

The Misadventures of Findlay

BY S. TEN EYCK BOURKE AND CHARLES FRANCIS BOURKE.



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"CASHING bank checks," said Findlay, "is as easy as clipping coupons and, in the main, as satisfactory. But I never before tried the easy road to riches by anticipating 'em—with a forged signature!"

Findlay was worried. Despite his byzantine exterior he was worried by his own past performances and harassed by the hand of the law sternly beckoning.

Earlier in the day Findlay had gathered with certain sporting companions at the café of the Ocean Finance Building to celebrate the fortuitous outcome of an all night secret session at that metropolitan office warren, not unconnected with the imminent activities of a seagoing tug, whose "past performances" in tropical waters had variously incited Uncle Sam's undrest espionage. Funds running low to prolong the festivities and the hour short—it was Saturday with its noon bank closure—Findlay had risked his personal reputation and liberty to procure the not incommensurable wherewithal in the immediate vicinity.

Subsequently, very shortly, brutal men in brass buttoned uniforms had halted him to answer to a grave infraction of the law, to wit, forging a check on a baking company and presenting said check at a strange bank.

Findlay had laughed—then. To be "wanted" at Headquarters was more or less a joke to such irresponsible young bloods as Findlay, considering the farcical ease with which those "in the know" could "square things" if too much publicity did not pertain to the case and funds were forthcoming. Findlay had commanded the situation, and the funds, then.

Bailed out, with the proceeds of that check, Findlay had jumped the bond. Emerging from the Ocean Finance Café, where he had failed to connect with his erstwhile friends and their money, matters were another complexion. He was deserted, left to his fate in the equally deserted parlous of lower Manhattan, at the close of a sultry summer Saturday.

Let alone the disastrous possibility of frustrating the tug venture if publicity, at its present stage, proclaimed his presence in town, Findlay began to doubt even if he could explain satisfactorily to the Court, the lawyers and the police—to say nothing of the irate banker—all but on the trail of the fugitive who had so summarily evaded them, with blood in their eyes!

"I'll never do a crazy thing like that again," he told Casey—Special Officer Casey, of the Ocean Finance Building—"those Johnnies aren't worth it."

"The lads has left, then?" Casey cooed. "They was cuttin' up high jinks since you was gone th' mornin', before they was put out."

"I never doubted it," Findlay said gloomily. "Now I can shift for myself. I've a good notion to go to the war in Cuba; there's as much sense in it."

"An' what has the war in Cuba to do with it?" asked Casey.

"Oh, some friends of mine in the building here were fitting out a filibuster—a gun runner," said Findlay unhesitatingly. "If there's anybody in the world more miserable than I," said Findlay, "I'd marry her!"

none of the blue coated enemy cropped up in front to head him off. Findlay, doubling for the river, debouched unexpectedly into the late outpouring of a big factory building. The fugitive, the policeman and the mob trailing them wrought panic among the sweatshop workers. Some scattered before the hunt, leading it as if they were.

"You noted for the sheer incongruity of her evident refinement in that illiterate throng, even as he booted out on a long wharf, the big policeman clinging like a leech."

"He had seen the dark eyed girl dart ahead of him, down the wharf, as the big policeman bore down. Then, as the officer threatened, a pitiful cry of fright flushed him as the colossal Nemesis in the enshrouding gloom of the imminent thunderstorm could never have."

A jagged, vivid, streaking orange slashed the blackness. Findlay saw the girl poise, struggling for her footing on the outermost edge of the strappiece, and with a backward, white faced glance of terror at the suddenly revealed peril, plunged headlong down into the phosphorescent river.

Findlay's hands went up in his stride; not pausing for a second, he launched himself in a graceful, arching dive, aiming to come up close under the girl's body. The rush of the tidewater had the girl's frail form in its clutch, sweeping her seaward. Catching a flutter of red and a glimpse of rippling tresses shimmering like molten ebony in the lightning's flare, he struck out in pursuit.

A frantic blast whistled behind him; then something struck him on the head, sweeping him aside. For a moment he viewed a gorgeous electrical display, from within and without, including the lights of the Battery overhead. But he had the girl in his grip, and the crew of the chortling tug (a full fledged seagoing tugboat she was, he noticed even then, showing no lights) were flinging ropes and stretching out brawny arms to drag them aboard.

"'Tis no fault o' yours you didn't get bumped to bottom," a gruff voiced rescuer, the tugmaster, accented him. "What would ye be doin' in th' drink now—you an' the la-dy?"

"Not a blessed thing," said Findlay fervently. "We were—ah, capsized in a race. Got bumped, as you say."

He was bumped, badly bumped, but Findlay was used to hard knocks. Besides, it buoyed him immensely to see that the girl was coming round all right; she was resting against his shoulder, getting her breath, or her courage, or both, while he listened to the crew, or cabin complement, excitedly jabbering in Spanish and English about the immediate disposition of himself and the girl he had saved.

"You're crazy to pick up this man! With the revenue watching out for us, too. Much better to drop 'em overboard again, Captain," a villainous voice suggested.

"Overboard is it, ye scum? Now, mind me," a heavy brogue responded. "They'll be nobody thrown overboard while I'm skipper o' this filibuster packet—barrin' it do be yod Cuby Junta 'Gimrais, me bucko. So put that in your cigarets an' set fire to it!"

"I judge we'll not be landed yet," Findlay suggested tentatively, when the skipper came up with a friendly word. "Anyway, the lady will do better below."

"It's a judge o' Special Sessions ye ought to be!" said the skipper dryly. "In the cuddy she'll maybe find a dry coat as well as be out o' th' way o' me maintenance discipline on me quarterdeck."

Findlay caught the growling remonstrance of the temporarily cowed Junta as he strode below, bearing his dripping burden. His jaw squared; he looked sternly remorseful and unforgiving for Findlay.

"Wanted to chuck her overboard, that Junta crowd did!" he growled. "That's the kind of filibustering sports they are, is it? Just wait awhile!"

somewhere near the Narrows, not such the quarterdeck. But he had not counted on attack from the rear. Something it might have been the butt end of a simple of the gun runner's cargo—found on his head, and Findlay drifted away into the star spangled void.

How long he lay in stuper he did not know. He had a vague impression of his head reposing on the knees of the Seminola's commander, who was fitting wadding rings on Findlay's fingers. Anyway, he wasn't a marrying man, and it was no business of his if she was—

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"You thought if they thought you had some one to look after you—You poor little kitten!" said Findlay. "Look here, Miss—"

"Fortuna. My name is Maria Fortuna," she said.

"Mine's—ah—Findlay. Look here, Miss Fortuna, how long have I been dead to the world—senseless I mean?"

"Hours, Señor! Ages! It is growing daylight."

"Heaven knows where that revenue cutter is, then! And I don't like these filibuster chaps a little bit!"

Findlay groaned and struggled to his feet, steadying himself against the table. Mechanically he glanced at the newspaper on a late New York edition. All the impress went suddenly from him, a curious expression hovering around his aristocratic mouth; his jaw tightened as he stared at the face on the front page—a young man well known in Wall street for his connection with big ventures. Allowing for the distortion of the libellous woodcut, it bore a marked resemblance to Findlay; even in the printed name there was a similarity—Findlater Rockmogan, Jr.

An idea flashed suddenly into Findlay's mind. "I'm going to interview the cook," he said grimly. "That little song bird keeps his nerve anyway! With his help maybe we can do it, if that cutter's still hanging on."

He caught up the newspaper and climbed into the mezzanine gallery, where the cook's light tenor was still chirping cheerfully.

"You are a big man, a Colossus in snowy white linen, beside whom Findlay's policeman of the dock was a mere atom, confronted him. Findlay gasped. He gasped again when his eyes fell on the enormous axe which the cook flourished in a hand like a smoked ham.

"I thought it was the r-revolution come to storm me," the giant piped, in a voice like a penny whistle. "So you have re-couaire? And now?"

Findlay was a Findlay Unfurled judge of men. He went straight to the point. "You know what this money-making hand is—gun smugglers—filibusters," he asked. "They've got the Captain locked; they wanted to leave the young lady to her fate, too! Now, I don't know whether you know me, but—Just cast your eye on this front page cut." He held up the newspaper with the libellous woodcut of the prominent New York financier.

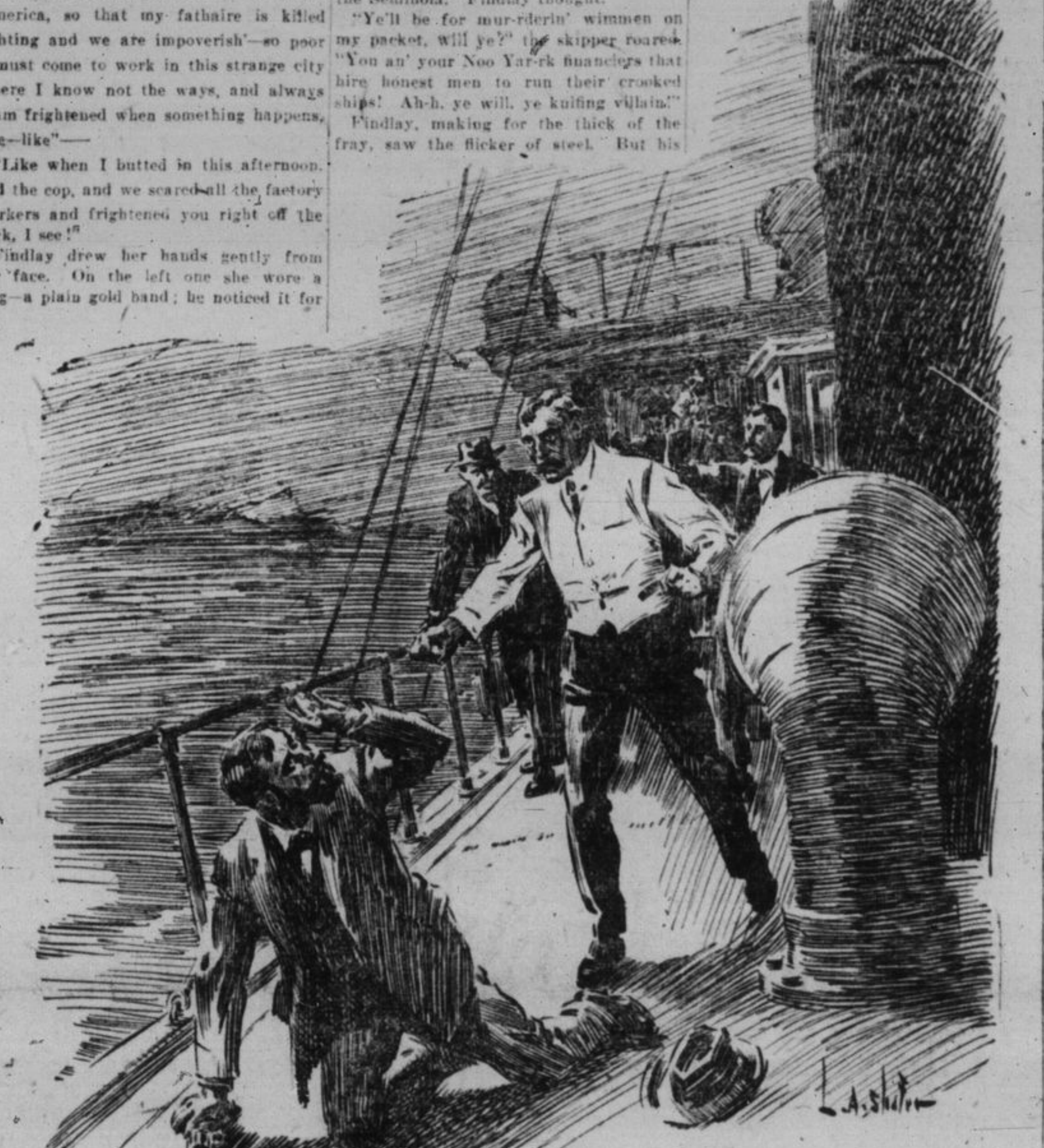
"Mistaire Findlater Rockmogan, Jr. In such distress?" The cook gasped. It wasn't necessary to ask if he believed. Only one doubt seemed to linger in his colossal head, and Findlay anticipated it.

"I know they say I financed just such gun running expeditions as this," said Findlay. "This experience has been a lesson to me. Only don't let those fellows get on. They'll kidnap me in dead earnest, and hold us for ransom. Now, that revenue cutter's still watching us." He pointed out the open port. Under the lee of the distant Jersey shore, in the breaking dawn, flaunted a little fluttering ensign, with the stripes running up and down, the stars and bars of the Revenue Cutter Service, the "sea cop" of the United States merchant marine. "I'm going to signal her. Where do you come in?"

"I," said the cook, proudly. "I, Alphonse Bataille, was once chef of that revenue cutter, the Seminola. At first I hold off, but now—"

"Bully!" Findlay cried. "Now, how'll we go about it?"

"A red flag," suddenly cried the cook. "She would not fire on us unless she was sure. But a pirate flag, taunting from the funnel top—she come like the wind."



"For a Glorious Minute He Was Master of the Deck."

"How did I come down here? Oh, I remember! How did the Cap come out?"

"The Captain? They locked him in the other cabin with a man on guard. He is not hurt—ah, He—swore!"

"I let her do it!" said Findlay heartily. "You, they bring to me," she said.

Findlay still, looking up into her pale face. Then suddenly he thought of something. She drew her hand away when he touched the ring.

"Ah!" she said. "It was maybe silly! Only I thought it would be easier in the factory after it is hard. It is the ring of my mother," she said softly. "I lost her, Señor, when my father died."

Henry of Germany was prostrating himself before the Pope on the windy crags of Capua; perhaps even when Caesar sat his steed, pale face toward Egypt. High in among the snow capped mountains, no less than ten thousand feet above the Pacific, flourished the Chibcha kingdom, a domain whose very cities are said to have enclosed millions of souls. Here, in the land of the Five Sacred Lakes, there had arisen a civilization that rivaled, if not surpassed, the Aztec that Cortez found in Mexico and the Incas that Pizarro found in Peru. Here, at the Sacred Lake of Guatavita, was the mythical El Dorado.

"The funnel top?" said Findlay. "You mean we got to climb up the smokestack?"

"One of them is hollow," explained the cook. "It is only a dummy funnel for ventilation to the hold. There is a ladder inside and a trap door. I will keep the door."

"All right," said Findlay. "I'll tackle the inside job. Now, about that red flag?"

The giant shed his white jacket. From the waist up he was clad in glaring flannel. "All sea chiefs wear such to guard against the damp," he explained. The red shirt was over his head in a jer—Alphonse stripped for action—Hercules swinging his battle axe."

"Follow, Mistaire Rockmogan!" he said. "We will strike terror to the enemy!"

Silently they traversed the deck, deserted save for the man in the pilot house, but Findlay heard voices. Dodging behind the real smokestack, the cook opened a sheetrock trapdoor at the foot of the ventilator funnel.

"Doubleless they will shoot, but I will hold the door," he said. "Flap-hard, Mistaire Rockmogan! If you die do not die alone!"



"The girl was blushing like a rose as Findlay assisted her over the side."