

The Shadow Jumper

by *Herman Howard Matteson*

ROSIE GRAHAM hadn't had a real home for years—not since her mother died; nor had Billy Latimor had a home worth the title since he was fifteen years old. Rosie now was twenty, Billy twenty-six. Billy, who had been working on fish traps and deep sea diving outfits up and down the southeastern Alaska coast for ten years, had not especially yearned for a permanent abiding place until he got acquainted with Rosie. Then, all of a sudden, he wanted a home very badly, with Rosie in it; and he told her so.

Now Rosie was not in the least averse to pouring Billy's coffee for him, mending his socks, and bossing him when he required bossing; and she said so, without coquetry or circumlocution.

"Well, then, Rosie," said Billy, grinning down upon her fondly, "let's I and you shake out our rags, wing into Wrangel, and sign up the articles."

Two spots of red began to burn upon Rosie's cheeks. Her eyes grew bright.

"No, Billy—not now. It hain't that I don't love you half to death, because I do. You see, fact is, me knocking around so, working a season in a cannery here, lacquering tin cans another season there—well, truth is I hain't got clothes fitten to be married in. Besides, I hain't got no hope chest. You ain't a woman, Billy, or you'd understand. A girl thinks a whole lot of nice things, pillow slips, tablecloths with initials rove onto 'em, and so forth. Honest, Billy, not demeaning you a mite,

clothes, fine gear for the house, is 'most as important to a girl as the man she aims to marry."

Billy Latimor's hand reached into a cavernous pocket of his tarpaulin trousers, and drew forth a dirty tobacco sack that bulged and chinked.

"No, no, Billy!" protested Rosie, shoving away the tobacco sack. "Put away your money. I know you got a heart big as a fish trap spiller; but I can't take the money. Maybe it's fool pride, Billy, but I just can't marry till I've saved up my very own money and boughten tablecloths with initials onto 'em, and six pair of silk stockings, and—and other things. I just can't!"

That, for the time, ended it. Billy saw Rosie's point of view. He had the sensibility to know that a hurt pride is the most mortal of hurts, so he urged her no further.

One evening Billy came to the chuck shack where Rosie was cooking for a small logging outfit, and called her to the door.

"You're so plumb set on earning your own wedding outfit money," said Billy, grinning at her and pawing about in the darkness to find her hand, "I suppose the better wages you can grab, the better, and the quicker. Well, Tel Gifford—him that's boss of the salmon trap driving outfit—he wants me to go diving for him, twenty a day, two hours on, two hours off. He's got a cook, Tel has, but he wants a cookee. Hundred a month clear, cookee pays. That's more than you get here. The outfit pulls out to-night, Rosie.

We'll be driving up and down the coast, Sitka to Ketchikan, maybe four months. Why not, Rosie, for you to take the job? Then I and you can see each other every day, quarrel and make up, and get acquainted good. End of the season, you'll have your four hundred dollars—you said you allowed it would take four hundred to buy the gear you want—and I'll have all my wages, and we can warp into Wrangel together and pull off this wedding stylish as can be. What say, Rosie?"

It was a go. Rosie resigned from the logging outfit, packed her turkey—a fisherman's dunnage bag—and moved aboard the chow ark, as the kitchen scow of a trap concern is called.

With the turn of the tide, the outfit moved, an important, puffing tug towing the pile driver, the scow house, the chow ark, and the scow from which the divers worked.

II

ROSIE and Billy had agreed to keep their engagement secret. Lovers aren't lovers at all unless they have secrets, "the foolisher the fonder," as Billy said. So nothing was said of the relationship between them.

Which was a mistake. Zeno Lachise, the cook of the trap outfit, Rosie's immediate boss—a fat little man with black shoe button eyes, a fellow of prodigious self-conceit—immediately conceived a liking for the plump and wholesome cookee, and decided to permit her to bask in the smiles of his regard.

"Rosee!" whispered Zeno, sidling up to her, bestowing a waxy smirk. "I kees your hand!"

"Oh, don't you do it, Zeno," Rosie replied saucily. "I just had this hand in a barrel of salt salmon bellies,

getting some out for breakfast. Don't!"

Rarely do profound egotism and a sense of humor dwell together. Zeno Lachise found no rebuke in Rosie's crude rejoinder. The cook continued to make his advances, none of them too subtle or delicate. At first the girl rebuffed him with good-natured laughter, then with a slap of a firm, purposeful hand that landed the Lothario up against a red-hot galley stove.

That staggering slap Mr. Lachise understood. It exploded his conceit as a flung pebble bursts the fish bladders that little Indian boys fasten to their seal spears. His shoe button eyes fastened themselves upon Rosie with an ophidian glitter. Then he made the only sort of reply of which he was capable—a burst of profanity and vulgarity.

From that time on, the cook watched Rosie's every move. When any of the crew offered her chaff or badinage, Zeno was behind a door, around the corner of the scow house, listening. His insane jealousy drove him into a murderous mood. Even a cook may be dangerous when his coxcomb self-sufficiency has been ravaged.

Zeno's searching vision of jealousy very soon discovered what no other man of the crew had remarked—that there was something between the pretty little cookee and Billy Latimor.

Rosie had told Billy nothing of the attempted gallantries of the cook. Not that Billy would have been jealous, but she was ashamed to tell him. Somehow she felt degraded, sullied, and she didn't want to tell any one, Billy least of all.

Zeno began to watch Latimor. When Billy and Rosie sat upon the end of the scow in the evening, the cook would creep along the deck, his ear eager for the words that the lovers were whispering.

Sundays, when they would go ashore, Zeno followed, prowling over the rocks and stumps like a fat tomcat, seeking a hidden place where he could look and listen.

Of this sneaking espionage Rosie shortly became aware; also of the threatening fact that the cook had taken to wearing, beneath his work apron, a deadly, broad-bladed French knife.

“Oh, I know you’re packing a knife,” said Rosie, pointing to the bulge of the knife handle. “You’d better shuck it. If you don’t, I go straight to Tel Gifford.”

Lachise shucked the knife, but he did not shuck his hate, or the determination to destroy Billy Latimor that festered within his fleshly entity like an eating cancer.

The weeks passed without untoward event. Unpleasant weeks for Rosie they were, for the cook found ways to insult and persecute the defenseless girl. She didn’t dare tell Billy. She didn’t care to cause a scene, or to be the occasion of a possible tragedy. So she bore all the persecution and said nothing, though she watched the little cook’s every move.

Toward the latter part of the season one of the four divers of the crew, Billy Latimor’s shift mate, received a terrible slash from the tusk of a sea lion that had got tangled into the sunken webbing. The poor fellow was taken to Wrangel on the tug, and Billy continued to work below water alone, fastening the wire netting to the pilings of the lead of the trap.

Presently the divers would be at work on the spiller of the trap—an immense sack of cotton webbing held bottom downward in the trap by means of ropes called down-hauls. The water was

deep where the spiller stood, and the tides were running strongly.

Rosie would be thankful when this dangerous business was done, thankful when the season was over and she and Billy could get away. More than once she had rebuked herself for the foolish longing for clothes and fine fixings that had brought this situation to pass. If she had done as Billy had wished, why, Zeno Lachise would never have seen her.

Too late now for regrets! It would soon be over. She would have her four hundred dollars, and she and Billy—but what if, at the very last, something should happen to Billy?

Every moment Rosie endeavored to keep track of both Lachise and Latimor. When she knew Billy was down in the diving rig, she seized every opportunity to steal a look, through the door or window, at the diving scow, to make certain that Herve Holliday, the watch, was attending to the air and looking after the signal cord. If Lachise left the chow ark, on some pretext Rosie would contrive to follow and to learn what he was up to.

Having followed Billy and Rosie ashore one Sunday, while maneuvering to find a place from which he could watch the lovers, the cook ran into a patch of ripe salal berries. Lachise, really a good cook, and something of a gourmet himself, though he swore he never ate anything, conceived the idea of putting up a quantity of salal berry jam. On Monday morning, when the breakfast dishes were done and the spuds peeled for the midday meal, he ordered Rosie to go ashore and pick a couple of buckets of the berries.

She could think of no possible excuse for refusing, so she took the two

shiny tin pails and was upon the point of stepping into the dory when a second craft came rowing out from shore. Rosie paused a moment to learn the identity of the visitor, for callers were few on that remote shore.

As the battered rowboat approached the chow ark, she noted that the man at the oars was a gaunt, awkward fellow, hollow-eyed, a man who had the appearance of having been ill. Landing upon the scow, he glanced over his shoulder furtively, his lips twitching nervously.

"Say," called the stranger through the door to Zeno, "can a pile driver man out of a job grab a take of muckamuck?"

Lachise came to the door, a malevolent scowl upon his fat face. For a full moment he regarded the stranger. Then the scowl relaxed, and the shoe button eyes suddenly gleamed.

"Why, you're Jess Jenner!" exclaimed Lachise. "You work on the same outfit with me up the Kuskokwim, didn't you?"

The fellow gave a start and folded nervous hands across his breast.

"Yes—I worked the Kuskokwim, I remember you. You was cook."

"Come in," invited Zeno. "Sure you can have a take of muckamuck."

Rosie could hear Lachise dishing out the stranger some mush left from the morning meal, and pouring him some coffee. Just a moment longer she dared to linger, her body bent in an attitude of listening.

"Out of a job just now, Jenner?" inquired the cook.

"Yes," answered the stranger.

"Say!" said Zeno Lachise, lowering his voice to a tone of confidence. "How did you happen lose your last job? Same old thing—shadow

jumping?"

Jenner took a great gurgling gulp of coffee before he replied.

"Yes," he said resignedly; "same old thing—shadow jumping. I just naturally can't help it. Something wrong here, in my head, that I can't help."

"Did you—anybody get hurt this last whirl, Jenner?"

"Why, yes—I near killed Dave Tull. Now you know I didn't have a thing in the world ag'in' Dave Tull. Near killed him!"

"Well, it's too bad," consoled the philosophical Lachise. "I guess you can't help it. Kind of tough on the—the other fellow, though, Jenner!"

The cook emitted his mirthless, cackling laugh.

Rosie could hear Jenner thrusting his bowl across the table to the cook, to be replenished.

"I was figuring on striking this outfit for a job," said Jenner. "I didn't suppose—I wasn't looking to find any one here that knowed me. As you're here, I might as well wing out and go on."

"Jenner," answered the cook, his voice smooth and oily, "I hain't going to say a word. There's a job open on this outfit right now, too. I won't say a word except that I know you and that you're a first-class man—that's all I'll say."

"Zeno, that's white of you—white. Thanks!"

Rosie heard the visitor scrape his chair back from the table and ask Zeno where the boss was to be found. Both men were crossing the floor toward the door of the chow ark. She leaped lightly into the dory, thrust it away, and rowed swiftly toward the shore.

Glancing back over her shoulder, she saw the cook pointing to the driver, where Tel Gifford, the boss, might be

found. She saw Zeno beckon to Herve Holliday, the watch on the diving scow, to shove his dory across the narrow space of water for the use of Jess Jenner.

Rosie landed, scrambled up the bank, and began picking the salal berries. Over and again, with a strange feeling of discomfiture and apprehension, she reviewed the conversation between Lachise and Jess Jenner. Shadow jumping! What was a shadow jumper?

III

SHORTLY before noon Rosie returned to the chow ark, her two buckets filled with the plump, sticky salal berries. At once she busied herself setting the long table and helping in the task of serving the midday meal.

Billy Latimor came in with a number of men from the driver. Billy ate his meal, walked out upon the deck, and paused to study the bulletin board, where Tel Gifford, the boss, always kept posted the names of the men of the various crews, the tasks assigned, and the hours of the shifts. Billy was to dive from one to three, again from five to seven. That last shift would be a dangerous one, for the tide would be at the full of the flood.

Seizing the very first chance that she had had, Rosie walked out upon the deck. She wanted to ask Billy what a shadow jumper was. She hesitated to ask any of the other men.

But she was too late. Billy had crossed to the diving scow and was already climbing into the heavy rubber rig with the lead soles and the bulging, glass-eyed metal helmet.

Rosie turned to the bulletin board. Billy was posted to dive with Thomas, who was then rowing toward the diving scow. The shift following Billy's, Smiley was to dive with Jess Jenner. The shadow jumper, then, was a diver, and had been

assigned to work by Tel Gifford.

Feeling unaccountably thankful that Jenner was working with Smiley, not with Billy Latimor, Rosie began washing up the dishes. Upon the stove bubbled a great caldron of salal berry jam. In a dish upon the table was a quantity of the berries, and crust rolled out for pies.

"Rosee," said Lachise, "you might as well keep on picking berries this afternoon. Better pick three pails. If it makes you late, never mind—I'll handle supper alone." Lachise pointed to the three buckets. "I'll row you ashore," he said. "I want to have the dory here at the scow. If I get time, I'll come and pick a bucket of berries myself. When you get your pails full, if I haven't come ashore, call, and I'll put in and get you."

The cook wadded up his apron and tucked it in at the belt. He rowed Rosie ashore, deposited her on the beach with the three buckets, and rowed back.

The girl sat about filling the pails with berries, but found her fingers strangely awkward. She dropped almost as many upon the earth as found their way into the buckets. Constantly she glanced back at the chow ark and the diving scow, and bent her head to listen.

The sun was dipping westward, and she had filled only one of the three pails. She thought of giving up the task and calling to Zeno to come and get her. She could plead a headache as an explanation; but she hated to fall down on a job, to supply any excuse for the fat cook's profane abuse.

She heard a crunching noise upon the beach, and stooped to peer beneath the overhang of the fir branches. Dan McCush, the engineer of the driver, was walking slowly along the beach, looking for something.

She scrambled down the slope

and approached the gray-haired engineer.

"Hello, Rosie! I'm looking for a straight piece of cedar. Got a leak in the water tank, and I want to whittle some plugs. Here—here's what I need."

McCush picked up a bit of driftwood and started back toward the dory in which, he had landed.

"Dan," said Rosie, averting her gaze, "what is—I want to ask—did you ever hear of a shadow jumper? If it's something you'd rather not—not tell a girl, why, never mind."

"Why, it's all right to tell, Rosie. Hain't you ever heard of a shadow jumper? Well, a shadow jumper is a crazy man—not crazy like you usually think of folks, but only crazy below water. A shadow jumper is a diver that if a fish swims over him when he's at work, or a drift log floats over him, or a boat, or anything, why, that shadow jumper goes plumb lunatic. He'll fight that fish, or that log, with anything he's got handy. Dangerousest thing, Rosie, is a shadow jumper, when he goes wild, will tackle his shift mate with a crowbar, or an ax, or anything. Lucky there ain't many shadow jumpers; but there are some. Why you ask, Rosie?"

Rosie merely shook her head stupidly and turned back down the beach.

Before she came out of her daze, Dan McCush had rowed out to the driver and was pounding away noisily, driving plugs into the big iron water tank.

She stood staring blankly in the direction of the diving scow. Even as she looked, Zeno Lachise appeared in the door of the chow ark and called something to Herve Holliday, who was standing by the air pump of the diving rig, minding the signal cords. Rosie saw Holliday give the air pump handle a few vigorous motions, jump into the dory,

and push the craft across the space of water to the chow ark.

Infamous! Infamous! Holliday, on diving watch, was deserting his post—the reddest crime in the trap man's calendar!

Holliday, Rosie knew, was the camp glutton. Lachise had called him over for some hot salal berry pie, and he had succumbed to the temptation.

Holliday had no more than entered the chow ark when she saw Lachise cast off the painter of Holliday's dory and give the craft a shove out across the water where the divers were at work.

Flinging her arms, screaming hysterically, Rosie called for Lachise to come and get her. No answer! The thunder of Dan McCush's hammer upon the iron tank drowned her cries.

Rosie turned and ran down the beach with all her speed. She ran straight to where the line of the pilings of the trap came almost to the shore. She waded into the water, dug her toes into the mesh of the webbing, and climbed to the top of the piles. Leaping from one pile to another, she made her way toward the body of the trap, toward the spiller where the divers were at work.

The first fifty yards she made without difficulty. Then she came to where the pilings felt the force of the rising tide, which swayed them like reeds in a wind.

Constantly she shouted for Holliday and Dan McCush. Frantically she screamed the name of her lover:

"Billy! Billy!"

Teetering, balancing on the tops of the wet and swaying timbers, she went steadily on. Finally Holliday heard her, and came rushing from the door. His dory was gone. So was the second dory that had been made fast to the chow ark, for Lachise had sent it adrift.

Weaving to and fro upon the tops of the timbers, now running recklessly, now pausing to catch her balance, Rosie came at length to the decked over heart of the trap. She rushed along the planking and stopped above where the air hose descended to the divers below. The two lines of hose, the two signal cords inextricably tangled, hauling this way and that through the water, told the story of the battle that was waging in the depths below.

With a despairing cry, Rosie plunged from the edge of the trap and swam swiftly to the diver scow. With all her strength she began winding in upon the winch that would hoist one of the divers to the surface—which one, the man attacked or the maniac shadow jumper, she could not know.

Holliday, who had likewise leaped into the water, now clambered upon the diving scow and began helping Rosie to wind the winch. At last, in a tangle of air piping and signal cords, two monstrous, bloated rubber images of men appeared just below the surface. Both divers, wrapped in a close and deadly embrace, were coming to the top together.

Locking the winch with the iron ratchet, Rosie and Holliday dragged the divers to the deck of the scow. The glass bull's-eye of one diving helmet had been struck in by a blow of a hammer. In the rubber hand of his suit, Jenner, the shadow jumper, still grasped the hammer, still was striking feebly at his fellow.

"Quick—this one!" cried Rosie. "We've got to get him out of this suit. It's full of water!"

Rosie snatched the wrench from Holliday's hand, unscrewed the shattered helmet, and lifted it from place. A face deathly pale looked up at her—as the head

rolled weakly—the face of Billy Latimor.

Whimpering, calling his name, Rosie drew the inert body from the rubber suit, jackknifed it across her knee, and emptied the water from the man's lungs. Then she laid Billy upon his back, placed her lips to his, and filled his lungs with her own warm breath.

Finally he breathed, opened his eyes, looked up at her, and smiled.

IV

DAN McCUSH was coming over from the driver in a dory. The tugboat also came faring in with, a tow of pilings, which, in response to Rosie's frantic call, it cut adrift.

Before the tug could come alongside, Zeno Lachise had cut the chow ark adrift from its anchor cables. It went whirling away upon the tide. As it neared the shore, carried thither on a back eddy, the cook sprang over the side, swam ashore, and disappeared into the brush.

Lifting his voice, Tel Gifford shouted to all hands—the men on the driver, those in the bunk scow, everybody—to get ashore and hunt down the fugitive.

"Fetch in his meat!" roared Gifford. "That's all I want—his carcass!"

Toward evening Herve Holliday returned to the chow ark, which Gifford had picked up and returned to its moorings. Holliday had a vicious knife slash across one cheek and a thrust through his left shoulder.

"I tried to square myself, boss," said Holliday weakly. "Anyway, maybe I done a little toward it. I got him, final, after this!" Holliday pointed to his wounds. "He fought like a cornered beach rat. I didn't fetch in his meat like you said, boss. It wasn't hardly worth it."

From beneath his torn coat Holliday removed a long-bladed

fisherman's sliming knife, and tossed it upon the deck, where it lay dripping.

Rosie Graham, fetching a clean bit of cloth with which to bind up Holliday's wounds, passed the bulletin board. She paused for a moment.

"Look here a minute, boss," she said to Gifford.

Two of the divers' cards had been transposed in a manner which resulted in the order to Jess Jenner, the shadow jumper, to dive the five to seven o'clock shift with Billy Latimor. The edges of the cards so changed were daubed with little stains of salal berry jam.

Rosie thrust her head in at the door of the bunk house, and then walked inside. Billy Latimor, still looking a little pale, sat by the window.

"Billy," said Rosie, turning her face to gaze embarrassedly through the window, "you feel good enough to take a little trip?"

"Yeah—why?"

"Tel Gifford is going into Wrangel on the tug, to send Jenner to the

government hospital at Townsend. He said I and you might go along. He's give me two days' holiday, and you, too. I'm to be cook then—hundred and seventy-five a month. You want to go into Wrangel with us?"

"Yeah—I don't mind; but what we going for?"

"Billy Latimor, you going to make me ask you outright to come on into Wrangel and get married to me?"

Billy, grinning broadly, arose with alacrity, and began threading his best red necktie through the slit in the blue poker chip that he wore as a scarfpin.

"But you hain't got no hope chest as yet, Rosie!"

"I'll get that later. When I do, to make up, I aim to spend six hundred dollars instead of four, or maybe seven hundred."

The tug shoved in beside the bunk house scow, Billy and Rosie climbed aboard, and away they went for Wrangel.