

# Saving Susan

*The way this romance works out, it will be very nice for young Mr. Vaughn when the stock of Pacific Utilities booms again. But it won't make any essential difference*

**By Duncan Norton-Taylor**

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE DE ZAYAS

SHE was sure she looked pale; purposely she had not put on any rouge and in black satin lounging pajamas she decided that she conveyed the idea. Especially when she pushed her brown bobbed hair back of her ears. Then she went down to breakfast.

Though she was hungry, she shook her head at the omelet and said in a tragic voice, "I just want some coffee." Out of the corner of her eye she was pleased to see that her uncle was looking at her, and she languidly unfolded her napkin and gazed into space.

"Good morning," said Uncle Ogden. She sighed.

"What's the matter with you?"

She was gratified. The butler was pouring her coffee and she watched him with a melancholy face; and not until he had departed and she guessed Uncle Ogden's suspense had reached its peak did she burst out: "It's him—it's he, Russ!"

"Not already. He has only just come home."

"It's his pride," she explained passionately. "It's diabolic—to be so calmly full of pride. He says we must wait until Pacific Utilities comes back and then he can marry me without losing what he calls his self-respect. Meanwhile I'm expected to sit and yearn. . . ."

"It's a crafty plan to escape," Uncle Ogden suggested. "He has discovered what a gangling, homely creature you are and now he doesn't love you."

She gave him a withering look with her beautiful eyes. "I don't think you are funny," she said. "This is too serious."

He looked repentant.

"We've gone around with each other for years. Of course he loves me. Once he said he has really loved me ever since the day he noticed I was no longer a girl but a lovely woman."

"Hmph, what day was that?"

She folded her hands under her chin and announced: "I am going away!" and studied his reaction.

BUT Uncle Ogden was running his finger down the stock quotations. "Pacific Utilities is one and seven eighths. How far does it have to come back?"

"It was worth half a million when his father gave it to him on a birthday."

"Darius Vaughn did large things when he owned all but the moon. What Russ has is probably worth now about ten thousand—"

"And he won't sell it."

"I don't blame him. In ten or fifteen years it may be worth what Darius paid for it."

"And I've got to wait that long! Because of his idiotic pride! I'm going away from it all. When I'm gone he will realize, the big moose—"

"I forbid you to do anything giddy. How old are you? I've forgotten."

"But I wish to go away—anywhere, maybe the Bahamas. I'm nineteen, but what has that got to do with it?"



"I'm just doing a sort of job for your uncle," he said. "I've got to see you, Susan"

It appeared to have some significance to Uncle Ogden, for he vanished behind his newspaper, and Susan, temporarily frustrated, said that she had changed her mind about the omelet and ate some in indignation.

Uncle Ogden forgot the incident until two days later when he received a telephone call at his office from his wife.

"Susan's gone!" gasped Mrs. Blackwell.

"Gone where?"

"To Nassau—"

"Nassau—what of it?—wait, do you mean Nassau in the Bahamas?"

"Yes. Ogden, I came back from our luncheon bridge at the club and they told me Susan had left, bag and baggage. There was a note. She must have made all the arrangements, booked her passage and everything and not said a word. What will you do?"

"Oh, Lord—I don't know what I can do. I've got a steamship company to attend to. Have you ever heard of the Southern Export Lines? Her father

left her a twenty-five-thousand-dollar income. If she wants to take a trip to Nassau, why—"

Mrs. Blackwell groaned.

"She'll be all right," he yelped. "Did she go on one of our boats?—No, of course she wouldn't."

They had a cable from her that night. "Gorgeous trip having lovely time home soon." And Ogden Blackwell said eagerly, "See? Nothing to get upset about."

"Oh, I don't think you feel any sense of responsibility. We, her guardians—your brother's child—"

"What am I supposed to do?"

"At least worry," Mrs. Blackwell said hysterically. Ogden Blackwell waved his hands and retired from her presence. Worry—Lord! He blamed Russell Vaughn. The third day after she had left, he summoned Mr. Vaughn from the freight soliciting department to his office.

SUSAN sometimes referred to young Mr. Vaughn as a big moose, not because of any swiftness of pace or majestic grandeur but because he reminded her, she said, of a moose at twilight beside a lake, still and unemotional and single-minded. She had seen a picture of a moose in this attitude.

He had played guard at Yale and had been held in respect by Harvard teams of three seasons. This was on account of his unholy zeal and his method of exploding upward into plays.

He had graduated in 1930. It was the previous winter that his father crashed and dropped out of the picture—Darius Vaughn was now living on a chicken farm in Indiana—and Russ came out of Yale, his family bankrupt, no prospect of a job, and still engaged to Susan Blackwell, who had inherited a fortune. Ogden Blackwell offered him a job with Southern Export and he said, "Thanks, no," mumbling something about charity. But Mr. Blackwell explained he planned to put Russ on one of their freighters until he learned something and there was no charity about that, and Russ finally accepted.

He sailed away. The devil of it was leaving Susan. And yet it was probably best.

He was scraping paint in the Caribbean when she made her debut. She hadn't wanted to. "It's just a gesture for Aunt Anne's sake," she wrote him. "I'm waiting for you. When you get back you'll go into the New York office." She met the S. S. Valdivia when it docked in Brooklyn in the spring.

"We can't get married now," he said. He was bronzed and hard-muscled, with close-cropped, sun-bleached hair. "Your uncle can't pay me enough to put me in your income level. My job doesn't justify it. However"—he brightened up—"I salvaged five thousand shares of Pacific, and when it comes back—Darling, you know what people would say: 'His old man went broke, so he married money.' You wouldn't want them to say that. It won't work—with you having an income six times my salary—"

"Oh, damn my income!" Susan swore. But Russ was adamant. "We're young, we can wait a few years," he pointed out.

MR. BLACKWELL waved Russ into a chair. "Have you and Susan any—er—understanding?" he asked.

"Why, no—well, yes, in a way." Russ took his large hands out of his pockets and clasped them around one knee. "You see, of course, I am not in a position to marry Susan now—a financial position. When Pacific comes back—"

"Oh, yes." Ogden Blackwell's small, thin and dapper figure swung half around in the mahogany chair and his little wrinkled face tilted thoughtfully toward the ceiling. "Don't you think it may be some time?"

"I hope not, Mr. Blackwell."

"Are you very fond of her?"

Russ blushed and looked surprised and old Blackwell favored him with an encouraging smile, which was abruptly replaced by a grave scowl. "You know she has gone to Nassau in spite of my forbidding it—"

"I didn't know you had forbidden it. I sent her some flowers and some books."

Mr. Blackwell frowned. "I am worried. She's headstrong, self-willed." He paused. "Why do you suppose she was set on taking this trip?"

Russ shook his head. "I wondered about that, too."

"Hmph. As far as I know she has gone alone. All kinds of unscrupulous people infest these boats and these resorts. In spite of herself, Susan is unsophisticated and naïve. I am worried. She could fall into the clutches of some gigolo, for instance."

"That's right."

Mr. Blackwell leaned forward. "I'm going to send you after her."

"Send me?"

"I can't go. I can't at this time. I won't send an agency detective. I want to fetch her back. I want you to fetch her back."

He picked up a check, already written. "As a matter of fact, I have told Hollis that I am sending you to the Bahamas on a special job for me, so you don't need to explain anything around the office. There's a check which will cover all expenses. When can you leave?"

"On the next boat—"

"There's no boat until Sunday. You had better go by plane to Miami and

get a plane from there across to Nassau. . . ."

When the door had closed after Russ, Mr. Blackwell examined the end of his cigar. He was a pretty smart old rooster at that. Killed two birds with one stone. He even smiled, because he was devoted to his niece and had a good deal of respect and affection for the son of Darius Vaughn.

Russ' face, as he walked out of Mr. Blackwell's office and back to his own desk, was wooden. He sat down and laid Ogden Blackwell's check in front of him. It was for three thousand dollars.

He made several notes for Hollis, the vice president in charge of freight soliciting, about some cancellations and new contracts, closed his desk, and departed.

Flying down the coast the next day he had time to think. And the more he thought the more he began to wonder. How was he going to fetch her back? She would not be coerced, or cajoled, or even tricked. Not Susan. How was he going to manage it? He thought about it the rest of the way to Miami and during the two-hour flight across to Nassau the following morning.

He guessed that she would stay at the New Colonial and he went there first. He was right. His inquiry at the desk elicited the information that she had stayed there one day and then had checked out—to depart on a cruise boat for Bermuda.

UPSET, he sat down and composed a cable to Mr. Blackwell. He wrote: "Susan left here West Indies cruise boat expect catch her in Bermuda can you suggest way to bring her back?"

He spent the day hanging around the hotel lobby and read in the Nassau Guardian that among the visitors to Nassau arriving aboard the Miami plane was "Russell Vaughn, son of the well-known financier, Darius Vaughn, of New York City."

He was aboard a steamer sailing for Bermuda a day later when Mr. Blackwell's reply caught up with him. It was evening and he was leaning against the after rail when a steward handed him the message. It said: "Cabled Susan wait for you in Bermuda in re your question how to bring her back marry her you big moose."

He stared at it. And he knew the truth: They had framed him!

Susan's flight, her uncle's concern—spurious—sending him to fetch her



"Would it be presuming," Mr. Ruiz asked, "if I might show the points of interest?"

back. Oh, yes, he could see Susan writing the plot and playing the romantic role and in the end whispering to him provocatively under one of these West Indies moons, "I ran away because you wouldn't marry me!"

For the sixth time he read the radio and then crumpled it up in his fist. She cared nothing about the pride a man might have. She nor her uncle. What was Blackwell's motive? Probably only to get rid of a difficult responsibility.

And the thing that maddened him was the temptation of it. He was in love with her, and Ogden Blackwell knew it. The insidiousness of it.

He brought his fist down smartly on the rail and scowled into the tropic night. His orders were to bring her home; he would do just that. How, he still wasn't sure. But he did think he might radio old Blackwell such a message: "Consider your suggestion irrelevant." Which was what it was. He leaned on the rail, seeing, unhappily, her warm, gray eyes, her laughing mouth.

A voice at his elbow said, "A penny for your thoughts."

He turned to look into the large, blue and shy eyes of a fellow passenger, with whom he had become curiously acquainted.

"My thoughts aren't worth a penny, Miss Tremaine," he said bitterly, stuffing the radiogram into his pocket. "I am not supposed to think. I'm just a waffle that people are always putting something over on."

SHE was an extremely beautiful girl—a golden blonde with a little, earnest, very red mouth, like a child's, which she made into a little pout and said, "I certainly appreciated you this morning."

"I was glad I could help you."

"It would have been terrible if it had really been lost."

"Sure it would. . . ." He had been pretty good, as he thought back on it with a pleasant glow. She had been frantic because she was sure they had not got her trunk aboard during the embarkation from Nassau. She hadn't

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He sat beside her, gazing down into her blue eyes

# The Silk Hat

A Short Short Story Complete on this Page

By Harlan Ware

ILLUSTRATED BY DAN SWEENEY

**O**LD Anton Cubesec was haunted by his own ghost. He dreaded to eat his meals, sit in his favorite morris chair, or go to his bedroom because wherever he went his ghost was there to haunt him.

It had begun in March.

An old Swiss watch, older than Anton—and he was a very old Swiss indeed—had given the first warning. The watch, like Anton, was all through.

In his shop in Pasadena, he looked at it through his magnifier. For ten years—since moving to Pasadena from Elgin, Illinois, with his second wife and her three daughters—that particular watch had been coming in for repairs.

And on this day, when he was not feeling so well himself, Anton realized that nothing more could be done.

"You must buy a new one," Anton said to the owner. "This could not even be called a watch any longer."

As he lowered himself to his stool the sad thought occurred to Anton Cubesec that he and the watch were in much the same condition. This realization made his hands shake. He was so startled that he put on his hat, closed his shop, and went to see his good friend Dr. Zweig.

"The truth is what I want," said old Anton. "I am not afraid."

The truth was that a doctor cannot remove the years from a man's shoulders. Anton should rest if he cared to live so much as three months longer.

**A**NNA'S three daughters were married now, so that she was alone when Anton came home with the news. She had been expecting it.

Anna promptly suggested using part of their savings to buy a mountain cottage in a near-by canyon. One she had always wanted.

"You live out your April, May and June there," she said evenly, "and I'll have a home—for afterward."

She withdrew enough money. She also bought a cemetery lot because Anton's relatives were buried in Elgin, Illinois, and that was too far to ship him.

She made arrangements with a tailor. It would be more convenient to have Anton measured for his burial suit when vertical than when horizontal.

In April, the suit was ready. A dress suit, with tails. Old Anton looked very well in it when he remembered to stand erect. The tailor admired him:

"Such clothes take years off a man's shoulders," he said, holding up a gleaming, high silk hat. "And this, too, sir?"

Anton shook his head.

"I will not need the hat," he said.

He was too tired just then to inspect the cemetery lot but after a few nights' sleep in the new cottage he felt stronger and early in May they made the trip. It was three miles on the electric car.

He found it a neat lot. Lettering on the tombstone read:

CUBESEC

Anton 1854—

Anna 1877—

"Good," he said. "Restful. Let's go home now."



There were no initials whatever on the portrait of Anton Cubesec. "So!" said Anton

The sun was shining brilliantly, the grass was green. Homeward bound, Anton drew deep breaths, folded his fingers to keep them from shaking, and sat erect in his seat. . . .

The cottage was high in the canyon but easily reached from the car line. It was in a picturesque location. Old Anton found it peaceful there. Each night he slept as he had not slept for years. Twelve hours. Thirteen hours, sometimes.

In the morning the sparkling light poured on his blankets and spilled over the cedar chest at the foot of his bed. It was like awakenings he recalled as a boy. The truth came to him only at the first movement of his thin legs, the first glimpse of the cedar chest in which Anna kept the burial suit, with the moth balls.

Time passed rapidly and soon the first of June had come.

"Now, then," said his wife briskly, "I've decided to rent the cottage for the income—afterward. It will not be so lonesome living with one of the girls. Gretchen has invited me."

"That will be good," said Anton. "That will be comfortable."

She went on: "Last night while you were sleeping the girls came over and divided the furniture. They put their initials on every-

thing. Now there will be no squabbling in a house of death."

Had he not felt so splendid on this June day, these preliminary arrangements would have seemed reasonable to Anton.

"Is it not a little soon?" he snapped. "I am feeling stronger every morning."

He walked to the balcony and drank deep of the air. There was life in it.

Below him, in the ravine, he could see his neighbor, Duval, the artist, vigorously chopping wood.

"Bring me another cup of coffee!" shouted Anton to his wife. "Bring me my pipe! I am not yet twice as old as Duval, even!"

Now he was haunted by his own ghost. When he sat down for meals he found a stepdaughter's initials on the back of the silverware. His chair had a G scratched on it. The sideboard was for Frieda—it said F on the handle. The wedding dishes were Ada's, a neat A on the silver serving platter.

Over the mantel was a crayon portrait which Dr. Zweig had made in his spare time. Anton squinted at the frame, the canvas, studied it on top and underneath. There were no initials whatever on the

crayon portrait of Anton Cubesec.

"So!" said Anton.

He sat long hours in the sun. He walked every day. Toward the end of June the parchment of his skin took on a ruddy color; sometimes he felt well enough to stop at Duval's for a chat. Often, he forgot how old he was. . . .

One night when old Anton had been sleeping for several hours he woke up to find moonlight dancing on his bed-covers and over the cedar chest. He experienced a moment of fright. *He saw a cobweb outline of himself crouching on the cedar chest!*

With a groan, he sat up. The outline turned into moonbeams. Then laughter and music struck his ears!

He moved to the window. Lights were bright in Duval's studio. There was a masquerade party at Duval's!

He lifted the lid of the cedar chest. There was his burial suit. Very quietly he put it on.

He tiptoed down the canyon road and knocked at Duval's door. Except for the lack of a silk hat, he was magnificently groomed. They welcomed him. He sat in corners, sipped drinks, chatted with women. He felt fine.

"Look," he said to Duval, when the party broke up, "if you ever need this suit you can borrow it. You can keep it a long time."

"It might fit me at that," Duval smiled. "I'll remember. Good night."

**O**NE bright February afternoon Anton Cubesec came briskly down the canyon road, wearing his burial suit and a gleaming high silk hat. Duval hailed him:

"By the way, Mr. Cubesec, I'm going to a wedding next week—I'd like to borrow your suit after all."

Old Anton took off the silk hat and mopped his brow. He shook his head. "Things happen suddenly, Mr. Duval. I want to have this suit where I can put my hands on it. I've just walked home from my wife's funeral. Who knows? There may be more funerals in my family yet, that I will want to wear it to, before it comes time for my own."