# Stairs of Sand

## By Anna M. Regan

(Continued from Last Week) CHAPTER 7

Carol Dempsey alighted from a taxicab at the head of the lane as Hedda and Neil Cramer reached Cherry Lane Farm, home, she turned a worried face toward them and hurried over to their car.

"Mr. Cramer," she said, "you're just the one I wanted to see. I have been nearly out of my head since I left you yesterday. That telephone call was from Nat asking me to meet him at the Globe Hotel."

"Was he—all right?" Hedda asked, fearfully.

"No, he wasn't. I knew at once that he had been drinking and thought if I could only get hold of him I might be able to get him over it again. You see I was anxious to undo what I might have done to him along that line. Nat is a darling youngster but he can not

"We know that. Go on, Carol, did you find him?" "No. He wasm't at the Globe and of course they didn't know where he was."

"I just heard yesterday," said Cramer, "that he made a haul on the stock market."

"Yes, and I'm afraid that this will be the death knell to our hopes for him," said Hedda.

"Mr. Cramer," asked Carol, "will you hurry back to the city and see if you can't find him? It's too bad to have him loose around there with a pocket full of money."

Yes," said Cramer, "I'm going right back and I think I can get on his trail in a short time." "If you don't maind," said Carol, "I think I'll go back

with you. I'm nearly a nervous wreck now." Carol and Cramer drove away down the Lane and on to the city. Sara did not appear to Cramer's regret. Later he drove on to Philo Leavitt's after leaving Carol at her home. lle promised to let her know the first news he had of Nat\_

"Haven't heard a word of the young cub," Philo told Neil. "We can't do a thing. He'll turn up all right when he gets over it.

"I'll call the Globe at once. They know him there as that's where he always stays when he's in town.'

Neil found out from the Globe manager that Nat and two other young men spent the late hours there, but left early in the morning. A couple of suit cases bearing Nat's name were still in his room.
"Nat must intend to come back to the Globe, Mr.

Leavitt, so I'll spend most of my time today in and out of there. I feel pretty sure I'll get in touch with him in a few hours. I'll leave a note there for him in case I do miss him, asking him to get in touch with home at once."

That's all we can do as far as I see. I'll telephone to Sara that he was at the Globe last night-if she is my niece, that girl has a good level head. They've all made a fool of Nat, of course. He ruled the whole place down

Good-day, Mr. Leavitt. I'll let you know as soon as

When Neil Crarner left Philo Leavitt he confidently expected to locate Nat in a few hours. As the long tiresome day wore to its close he had lost some of his confidence that he could easily trace Nat Leavitt. In answering several telephone calls from Cherry Lane Farm, he made it seem very clear to Sara and Hedda that there was not a thing to worry about in connection with Nat's disappearance. Carol spent the afternoon with him taking him to night clubs and places of amusement which she knew Nat patronized.

The days and nights went their round. Newspapers were closely scrutinized for accidents. Hospitals were called. Neil Cramer decided to call in a well known detective. He had the case five days and never unearthed a single clue. The Leavitt girls and Carol were sick from worry. They managed, however, to keep the trouble from their father and grandmother.

Nine days had passed since Nat's disappearance. One night about eight o'clock the telephone at the Leavitt home rang sharply. The message came from the hospital at Farnville. It was brief and to the point. A man said to be Nat Leavitt was just brought in badly injured. He was in an automobile accident. Sara called a cab and was soon hurrying to the hospital. Hedda's voice tear-filled and anxious telephoned the terrible news to her Uncle Philo and Neil.

Her uncle's answer, "Buck up, Hedda, Nat's young

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and tough. He'll prall through all right," was somewhat reassuring,

Neil Cramer told her he would start for the hospital at once. On the way out Cramer stopped to tell Carol and she insisted upon going to the hospital with him. Carol sat bolt upright staring straight ahead, and seemed to pay no attention to a word he said. Once when he was in the middle of a consoling sentence she interrupted him to ask, "What would happen to Nat's father and Grandmother if he should die?

"Why anticipate anything so serious?". Cramer remonstrated.

"I've a strong presentment that he is hurt seri-

But when they arrived at the hospital all side issues were forgotten in the gravity of the news that greeted them. The attendant at the desk said that Mr. Leavitt was in the operating room, and had not regained consciousness. Cramer sat in the dreary reception room and waited while Sara dashed off a note to Hedda.

The light from a shaded lamp fell on her bent head, on her moving white hand, and on the bare cak table, All beyond was unrelieved gloom. The rain rattled on the window-panes, and the air was sultry and faintly reminiscent of ether. How he hated the smell! It carried him back to France and to the long months he had spent in hospitals there.

But much more than the smell of ether contributed to his discomfort as he sat there and faced the whole situation. He was genuinely distressed over the accident and its consequences to all concerned for it would be one more load on the shoulders of Sara, already overburdened

The appearance of a nurse in the doorway interrupted his gloomy thoughts. She informed them that there had been another man in the car with Mr. Leavitt when the accident occurred. He had received only superficial bruises and would be able to leave the hospital at once. She thought if they saw the young man he would be able to tell them all about the shocking affair. They would have time to pay him a visit before Mr. Leavitt was brought from the operating table.

In a small waiting room they found the young man who had been with Nat when his car left the road. Pale and showing signs of shock, he hardly glanced up as they entered the room. When the nurse told him who they were and what they wanted from him he made an effort to rouse himself.

"You are Nat's sister, I know, because you look just like him." The fellow spoke faintly. "He can't be hurt much, is he? A car came along and we pulled him out in a couple of mirrutes. He wouldn't open his eyes though when I called to him, and there was a hole in the middle of his forehead." The fellow broke down and mumbled. 'Go on, tell how it happened," Neil ordered.

"It had been raining since we left the city andwell you know Nat would drive wild—I told him a couple of times to take it easy, it was so dark and slippery. We were almost into this burg where there's a sharp curve that Nat failed to make. In a second the car was over-turned in the ditch. Nat didn't move. Broken glass flew around, but I pulled out and waved to an auto that was coming up fast. There were two men in it. We had Nat out in no time. One man went into a house and phoned for an ambulance. Everything after that is just

"Just who are you? Had you been with Nat since he has been gone?" Neil asked.

"John Cole's my name. I was a salesman where worked. A couple of weeks ago he asked me to tak a trip with him. Said he fell into a bit of money. He said he'd stand jack for me if I went with him.

"Well, where did you go? Hurry up!" Neil ordered. "We went to Chicago. Nat said he wanted to see the city of thrills at first hand."

'Well?" Neil's voice was hard. Low means and sobs from the girls broke loose.

"Just a minute, girls, let him finish."
"We didn't find any thrills. Didn't know where to look, likely.' "You were just on your way home, to-night, broke,

I suppose." Neil snapped the words, Nat told me the last time we stopped for gas: "he'd have one dollar when he reached home. He said that didn't make any difference, for his Grandmother and sister Sallie would give him plenty more."

A groan burst from Sara. "That's enough," Neil exclaimed, "you've had plenty from the Leavitt family-"

'Well, I was just a passenger with him and should get something for myself-for doctor bills and torn

"I don't very often feel like fighting..." Neil's eyes blazed—"but I would enjoy fixing you so you couldn't leave this hospital for some time. Come on girls."

They found that Nat had been brought from the operating room back to the room assigned him. The surgeon left word that they could see him in a room on the second floor. As they left the elevator they were met by a small bald-headed man who had the look of one habitually concerned with life and death. He wasted no words in stating Mat's case.

"We thought at first an operation might save him but our conclusions were wrong. There is practically no hope for him." Cramer saw Sara's eyes widen with startled appre-

hension, and slipped near her, putting a supporting arm about her waist. "Do you mean that my brother Nat is going to die?"

she demanded almost indignantly. 'Yes. I'm sorry to say it, but I mean just that," the

surgeon continued. "Oh, where is he, Doctor?" Sara moaned. "We must go to him." Carol arose and pressed to Sara's side.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 6)

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of Spain through good "Republicia" schools only.

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