

The Observer.

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Through Straddle Rock Cove

By GEORGE E. WALSH

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BOGGIES came aboard at Hall's—stranded, battered, delirious, and anxious to sail to the north coast. He was suffering from a plethora of hard luck, but to Mr. Pierce he had the appearance of one recovering from a period of desolation. Annette saw only the picturesque side of Boggies, and he was tentatively engaged on the spot. "I know the Newfoundland coast better than I know the coast of my own face," confessed the pilot in a soft, pleading voice. "Seeing that I was born in Straddle Rock Cove, and I lived there until I was old enough to run away, I ought to."

Annette was romantic, and she anticipated his thoughts.

"And you want to visit your old home again?" she asked sympathetically.

"Yes, ma'am. I'm dying to do that; been trying to get back in the old

"OH, BOGGIES! WHY DID THIS HAPPEN?" home port for well nigh twenty years, but what with hard luck and other things I've always missed it. Once at St. John's, I says to myself, now I see Straddle Rock again before I die. I was so sure of it that I had to break a leg celebrating the event. Of course no one wanted a sailor with a game leg, and I had to stay in port until the season was too far advanced to go north. Then I shipped to the States again to keep from starving."

Boggies limped a trifle yet from his broken leg, and one eye seemed to squint with diabolical cunning when you looked him square in the face, but Annette saw none of the ugly sides of the subjects she liked, and Boggies charmed her.

Mr. Pierce grumbled at the bargain, but finally submitted. Pilots familiar with the north coast were scarce in Halifax, and the season was late anyway. "Well, it's for Annette's sake I'm up here," he confessed, "and I suppose I shouldn't object if Annette approves."

"He looks honest, but a bit hardened on the surface by too much contact with the world," ventured Dr. Langdon, with a smile. "I think his story of being born and nurtured in Straddle Rock Cove is a myth, however. I doubt if there is such a place."

"We must visit Straddle Rock Cove," said Annette positively one day. "Mr. Boggies—he always dignified the old pilot with Mr.—'can guide us there. It's an immensely dangerous harbor, and no one can enter it in a storm except Mr. Boggies."

"Boggies may be all right," drawled the doctor, "but I draw the line at going into Straddle Rock Cove with him in a storm."

Annette ignored the interruption. Mr. Pierce was bored with the whole trip, and he was willing to yield anything for peace.

"You will visit the cove, papa, where Boggies was born?" Annette continued. "You will make him happy again. He's been dreaming of this trip for twenty years."

"If you will be satisfied to return home then we may run in the harbor," craftily replied Mr. Pierce, anxious to shorten the trip by striking any sort of a bargain.

"Yes," reluctantly, "after we stay there a few days."

Straddle Rock grew daily in importance thereafter. It was the first definite point of entry for the yacht. Captain Reed looked the place up on the charts. There was a group of small rocks off a dangerous point of the coast, locally known by the fishermen as Straddle rocks. They were marked "Dangerous" and "No Safe Harbor For Ships or Yachts." He carried his information to the owner and grumbled with mutinous intent.

"Oh, it doesn't matter in the least, captain," retorted Mr. Pierce, annoyed by the new interference. "Annette is persistent, and you must oblige her. Really, it's none of my affair."

"But, sir, this man Boggies may wreck us."

Mr. Pierce waved his hand entreatingly. "Talk to Annette," he murmured.

Annette checked the ineffectual mutiny by closing herself in the chart room with the captain for two whole hours. When they emerged both were smiling. No orders were given to change the course of the yacht.

The waters of the north coast met them a week later. They were cold and icy, with the breath of floating bergs hovering over them. Boggies was consulted by the captain, and his meek, submissive air sloughed off to make place for the official bearing of "Mr. Boggies, the north coast pilot."

Boggies was to report for duty the following morning. As his last unofficial act he helped the mate to repair the small acetylene gas generator in the forward part of the yacht. This was used in emergencies for the forward searchlight.

"We've got to keep a sharp lookout for icebergs now," Captain Reed had warned, "and that forward searchlight must be fixed up."

Boggies didn't know much about acetylene gas. Neither did the first mate. They tampered with the plant for two hours, and then a muffled explosion forward alarmed every member of the crew. It was the first mate who exclaimed incoherently:

"The thing—the tank exploded right in our faces. It was so sudden that I could not say how."

Boggies couldn't explain, for he was blinded and his body was blazing like a human torch covered with pitch. The captain and Dr. Langdon squelched the flames, so the yacht was safe, and Annette, with two sailors, rescued Boggies from incineration.

Mr. Pierce was angry and bored to the point of saying:

"How annoying! Any one hurt?" "Boggies is pretty well done up," the doctor replied, scraping the charred skin from the blackened face. "He's blind as a bat for one thing, and—"

"I know the Newfoundland coast better than I know the coast of my own face," confessed the pilot in a soft, pleading voice. "Seeing that I was born in Straddle Rock Cove, and I lived there until I was old enough to run away, I ought to."

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Annette mechanically picked up the discarded strips of line and followed her crestfallen patient through the door. Boggies was on deck before her. All was confusion and blackness there, but the pilot wended his way through the obstructions to the pilot house.

"I'll take her, captain, now," he announced gently. "I've got my bearings. That's the Saddle's hump, and over there's Straddle rocks. It's nasty weather in here."

Captain Reed stared at the vision, but it was too dark to see clearly. His own nerves were considerably rattled by the recent series of events, and he stepped back in something like superstition.

"Let her go ahead full speed, captain," Boggies continued. "The tide runs like blazes through these channels."

The sailors halted in their work and left the boats swinging half down the davits. Mr. Pierce shouted angrily:

"What's he doing—wrecking us on his blind rocks?"

"Wait a moment, Mr. Pierce," Dr. Langdon said, the intuition of a vision possessing him. "He can't make matters worse."

"Isn't he blind?" snorted the owner. "Yes, we're all blind," answered the doctor meekly.

The crash of the breakers on their right drowned all further conversation. The wind veered and shrieked a new tune, and the Grayling cleared the line of rocks by a scant yard.

"That was as close as we could run to the hump without going on," exclaimed Boggies, with both hands on the wheel.

"Now," with a sigh, for the Straddle rocks, "they're worse, much worse in this weather."

"Good God! Then we're lost," groaned Mr. Pierce. "We can't live in anything worse than that."

"Hush, papa!" he whispered. "I think Boggies may know."

The yacht yawed and swung wide of the next line of breakers, then faced the black towering rocks. Boggies held her steadily toward them. There was no opening. The sea dashed mountains high against their precipitous face. The white foam splattered the bow of the boat. Mr. Pierce could stand it no longer. He broke loose and shouted in a frenzy:

"That's crazy! That madman will wreck us! Take the wheel, Captain Reed! I command you! Take it!"

But the captain fumbled in speech and movements. Then he was arrested by a most violent lurch of the yacht. There was a grinding and grating of steel against an unyielding substance. Some one shrieked awfully. It seemed an eternity for the bewildered spectators, but Boggies sighed and said:

"There, we're through the Straddle now! We're safe, captain!"

The towering wall of rocks had miraculously opened, and the Grayling

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