

West Wind Drift

By GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

**THIS STARTS THE STORY**

Captain Trigger commands the steamer Doronic, whose disappearance while bound from a South American port to the West Indies has long been a mystery. After the vessel leaves port, Algonquin Adonis Perovial, a Russian, boards the steamer and learns he came aboard as a stowaway. The captain questions him as to how he boarded the vessel and learns he came aboard as a coal stowaway. He wants to return to the United States, and explains that robbers have taken all his money. The captain also learns that two deckhands have leaped from the ship and he suspects a plot to wreck the vessel. Perovial is put to work under guard. Next morning the wireless operator reports the transmitter out of order. Perovial and Trigger are very nervous. Perovial asks around their fears for safety. While at work Perovial is recognized by Ruth Clinton, who shortly after he is involved in a series of explosions occur, killing forty-six of the crew and passengers. The ship remains afloat. Both the captain and Perovial were among the injured. Ruth Clinton dresses Perovial's wounded hands. The ship catches one of the terrific storms of the southern Atlantic, but springs a leak. Miss Obosky, a beautiful young Russian, is every day the admiration of Perovial. Just as the situation is critical the steamer is wrecked on the rocks of two small islands. There is a crisis as the steamer passengers in their efforts to escape the ship threaten Perovial again, and he is left to fend for himself.

**AND HERE IT CONTINUES**

"All right, captain. I give in. Perhaps you are right. I suppose it would be butohery."

There were a few in the crowd who understood English. These edged forward eagerly, hopefully. They called out protestations against the "slaughter."

"Tell them you have reconsidered," Mr. Perovial said to the captain. "They are to remain on board."

Excited shouts went up from the few who understood, and then the word went among the others that they were to be spared. There were cries of relief, joy, gratitude, and not a few fell upon their knees!

Perovial stood forth once more. Silence fell upon the throng.

The captain has put in a plea for you, and I have decided to grant it. You may remain on board. Now, listen to me! No one is to leave this ship until tomorrow morning. We are safe here. We are making fast on the bottom, and nothing can happen to us at present. Tomorrow we will see what the wind will do. Every man and woman here is to return to the task he was given by Mr. Moit at the beginning of our troubles. We've got to eat, and sleep, and—wait a minute! Well, all right—eat it, if you feel that way about it."

He stood watching them as they excitedly withdrew toward the bow of the ship, breaking up into chattering groups, all of them talking at once.

"Captain Trigger laid his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"If it had not been for you, Perovial, this deck would now be red with blood—and some of us would be dead. You saved a very ticklish situation. I take full credit for it, and I say, with a full heart, that I shall never again doubt your ability to handle men. No one but an American could have tricked that mob as you did, my lad!"

From various points of vantage the foregoing scenes had been witnessed by uneasy, alarmed persons from the upper cabins. Overwhelmed and dismayed by the rush of the yelling mob, the eloc had had fear for safety, urged by a greater fear than any that had gone before—the fear of rioting men.

A few of them, more daring and inquisitive than the rest, had ventured recklessly into the zone of danger. Among them were Ruth Clinton and Madame Olga Obosky, who, disregarding the command of Mr. Moit, were the only women to venture toward the protesting corner of the deck building. They stood aside by side, bracing themselves against the railing, and watching the deck. Halfway forward were Trigger and the armed gunners, and beyond them the densest and fiercest mob of humanity. Perovial, in rounding the corner to go to the assistance of Captain Trigger, observed with dismay the exposed position in which the two women had placed themselves. He paused to cry out to them sharply.

"What are you doing here? Get back to the other side. Can't you see there is a mob of idiots? Don't stand there like a couple of idiots! You're right in line if that mob begins to fire."

"He is tearing off his language," cried Ruth, as Perovial hurried on.

Madame Obosky was silent, her eyes fixed intently on the brink, aggressive figure of the man who had tricked her. She understood every word he uttered to the Portuguese. Her eyes flashed with pride when he turned forward to tackle the mob single-handed. And as he went on with astonishing speech she actually broke into a smile. Her companion looked at her with amazement.

"Why do you laugh?" she demanded hotly. "Those dreadful creatures may fear him to pieces. He is unarmed and defenseless. Those fellows sweep him—"

"You would laugh also if you understood," interrupted Olga, her eyes dancing. "Oh, what a grand what do you call it?—bluff! What a magnificent bluff he is doing! It is beautiful. See—they whirled among themselves—they have backed down completely. Wait! I will presently tell you what he has said to them."

"I never dreamed any man could be so fearless. Look at the odds against him. There are scores of them—and they—"

"Pooh! Do you suppose he would stand up and fight them if they rushed at him? No, he! He would turn and run as fast as he could. He is no fool. He is a very intelligent man. No, he would run if they make a single move toward him."

"I think this is rather a poor time to accuse him of cowardice," Madame Obosky, in view of what he—"

"I'd like to know what you call it. You say he would run if they—"

"That would not be cowardice. It would be the simplest kind of common sense. He is so very sure of himself. It is not courage. It is confidence. That is his strength. He would be a fool to stand in front of them empty-handed if they were to charge upon him. Maybe when you have known him as long as I have, you will realize he is not a fool—about himself or any one else."

Ruth stared at her. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, Madame Obosky, I have known Mr. Perovial as long, if not longer, than you have."

"You do not know him at all," rejoined the Russian brusquely. "He still, please! I must learn what he is saying to her arm. A little later she turned to her arm. "Purge me, I was rude to you. I am so very much older than you are—I'm twenty-five," replied the other, surprised into replying.

"Obosky, as if she were at least twice the age of her companion. "See! The dog is dispersing. It's all over. Come! Let us go back to the other side of the ship. I am not ready to go back to the other side," protested the American girl, resisting the hand that her arm. "Why should we go back, now the danger is over?"

"Because we must not let him catch us here," urged Olga in some agitation. "And why not, pray?"

"The Russian looked at her in astonishment.

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By Sidney Smith



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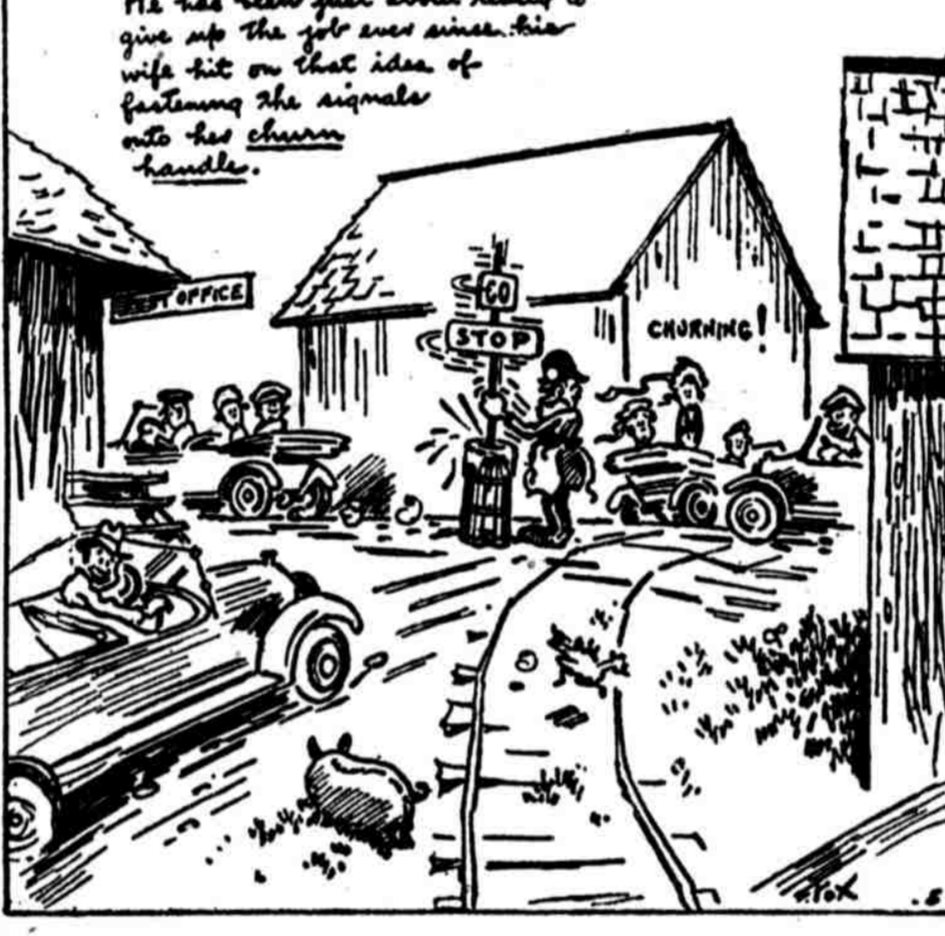
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