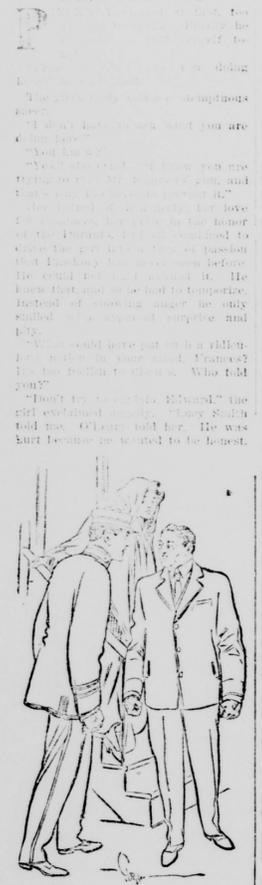


# VIA WIRELESS

NOVELIZED BY THOMPSON BUCHANAN FROM THE SUCCESSFUL PLAY BY WINCHELL SMITH, FREDERIC THOMPSON AND PAUL ARMSTRONG

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At the bottom of the steps the naval officer turned on the manager of the works.

She came to the house to find Mr. Sommers, and I borrowed her dress to come here quickly and warn him.

Pinckney was smiling now with relief. He saw he had a chance if he could only get the girl out of the way.

"And you believe such a story?" he protested in a hoarse tone. "Why, my child, O'Leary was delicious. Smith was drunk and struck him while they were fighting—a plain, ordinary fight between two headstrong workmen."

"What possible reason could I have for wanting to injure this man? To have it a success means as much to your father and to me as it does to Sommers. Think of the reputation of the plant, of these works, that your father has spent his life in building up."

"Why, Sommers is here now looking after the gun himself. If he were to hear such a story it might ruin your father's business. You don't want to ruin your father's business on the word of a delirious workman, sore on his foreman for beating him? Don't you see how wrong you are?"

The girl hesitated. It did seem plausible. O'Leary was hurt. He had been fighting. And then she did not imagine any one could be so contemptible as to fight a rival in the way Pinckney must be doing if he really had planned all that O'Leary charged.

The girl felt that perhaps she had been too fast. She felt just a bit foolish, coming there in Lucy Smith's clothes and possibly exposing herself to ridicule before the men. She hesitated, looking at Pinckney.

From the other end of the furnace room, where he had gone to intercept Sommers, Smith had made out Lucy, as he supposed, talking to Pinckney. The drunken rage of the foreman changed instantly to this new object of attack.

Why should Lucy be talking to Pinckney? What was she doing there? He had warned her time and again to keep away from the works, and especially from Pinckney and the office, because Smith knew Pinckney and the advantage which he had taken of his position more than once to injure girls whose fathers and brothers depended on him for their livelihood.

The general manager was a little czar in the town. Mr. Durant did not come into close personal relation with the men in the plant, and Pinckney could take on and put off, make and ruin men at his will. He had ruined some, and others, Smith knew, had risen from the works through compliance and pretended blindness to the actions of the general manager.

But the independent foreman did not propose to put himself in that class. He loved his family when he was sober, and no matter what he might do himself he was determined that his wife and daughter should go straight. No wonder, then, the sight of his daughter talking to Pinckney in the works before all the men engaged him. With the bar in his hand he lurched down the long room.

"Hey, there!" he shouted when he had come close. "But do you mean talking to this fellow? Haven't I told you I didn't want you hanging around the works and not to talk to him? Now, you get out of here quick!"

Frances turned, and Smith stepped back against the wall.

"Miss Durant!" he exclaimed. "Excuse me, miss. I thought you were Lucy."

"That's all right, Smith," exclaimed Pinckney hastily. "No trouble now, remember." And he turned back to Frances. "Come to the office, Frances. Come away from here. I will explain everything to you fully."

Fuzzled and a bit uncertain as to Pinckney's real attitude, she hesitated a moment before she stepped down the steps and into the manager's office.

Pinckney snatched his shoulders. "There's nothing to explain," he said. "Miss Durant wanted to see me. I was in a hurry, and she borrowed one of my Smith's dresses so as not to excite comment, that's all."

His tone was cool, collected, with just a touch of surprise in it that any explanation would be needed.

"I beg your pardon for my hasty speech?"

The general manager turned to Frances. "Come, let's go, Frances."

The girl had been looking at Sommers and he at her. Both knew that something more was needed. Something more must be said before the perfect understanding between them could be restored.

Finally, with a half sigh, she turned and started to walk away. Sommers stopped her at the door. "If you don't explain about it once you've attempted to put Miss Durant in an awkward position by locking that door I'll break your back. How dare you lock that door? You— with your reputation about these works!"

"The door wasn't locked," retorted Pinckney aloud.

Frances heard. She stopped short, her face flushed with shame. Was it possible that Sommers thought there was anything wrong in her being there? The anger at herself for coming and at him for letting himself provoke a scene swept her to action. She turned and stepped back quickly to the two men.

"Don't say a word, Mr. Pinckney," she ordered sharply. "I forbid you to speak. Lieutenant Sommers can think for a moment what his manner seems to imply. I refuse to give him any explanation. I must also refuse to even see him in the future."

Sommers looked at her aghast. "Miss Durant, you don't understand," he exclaimed.

The girl looked him coldly up and down. "I do understand, Mr. Sommers. Good day." And, turning, she walked quickly away.

Sommers looked after her for a moment, then, seeing with hopeless back to the furnace. As he did so for the first time he noticed his gun being transferred to the tempering bath.

"Here! What's this?" he shouted. But before he could say more Smith had stepped in front of him.

The foreman was wild with drunken glee now. He had won, he felt, and there was nothing to do but hold Sommers off a minute longer.

"What do you think of it now?" he shouted. "Your girl was locked up with him, wasn't she? Lots of chance you stand against the general manager when she'll lock herself in the office with him!"

As the last jeering word came to Sommers' ears, he staggered, then came back with the iron bar raised. In an instant he had brought it crashing down upon the lieutenant's head. Then, as the naval officer fell, in rage Smith bent over and seized him.

"What are you doing?" shouted Pinckney.

But Smith, insane from rage and the sight of blood, was beyond naming.

He lifted the half-dazed sailor and staggered with him toward an open furnace.

Naval men are used to hard knocks. Sommers came to. He had dodged partly, and the bar caught him only a glancing blow. Now he realized his danger and with a desperate effort tore himself loose.

Smith had dropped the bar. It was an even thing now. Wildly the foreman rushed, but a straight left stepped him, and then a fierce right uppercut, delivered close, brought him to his knees.

He arose only to meet another swing that dropped him senseless, and as he fell his head struck the ground just under the big trip hammer.

The hammer was coming down when Sommers with a quick jerk dragged his man out just in time. Then as he stood above his senseless antagonist he heard the voice of Pinckney joyously triumphant:

"All right! The Sommers gun is in the bath!"

The dirty trick had been safely turned.

CHAPTER XI.  
FRANCES GOES TO SEA.

THREE months had passed following the casting of the Sommers gun, three months that had brought many changes to those whose lives had been for a short time tangled in the intricate maze of pride, love and ambition.

The gun had been taken to the proving grounds and there had stood the test. The naval board was astounded over it. All that remained was for the weapon to prove its efficiency on shipboard at target practice and it was adopted by the government.

Orders on the Rhinestrom gun were still held up pending the result of target practice.

Lieutenant Sommers had been ordered back to sea duty. Apparently he had achieved his ambition. The

future looked bright for him in his chosen profession. Followed officers envied him. He was considered a wonderful young man, and his rise in the service of his country seemed in store.

All this on the side of ambition, but on the other side life was not so bright. He knew that no matter how high he might rise in his profession, happiness could not be his. He had loved truly, and the girl he loved, and satisfied ambition meant little to him compared to that.

On the morning after the sensational events in the furnace room Sommers had called at the Durant house. Frances had refused to see him. He wrote her a letter, and it was returned to him unopened. Finally he managed to meet her on the street, but she passed him by without speaking.

Next morning the young officer reported back in Washington for duty.

And I do not know if he had hurried away from the works that night tarred with shame and razing with anger. She determined never to see Sommers again. She hated him! She knew she did! And to make it sure she told herself so over and over again.

The next day she was still enraged when he called. It cost her effort to have him turned from the door. When his note arrived she started impulsively to open it, then checked herself. She would be firm; she would punish him.

And with some slight effort she handed the letter to the servant with instructions to return it to Lieutenant Sommers at his hotel.

Passing her old lover on the street had been an effort, but that, too, she managed to do. It took the last of her anger, however. The reaction had come. She began to regret, then to forgive and finally to long once more for the one man who, she felt sure, could make her happy.

A little discreet questioning had brought out the cause of his anger. She found out the real reputation of Pinckney among the work people. The discovery shocked her.

She understood then why Sommers had been so enraged. She saw it was not against her or brought about by any doubt of her, but merely fierce, uncontrollable rage against Pinckney that he had directed against her. She put her in a position that his character at once made questionable.

When she had finally come to a real understanding of the girl longed to write, but Sommers by that time was away on sea duty, and she could not reach him. Against her own judgment she had merely begged for and got the word from him. But the naval officer's pride was too great to pursue a further intrusion after so signal a rebuff.

Then the girl began to grow pale and to worry. Her parents noticed the change without realizing the cause. No longer had any suspicion of the real relation between Frances and the young naval officer. That "good night" on the vine covered porch was a secret—a tender memory locked in her heart and in his, to be brought out by each, regarded fondly and mourned over when alone.

Sommers had his work, but Frances had nothing to distract her mind. No wonder she grew pale and seemed to lose interest in everything! Mr. and Mrs. Durant became alarmed. They consulted doctors, but there was nothing wrong physically with their daughter. Finally one big expert proposed that she be put in a sanatorium. The Frances showed some sign of interest. Mr. Durant paid a double size bill cheerfully, thinking that doctor a wonderful man.

The Durant yacht, the *Ivessa*, was got ready as quickly as possible. Mr. Durant could not go himself, and he decided it would be a good plan to send his wife and daughter away for a cruise in charge of Pinckney.

Now for a month they cruised, but Frances showed little sign of interest.

Pinckney was the only one who seemed to get real enjoyment out of the trip. He felt that victory must be in the end be his.

He was not deceived by the result of the first test of the Sommers gun. It had stood the first test safely, but in his heart the conspirator knew that the badly tempered gun must fall, perhaps with shocking results.

That mattered little to him. The worse the accident the greater the disgrace of Sommers and the surer the result in his favor. The government must then accept the Rhinestrom gun and probably would give a bigger order than ever.

He had no fear of an investigation. That had been well attended to. Smith, under another name, was working far away. There was no one else who knew anything except Marsh, and that could be depended on to keep quiet.

The ultimate success of all that he had planned now seemed to the general manager certain. He gave himself up to the enjoyments of the cruise, dreaming now and then of the time when he and Frances as man and wife should go on long trips together.

The first sign of real interest the girl showed after starting was when the yacht cast anchor in the broad harbor of Ponce, Porto Rico. She was quite by accident that the cruiser *Roonoke* was expected there in a few days.

Then, to the intense astonishment of Mrs. Durant and Pinckney, Frances once more asserted herself. She declared that she would not go to Ponce. Even the dirty plaza, two miles away from the main city, interested her. She insisted on staying over, because, she declared, she was determined to see the town and the people and even ride over the famous military road constructed by the Spaniards at a terrible cost of labor and life from Ponce through the mountains to San Juan.

Nothing that her mother or Pinckney could do would move her. She was interested, excited, eager all the time, and each day, without the knowledge of the others, she managed to slip over to the government house to find out when the cruiser *Roonoke* was expected.

It was a very pretty game of hide and go seek that the girl and Pinckney played without realizing it. Pinckney also every day had inquired about the coming of the *Roonoke*. He knew

that Sommers was attached to the cruiser, and he was determined that the naval officer and Frances should not be by any chance met.

His orders were quietly given, and the captain of the *Ivessa* was ready the moment the *Roonoke* should appear in the harbor to get up steam preparatory to leaving.

Then, with these plans all laid, Pinckney began his own plans for departure. First he approached Mrs. Durant and found her only too glad to go. At his suggestion she spoke to Frances, only to meet a flat refusal.

"I don't want to go yet, mother," protested the girl. "I'm having a splendid time here in my own way, and I can't see any reason for leaving. I'd like to ride up to Coamo and try the Spanish baths and then go on through to San Juan. It's an easy ride, and I can meet the ship there."

"Suppose you and Edward go around by ship and let me come through the other way. I think that would be a splendid plan."

Mrs. Durant looked at her daughter, startled.

"Frances, I think you must be out of your head!" she exclaimed. "How could you come through alone? Probably you are planning to have Lieutenant Sommers take charge of you?"

Frances' expression showed only amusement, but her heart was beating hard.

"Lieutenant Sommers?" she asked, with well simulated surprise.

Mrs. Durant made an impatient gesture.

"Now, don't pretend, Frances, that you are ignorant of the fact that the *Roonoke* is expected here in the harbor, and he is on board."

"Is he?" said Frances, still seeming surprised. "Why, how nice that would be!"

"Nonsense!" snapped her mother. "Frances, I don't care for that young naval officer, and I don't see why you can't get him out of your head."

The girl's face flushed hotly.

"He isn't in my head!" she exclaimed.

Her mother was not to be put off so easily.

"Humph! Maybe he isn't in your head, but sometimes I've feared he's in your heart, which is worse. Now, Frances, don't be foolish. You know Edward cares for you, and you know that your father and I would like to see you both married."

The girl shook her head decisively, and her tone was very firm when she answered.

"I'm very sorry, mother, to disappoint you and dad, but I must tell you once and for all I wouldn't marry Edward. I think if he were the only man on earth."

The mother looked at her daughter, amazed.

"Frances Durant, I'm ashamed of you!" she cried. "Here you've had me enduring that horrid yacht for a month and merely because I thought it would help to bring this match about, and now you tell me you'll never marry him! I've never been so treated in my life!"

Frances could not help laughing. She slipped her arm about her mother's neck affectionately.

"Mrs. Durant, my mother, dear, but I don't see how I can help you. You wouldn't have me marry a man I don't love, would you?"

"No," agreed her mother uncertainly. "I don't want to force you."

"Then I expect it's settled," decided the girl, with a long breath of satisfaction. "We won't say any more about it."

Mrs. Durant knew Frances well enough not to try to argue the matter. She still had some hope, for she had dwelt on the prospect so long that she could not give it up entirely. One chance of escape had failed to work. She would try another.

"Well, then, for goodness sake, Frances, let's go home," she said eagerly. "I want to get settled in my own room and feel the floor stay still."

The girl sighed.

"Of course, if you wish, we'll go home whenever you wish," she agreed.

Down in the courtyard of the old fashioned Spanish hotel Pinckney was talking to the captain of the *Ivessa* anxiously.

"You say the *Roonoke* is in?" he asked.

The captain nodded.

"Yes, sir. She cast anchor in the harbor an hour ago," he declared.

"Then get up steam at once, captain," ordered Pinckney. "We will leave tonight."

The officer from the yacht hesitated.

"Of course, if you say so, sir," he agreed, "but I would strongly suggest waiting over a bit. There is a bad storm brewing, and storms in this latitude are apt to be awkward. Don't you think you'd better lay over until the weather clears up?"

Pinckney whirled on him angrily.

"I'm giving the orders," he snapped.

Still the seaman could not quite agree. He knew his business, and he felt a grave responsibility at the thought of taking the wife and daughter of the owner into danger.

"Certainly, sir. I'm under your orders," he said, "but we have the ladies on board, and they might not like a storm."

"Nonsense!" snapped Pinckney. "You're too cautious. We leave tonight and dine on board. Get up steam at once!"

The captain saluted.

"Certainly, sir," he said. "The responsibility is up to you."

Mrs. Durant and Frances came down into the courtyard a few minutes later. Just as Pinckney was reading a cable that a messenger boy had handed to him.

"Bad news?" asked Mrs. Durant anxiously.

"Pinckney looked up.

"Only that I must return at once," he said.

"What's wrong?" asked the other two together.

The man smiled at their alarm.

"Nothing very wrong," he said. "In fact, this cable brings good news. The government has notified us to go ahead on the Rhinestrom gun order."

"Then the Sommers gun, of which you were afraid?" suggested Mrs. Durant.

"Pinckney looked at her in his most superior manner.

"We were never afraid of the Sommers gun," he said. "It was only because the Sommers gun, of which you were afraid?" suggested Mrs. Durant.

"There was no reason to be afraid of that," she declared, as laughingly as though her own father's honor had been impugned. "Lieutenant Sommers would scarcely do anything dishonorable."

The man shrugged his shoulders. He could not, even though it were policy, suppress his hatred of Sommers.

"I'm glad you think so," he sneered. "I don't think I know," retorted the girl laughingly.

Pinckney smiled with triumph.

"Well, it makes no difference now, anyway," he said. "We get the order for the Rhinestrom gun because the Sommers gun has proved a failure."

Frances' face grew suddenly white as she turned away quickly. The Sommers gun a failure! What a blow it must be to him! Probably he didn't know it yet. How she would like to comfort him, and she could not! He would not listen to her. If she only could see him now! She was still so engrossed with her own thoughts that she scarcely heard Pinckney's question.

"Can you love tonight?"

"I can, too, easily," agreed Mrs. Durant. "What do you say, Frances?"

The girl turned wearily. After all, what difference did it make? She would not get a chance to see Sommers. His ship might not arrive for a week more. And, if she did see him, what could she say? It was all no use. She might as well agree to what they wanted. Why struggle longer? So she nodded indifferently.

"All right, I'll go whenever you wish."

Pinckney smiled his triumph, and Mrs. Durant beamed.

"I'm sorry right upstairs and pack," she said. "We can leave in an hour."

When Pinckney and her mother had gone Frances sat down at a table by herself to think. She was so lonely, and everything was so hopeless! There was no chance of seeing Sommers, no chance of their ever coming together again.

And she loved him. She knew that now. The clutch at her heart when she heard of his misfortune made it very clear to her. It was no use to try to deceive herself any longer. She loved him. She wanted him, for he was the one man in all the world who could make her happy. Now she was miserable, and he was a failure.

"Pardon me, Miss Durant."

At the cool, penetrating voice Frances looked up. A big man with a shrewd face and clear, cold gray eyes that had the particular faculty of compelling and riveting attention stood beside the table with his hat in his hand.

"Can you tell me where I can find Mr. Pinckney?" he asked.

"The man was so obviously not merely seeking to scrape an acquaintance that the girl had no hesitancy in replying.

"In the hotel, I think," she said coolly.

"You intend sailing almost immediately, do you not?" persisted the man.

"The girl was surprised, but the questioner's manner was thoroughly respectful and yet seemed to demand a reply.

"I believe so—yes," she said and half turned away.

The questioner bowed.

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