, and as he went out again into the open air he realized upon what small details great issues hang. Joe Penny's dissertation upon the effects of the rain upon the rock had made its mark upon minds already predisposed to agree with him. The jury had even attempted to add a rider to the effect that a railing ought to be erected along the edge of the cliff for the protection of Joe Penny's wandering artists, but this had been disallowed by the coroner. Fatal accidents in the vicinity were very rare, as he pointed out, and to erect railings all round the British coast was scarcely a practical suggestion.

Tiggie went back to Farne in Joe Penny's car with a dull sense of amusement behind his relief.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

"The Good Old Days"

RECALLED BY CLARK KINNAIRD
AUTHOR OF "TODAY IS THE DAY"



THEY DONE HIM WRONG—Career of Jesse James (above) ended 52 years ago today as he was hanging pictures in his home in St. Joseph, Mo. Robert and James Ford, members of his band, shot him in the back to collect a \$10,000 reward offered for his capture "dead or alive."

A SUCCESSFUL FAILURE—24 years ago today, Walter Wellman, newspaperman who believed in making news instead of simply writing it, was preparing for the first attempt to fly the Atlantic. When he got started from Atlantic City in October, in the airship America he didn't attain his goal, but he did break the world's record for sustained flight by traveling 1,008 miles, and he was first to use wireless successfully in an airship and demonstrate its possibilities in making air travel safer. Wellman is shown (right) as he appeared, with broken arm, after he and crew were rescued from the wrecked America at sea.

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THE SPARK FLEW—And 31 years ago today the first news was transmitted across the Atlantic (New York to London) by wireless telegraph. The equipment used was similar to that with which William Marconi, its Irish-Italian inventor is shown in his laboratory in 1901.

WHEN WALL STREET WAS "GREEN FASTURES"—30 years ago today Mrs. HeTy Howland Robinson Green then 69 was a queen before whom mighty potentates of railroads and banking kow-towed. But she pinched pennies and always wore bargain-gought clothes like those she is wearing as she walks with a secretary. Carriages were too expensive for this mistress of millions.



The Needle In The Haystack!

It is not a matter of record as to whether anyone, in the history of the world, attempted to find the proverbial "needle in the haystack," but if any one person ever did his task would have been not more difficult than the finding of the murderer in "The Spun

Glass Mystery", the Henderson Daily Dispatch newest serial story. Do you need a mental spring tonic? Do your wits need sharpening? Then join with the best minds of the great Scotland Yard in attempting to solve this almost unbelievable plot.

The Spun Glass Mystery

A TALE OF SCOTLAND YARD by A. FIELDING

Beginning Tomorrow in the

Henderson Daily Dispatch

"Grand National" Winner



Miss Dorothy Paget proudly leading in Golden Miller after he won Grand National Steeplechase, British turf classic, which brought fortunes to American holders of winning tickets in Irish sweepstakes. (Central Press)

Movie Memories



Carol Dempster

Ten years ago: After touring with Ruth St. Denis as one of the Denishawn dancers, Carol Dempster entered motion pictures. She is shown here as Nancy Montague in "America."