Gene Lees Ad Libitum

Jazzletter

PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240

October 2003 *Vol. 22 No. 10*

SONG LAKE SUMMER

Chapter Six

When John arrived at the bank the next morning, he could see that something momentous had happened in the life of Chester Timson. Glowing with satisfaction and importance, Timson several times appeared to be on the point of confiding the secret, but the interruptions of customers prevented it. Finally, in the afternoon, when Peleg Hopkins, the slow-moving young janitor, was putting up the shutters for the night, Timson looked at John sharply and said, "Has Dave said anythin' 'bout me leavin'?"

"He said you would be kind enough to stay as long as necessary to get me started."

"Jes' like him. Jes' like him," Chet said. "For all the world. The fact o' the matter is that I'm goin' tomorro'. I s'pose he thought that he'd ruther you'd find out yourself than have to break it to you. 'Cause then — don't y'see? — after I was gone he could lay the whole thing at my door."

"Really," said John noncommitally.

"Well," Chet said in a tone of deep solicitude, "mebbe you'll git along somehow. I told Dave you'd do 'bout as well as most anybody he could find."

"Thank you very much. And so you are off tomorrow, are you?"

"Got to be," Chet said, puffing up still more. "I'd 'a' liked to stay with you a spell longer, but they's a big concern up in Syracuse that, as soon as they heard I was at liberty, wrote for me to come right along up, an' I hadn't ought to keep 'em waitin'."

"I suppose not," John said. "I congratulate you upon having located yourself so quickly."

"Oh," Chet said with a wave of dismissal, "I hain't lost no sleep. I've allowed all along that Dave Hannum'd find out that he wa'n't the only man needed my kind o' work, an' I hain't meanin' any disrespect to you when I say it."

"I quite understand. Nobody could expect to take the same place with him that you have filled. And, by the way, as I may not see you again, would you kindly give me the last balance sheets of the two ledgers and the bill-books? I suppose of course that they are brought down to the first of the month, and I shall want to have them."

"Cert'nly, of course," Chet said quickly. He seemed uneasy. "Well, I guess Dave's got 'em. I'll look 'em up in the mornin'. My train don't go till ten o'clock, an' I'll see you 'bout any last little thing before then. But I guess I've got to go now on account of a lot o' things. You can shut up, can't you?"

"Of course," John said. And Chester Timson left. John locked the safe and the vault and Peleg Hopkins went off with the day's outgoing mail. Shortly after that, David arrived. Instead of going to his office, he lifted himself to sit on the counter. "Chet leave?" he asked.

"Yes sir. He said he had a good many things to attend to, as he was leaving in the morning."

"Did he leave everythin' in good shape? Cash all right an' so on?"

"I think so. The cash is right, I'm sure."

"How 'bout the books?"

"I asked him to let me have the balance sheets and he said that you must have them, but he would see me in the morning, and, as he put it, look after any last little thing."

"Mmm," David grunted. "He won't do no such thing. He'll take the nine o'clock tonight. Drawed his pay, I guess, didn't he?"

"He said he was paid for this month and took sixty dollars. Was that right?"

"Yes," David said absently, nodding to himself as if he were trying to decipher a hieroglyphic. "What was it he said about them statements?"

"He said he guessed you must have them."

"Mmm. What'd he say 'bout leavin'?"

John related the entire conversation. "What'd I tell you?" David said with a short laugh. "Mebbe he won't go till tomorro' at that. He'll want to put in a little more time tellin' how he was sent for in a hurry by that big concern from Syracuse."

"I can't understand it. He knows you can contradict him."

"Walll," said David, "he'll allow that if he gits in the fust word, he'll take the pole. It don't matter, long's he's gone. I guess you an' me can pull the load, can't we?" He dropped down from the counter and started for the door. "By the way," he said, "can you come up t' the house to tea at six

o'clock? I want t'make you acquainted with Polly, an' she's itchin' t'see you."

"I shall be delighted," John said.

"Polly," said David, "I've ast the young feller to come to tea, but don't you say the word 'Eagle' to him. You can talk about all the other birds an' animals, but leave eagles alone."

"What you up to now?" Polly demanded, but the only reply was his chuckle.

The evening was not a notable success. John was tired, David was uncharacteristically taciturn, and Mrs. Bixbee, under David's interdict on the one subject that might have inspired discussion, was at a loss for generalities after the usual ones about the weather.

For the first week after Chet Timson's departure, David spent a good deal of each day in the bank. Gradually, however, he left more and more of the responsibility for the daily procedure in John's hands. This routine was more exacting than laborious, but it kept John confined for seven hours of the day, and he devoted at least two more to his readings about finance and banking. He had time nonetheless for long walks and rowing a rented boat on the scintillating waters of the lake.

Little by little, he came to know the bank's customers and, through them, the village itself.

Homer and Cortland were almost contiguous communities. Their economy was based largely on the agriculture of the surrounding countryside. There were, in addition to the small merchants and their employees, a good many persons whose families descended from the early settlers and who lived in good and even grand houses, many of them outside the town. They were people of refinement and considerable wealth who constituted a coterie of their own, though they were on terms of acquaintance and even comity with the "village people", as they designated most of Homer's population. To these houses on Main Street, sons and daughters, nieces, nephews and grandchildren came in the summer, and in recent years more houses had been built farther out, a number of handsome and stately residences, by newcomers who had been attracted by the beauty of the location. Thus during the summer months the village was enlivened by a concourse of visitors, who brought with them urban costumes, customs, fashions, and manners, and added life and color to the Homer streets, as well as putting money into the town's collective pocket. Cortland and Homer were anything but the rustic backwaters John had expected. Why Cortland even had a thriving Conservatory of Music!

"Some o' those folks," David explained, "leave in the fall an' come back in June or July, people like the Van Denberg family. Some o' them lives here the year 'round, and always has, an' call the rest on us 'village people', though they are jest as countryfied in their way as me an' Polly is in ourn, only they don't know it. 'Bout the only difference is the way they talk an' live."

"It seems," John said, "that Homer has great potential as a resort."

"It has to some extent for a good many years, an' it's gettin' more so all the time, only different. The folks that comes now make more show, an' most on 'em who ain't visitin' their relations either has places o' their own or hires 'em for the summer. One time folks used t'come an' stay at the big hotel. They was quite a fair one then, but it burned up, an' wa'n't never built up agin. The Eagle an' the Lake House ain't fit t'take its place. Doug Robinson's wife an' Mis' Truman, 'round on Laylock Street, has some families that come an' board with 'em every year, but that's about all the boardin' they is nowadays. Fact is, if Homer's ever goin' t'be the resort it could be, it needs a new hotel, an' so far nobody ain't seen fit to build one."

Dick Larrabee entered the bank at that point, wearing his usual happy smile. David had said that Dick's principal occupation was finding something amusing in every hour of his life. He also said that Dick was the best saddle-maker in three counties, and always had more business than he could handle. He and David sometimes got into business deals together — deals involving horses, of course.

"You ready, Dave?" Dick said. "Mornin', John."

"Jest about. John, d'you know anythin' about hosses?"

"I've ridden since I was seven."

"For *pleasure*?" David said incredulously.

"Oh yes," John said, not knowing what to expect now.

"Never could see the sense on't. I can imagine gettin' onto a hoss's back when 'twas either that or walkin', but t'do it for the fun o' the thing's more'n I can understand. There you be, stuck up five feet in the air like a clo'espin, havin' your backbone chucked up into your skull, an' takin' the skin off in spots an' places, expectin' every minute the critter'll git out from under you. No sir, if it come to be that it was either to ride a hossback for the fun o' the thing or to have somebody kick me, an' kick me hard, I'd say, 'Kick away.' It comes to the same thing far's enjoyment goes, and it's a lot safer."

John had begun to look forward to these sudden philosophical divertimentos of his employer, and he was careful never to break the thread of David's thought at these times. He laughed aloud at this unromantic view of the noble art of equitation.

"John can laugh now," Dick Larrabee said to David. "I'm gonna laugh when you miss your train."

"Shet your teeth, Dick," David said. John suspected that, as often was the case, what seemed to be a digression was preamble to a point. "Well now," David said to him, "I've got some hosses that need exercisin'. Mike, my hired man, is feelin' poorly. He's gettin' old. D'you think you could drag yourself away from these books o' yourn while I'm gone, jes' long enough to run 'em around a little in the evenin's?"

"I think I could manage that," John said.

"Good. They's a black name o' Kirby. He's the prop'ty o' Paula Van Denberg. I board him for her while she's away, which is most o' the year. There's a roan named Jinny, an' they's a bay with no name that I jes' bought a few weeks back." Dick Larrabee laughed aloud at this point, for what reason John had no idea. "If you want t' use my carriage, hitch up Jinny. Don't use the bay. He'll balk on you."

"He surely will!" Dick Larrabee said, and laughed harder.

"I understand, Mr. Hannum," John said.

"I should be back by Friday," David said, and left for Syracuse.

The day passed without event. John and Peleg Hopkins secured the bank for the night. John returned to the hotel and, ordering an ale, decided to put in an hour on his books before exercising the horses. Then he changed his mind. He finished his ale and went up to the Hannum house, paid his respects to Mrs. Bixbee, and then gave David's message to old Mike.

He decided that, instead of halter exercising the three horses, he would take the buggy out for a drive. Mike helped him hitch up Jinny, a lively but gentle mare, and they tied the black behind. It was a beautiful animal, almost blue in color. John drove south along the River Road for a half hour, then returned to the house. He put a halter on the bay, attached a lounge line to it, and brought the horse out of the barn.

The animal puzzled him. It seemed to be a gentle and obedient beast, even an affectionate one. Mr. Hannum had said he purchased the animal only recently. Why did it balk? He ran the horse around him in a circle. It proved obedient to voice commands. He asked Mike about the horse. Mike, chuckling, told him the story of how David had bought that horse twice — once from two strangers and once from Deacon Perkins. He laughed, saying that by now everyone in Homer knew the horse's history, at least its recent history.

"Hmm," John mused. Then he said, "Mike, do you think you could find me a blanket?"

"I reckon I could," Mike said, and went into the barn. He returned shortly with an old gray woolen blanket. John waved the blanket slowly in front of the animal's brown eyes. The horse did not react. He waved it more vigorously, then gave it a slight snap. The horse remained still. John folded the blanket into a pad and laid it across the horse's back. It remained placid, and when John rubbed its nose, it began to nuzzle him.

Decisively John tied the horse to a fence post, leaving Mike to watch him, and walked quickly, with growing excitement, across the town square and down a side street to Dick Larrabee's house. Mrs. Larrabee said that Dick was out back, in his shop. John found him working on some leather harness. There were several saddles in the shop, some of them quite beautiful.

"Evenin', John," Dick said. "What brings you here?"

"Dick," John said, having learned that Mr. Hannum's friend did not like being called Mr. Larrabee, "would you be so kind as to lend me a saddle and a head stall with a snaffle for perhaps an hour?"

"Well sure. But if I hain't bein' nosey, who for?"

"I've a suspicion," John said, "that the bay . . . "

"Ol' Stickin' Plaster?"

"Yes. I have a suspicion that the horse was trained for riding, some time in its unknown past, and then someone tried to retrain it to pull a buggy, and the animal resents it."

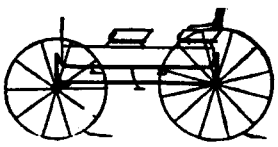
"Well scat my dogs!" Dick Larrabee said. "What a joke that'd be on Dave Hannum! He got fooled on that hoss two ways! Sure I got a saddle. English or cavalry?"

"English."

"I think this'n 'll do you," Dick said, picking up a saddle from a long rounded rail of saddles, and with his other hand grabbing a blanket and headstall. "John, I'm comin' with yeh. I got t'see this."

"By all means."

As they crossed the square, John paused, looking up at the hotel. "Dick," he said, "would you take this up to Mr. Hannum's barn, and wait for me?" He gave the saddle to Dick, then hurried to his room, taking the stairs of the Eagle three at a time. His room now contained several trunks, one of which he opened. Removing various items of folded clothing, he put them on the bed and at last found riding jodhpurs and a pair of brown boots.



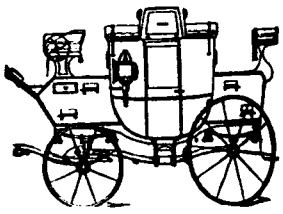
"Well, will you look at that!" Dick said when John arrived in front of the Hannum barn. John smiled, without explaining; he had not ridden in some time and had no desire to go to the bank tomorrow with chafed legs.

He changed the horse's halter, talking to him in a soft and assuring tone. "Easy, fellow," he said, "easy now." Very cautiously he saddled the horse, leaving the cinch snug but not

tight. He stroked the animal's nose, and again it nuzzled him. John tightened the cinch two notches, attached a long exercise rope to the halter, and walked slowly backward toward Dick Larrabee, keeping his eyes fixed on the horse. "Would you please hand me that buggy whip, Dick?" he said without looking back. Dick put the whip into his outstretched hand. John cracked it in the air and called, "Giddap!" The horse lunged into a trot. John worked him in a circle for a minute or two, cracked the whip again and called out, "Canter!" The horse picked up its pace. It was a high-spirited animal but its rebellion in the next few minutes was limited to a little bucking. Finally John brought him to a halt, rubbing the animal's nose and saying, "Good boy."

Still cautiously, John checked the cinch and put his left foot in the stirrup, firmly gripping the reins and the animal's mane with his left hand. He put a little weight on the stirrup, prepared to leap away if he had to, then, satisfied, mounted the horse in one swift movement. Talking to it quietly, he nudged the animal with his heels. It started forward. John looked at Dick and said, "I think I shall go for a ride." And Dick, whose grin was as broad as John's, shook his head.

The next hour was exhilarating. John galloped the horse on a dusty road, walked him through meadows of deep grass, then led him through cool birch woods. At the far side of the lake, he walked the horse across a gravel beach and out into the water. The animal lowered its muzzle and drank. It was late evening now and, as John looked across to Homer, the lake and the sky were the color of wine. A cool breeze moved his hair and dried his damp face. He had no idea how long he sat there with hardly a thought in his mind, but at last he realized the evening colors had grown deeper and he turned the horse back toward town.



The usual collection of sundown loafers, including Amos Slocum and Dick Larrabee, occupied the veranda of the Eagle. They greeted him, as he passed in his equestrian costume, with catcalls, jeers, and a spattering of applause. John bowed gravely in the saddle, as if in a parade.

"When'd you learn t'ride like that, John?" Dick Larrabee shouted.

"When I was learning to box!" John answered grandly, and dismounted with a flourish. The loafers applauded and he took a deep bow. "I should like an ale, if you don't mind, Mr. Slocum," he said, and dropped into a chair with a half-round back, tilted it and put one booted foot against one of the veranda posts. The loafers laughed and said they'd never seen the beat of it, and they teased John about his fancy clothes. Amos Slocum returned with an ale, a third of which John consumed immediately, and then licked the white foam mustache from his upper lip.

"Well," said Dick Larrabee, "that's one more time Dave got fooled. This here's the funniest one since Jason Miller got 'im." And they all laughed. Even Amos Slocum seemed on the verge of a smile.

"And what, may I ask, was the previous occasion of Mr. Hannum's deception?"

"Oh I couldn't tell you that!" Dick Larrabee said. "Dave'd skin me. It's a sore spot with 'im."

"It sure is," one of the others said.

"You're tantalizing me," John said.

"I'm *what*?"

"Tantalizing. You know what I mean." He was learning to play their game.

"I jes' couldn't tell it," Larrabee said.

"Go on, Dick, tell 'im," Slocum said. "The boy'll find out sooner or later."

"Wallll," Larrabee said, drawing the word out long, "if I tell yeh, an' you tell Dave, an' I find out, you'n me's quits."

John sat solemnly upright in his chair, his right hand across his heart, his face sober. "I swear by all I hold dear," he said.

"Wallll," Larrabee began, an' then paused. "Cortland County is full o' smart horse-swappers, and there ain't airy a man who won't tell yeh Dave's the best. But even he got badly took once."

The others laughed in anticipation. "Get on with it, Dick," Slocum said. They were like children wanting to hear a favorite tale repeated.

"Well Dave got holt of a horse once that was a kicker," Larrabee resumed. "Now that horse looked like he was wuth five hunderd dollars, but bein' a kicker, he wa'n't wuth more'n thirty. Whenever he was hitched to a buggy, he'd start kickin' an' kickin' an' raisin' hell until he kicked the dash-board an' anythin' else he could get at to flinders. Dave threw him for nothin' in a trade with a Cortland fella. He told him the horse was a kicker, an' the man said he thought he could break 'im. I think Dave got thirty, forty dollars for the horse, and glad to get it.

"Walll, they was a fella in Cortland name o' Jason Miller, drove for the streetcar company, that had a grudge agin Dave. I never did find out the partic'lars of it.

"Now, this Jason Miller got an idea o' how he could get back at Dave for whatever it was he had stuck in his craw. An' he bought that horse in Cortland. Now in those days — this was a few years back, when Dave was a younger fella — clippin' horses was a new thing. And when Miller clipped

this horse, it made a considerable change in its appearance. Next thing Miller done, he hitched this horse to an old streetcar. And the horse started to kick. Only problem for the horse was that the streetcar didn't have a wooden dashboard. It had a dashboard made of iron. So it didn't do him any good. An' by the time Miller drove that streetcar from Cortland to Homer, that horse was wore out. He was limp. Not a shot o' spirit left in him.

"Now Dave was over in Zimmer's barbershop, swappin' stories," Larrabee said, jerking a thumb toward a red-brick building more or less across the street. "An' I was with 'im. But I didn't know what Miller had done to that animal. Miller comes in an' says to Dave, 'I got a fine horse I want to sell you.'

"Well that's all Dave ever has t'hear. He was gone in a blink. I followed him out into the street. There stood this horse, with his tail and mane clipped, an' a kind o' meek look in his eye, an' Dave didn't recognize him.

"He said, 'That's a good-lookin' animal. Too good-lookin' to be haulin' a streetcar. What'll you take fer him?'

"Miller set a high price, an' he an' Dave dickered, an' finally Dave got the horse for I forget what, two, three hunderd dollars. Miller drove the streetcar back t' Cortland, then brought the horse back that night.

"Well, by next mornin' the horse had his spirit back." The others interrupted Larrabee with laughter. He resumed: "Dave takes that horse out to test its gait. He hitched it up to his best buggy, a real fancy one. An' between the stable an' the street, that animal kicked that buggy into toothpicks, and threw Dave into the dirt."

By now the others were roaring with laughter, for all the times they had heard or told the story.

Dick Larrabee wiped away tears with his knuckles. The laughter slowed.

"What ever happened to that horse, Dick?" Slocum said.

"Dunno. Mebbe he went for glue." And then, pointing a finger at John he said, "So that's the story, an' don't you tell 'im I told it to you, an' while I'm givin' you advice, I'd advise you not to mention the name Miller in front of Dave neither. Dave ain't spoke to him from that day to this."

"Only time I ever seen him hold a grudge," Slocum said.

"Oh no," Larrabee said seriously. "I've seen him hold a few. Dave's fair, and Dave's good, an' he ain't mean, but once he's down on somebody, he never forgets."

"Well," John said, rising to his feet, "I thank you gentlemen for your entertaining company, but I had better go and give this horse a rub-down." And he mounted the horse again. From this high perch he said, "By the way, Mr. Slocum, after I rub him down, I should like some supper. A slice of the pickled elephant would be very nice." Dick Larrabee's laugh could be heard above that of the others as John rode on down Main Street.

Chapter Seven

David returned from Syracuse on Friday and arrived at the bank shortly after two o'clock. John was anxious to tell him about the bay horse before Dick Larrabee or someone else did but David, after some preliminary questions about the week's business said, "What luck you had with your money? Git any bad?"

"I'm afraid I did," John said, coloring a little. "I don't know how many I may have taken in and paid out without knowing it. But there were two counterfeit tens which were returned from New York out of that package that went down last Friday."

"Where be they?"

"They're in the drawer there. They're interesting objects of study."

"Countin' 'em in the cash?" David said, and John reddened.

"No sir. I charged them to my own account, since I made the error, and I've kept them for comparison purposes."

"You hadn't ought to done that," David said gravely.

"Should I have burned them?"

"That wa'n't what I meant. Why didn't you mix 'em up with the other money, an' let 'em go when you was payin' out? You charge 'em to profit an' loss if you're goin' to charge 'em to anythin', an' let me have 'em."

"What will you do with them?"

"I'll take care on 'em. They mayn't be good enough to send down to New York but they'll go around here all right — jest as good as any other, long's you keep 'em movin'."

"Well," John said with icy civility, "I don't see why you should lose by my mistake, or any of your customers either. I have paid for those bills from my own account, Mr. Hannum, and as far as I am concerned, they are my property." John opened a drawer, took out the bills, struck a match, set fire to them, held them by their corners as they burned, and dropped them at last into a brass ashtray. Tiny red fireworms crawled over the paper's black surface and at last went out.

"So be it," David said. "They's your loss, John. I got to be gittin' up t'the house." And he left.

John's anger rose throughout the afternoon. At the end of the day he went to the Lake House and sat on its rear veranda with a glass of ale, looking at the serene lake. He could see a canoe near the far shore, bearing a solitary paddler. How could I have been so wrong about him? he thought. But then I was wrong about many people in New York, too.

He was overcome by the feeling that he belonged nowhere. He had begun to like it here in this broad valley, but now . . .

After a time he made up his mind what he must do.

David was sitting in the "wing settin' room", as he called it, reading a newspaper. Polly, in another chair, was hemming a towel. David was reading an editorial.

"You ain't said nothin' for quite a while about the bank," Polly said, interrupting his train of thought. "Is Mr. Lenox gittin' along all right?"

"Guess he's gittin' into condition as fast as could be expected."

"It must be awful lonesome for him," Polly said. David offered no reply. "Ain't it?" she said impatiently.

"Guess nobody ain't ever very lonesome when you're 'round an' got your breath. What you talkin' about?"

"I ain't talkin' about you, at any rate. I was sayin' it must be awful lonesome for Mr. Lenox up here an' livin' in that hole of a tavern."

"He hain't been very lonesome daytimes, I guess."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we found that Chet hadn't done more'n to give matters a lick an' a promise in most a year. He done jest enough to keep up the day's work an' no more, an' the upshot on't is that John's had to put in consid'ble time t' git things straightened out."

"What a shame," Mrs. Bixbee said.

"Keeps him from bein' lonesome," her brother said.

"An' you haven't made up your mind yet whether you're goin' to keep him, an' you're lettin' him work like that?"

"I've told you more'n forty-seven times, Polly, that I thought we was goin' to make a hitch of it, but if you're so anxious to know how *he* feels about it, you can ask him yourself, because I'm expectin' him to arrive here any minute. Fact, you might ast Sarry to set another place for supper."

"What *are* you talkin' about?" his sister demanded.

"He'll be comin' here putty shortly t'tell me he's quit," David said, and raised the paper in front of his face to hide his laughter from her, but she could see it shaking.

"David," she said in her gravest tone of disapproval, "you're always testin' an' tryin' people, an' you're liable to get ketched at it some day. What you been up to with Mr. Lenox?" He did not answer. "Be you goin' t'tell me," she demanded, "or be you 'shamed on it?"

"Well I laid out to try an' read this paper," he said, spreading it on his lap, "but I guess 'tain't no use. Do you know what a counterfeit bill is?"

"I dunno as I ever see one, but I s'pose I do. They're agin the law, ain't they?"

"They's a number o' things that's agin the law," David said drily. "It was like this: the young feller's took holt everywhere else, but handlin' the money bothered him consid'ble at fust. He's gittin' the hang on't now. Another thing I expected he'd run up agin was counterfeits. They ain't so very many 'round nowadays, but they is now an' then one." And he told her about the afternoon's incident.

"David Hannum!" she cried when he had finished. "I hope to gracious he didn't think you was in earnest. Why, s'pose they was passed around, wouldn't somebody git stuck with 'em, in the long run?"

"I see by the paper," David said, "that they was a man died in Philadelphy one day last week."

"What more did he say?" she demanded, ignoring the non sequitur.

"Nothin'," David said. "He jes' went as black and silent as a storm cloud comin' in. I expect he's down at the Lake House, havin' a couple of ales an' gittin up his grit t'come up here an' tell me that I'm a crook an' he's goin' back t'New York." David pulled on his gold chain, drawing his watch from his pocket. He consulted it, put it back, and said, "He should be here any minute now."

"He done jes' right, and you know he did."

"Yes he did," David said, his mood suddenly become pensive. "Polly," he said gently, "I've been lookin' for an honest man for quite a number o' years an' I guess I found him. Yes'm, I guess I found him." He caught sight of a movement beyond the curtains of the broad window that overlooked the street. "Here he comes, right on time." He stood up, parted the curtains, and said, "I swear to 't, Polly, he looks even madder'n the deacon. Now you show him in an' leave us alone."

John's determined footsteps could be heard on the steps of the porch, which sound was followed by an assertive rapping on the door.

"Good evening, Mrs. Bixbee," David heard John say in the hallway. "I would like to see Mr. Hannum, please."

"He's in the settin' room," Polly said, "right through there."

John entered, a tower of indignation.

"Evening, John," David said.

"Good evening, Mr. Hannum," John said severely. "I have been reflecting on the incident this afternoon, and I have come to tell you that . . . "

"Before you tell me," David said, "I've got somethin' for you." He took a twenty-dollar gold piece from his vest pocket and held it out. John looked at it bemusedly. "Take it," David said, "an' put it in your account. You did jest the right thing, an' the loss is mine."

"I don't understand."

"You didn't really think I'd let those counterfeits go out again, did you? Some o' these folks 'round here is friends o' mine. Some of 'em ain't, but a lot of 'em is. Here, take it."

John continued to stare at the outheld coin. "I still don't understand."

"I was testin' yeh," David said.

"You were *what*?" John was almost shouting. David had the feeling that this time, perhaps, he had indeed carried one of his "experiments" too far. John's teeth were clenched, his compressed lips were white, and the muscles in his jaws worked with tension. He turned away and looked out the window, his hands thrust deeply into his pockets, almost trembling with his effort to control his anger.

Polly was right, David thought, I've made a mess on 't. "I jest finished tellin' Polly," he said to John's back, "that you'd be here to resign, an' she oughta set a place fer supper fer yeh."

John turned. To David's enormous relief a slight smile played around his mouth. "You were that certain that I would resign?"

"Yep."

And then John laughed. "Mr. Hannum," he said, "I have not met your like before."

"An' I ain't met yours, neither. That's what I found out today. Set down, John. Would like a leetle sherry an' a cigar?" And he pressed the coin on John who took it with a shrug and put it in his pocket.

"The sherry would be very nice," John said, eyeing the ominous cigar David was proffering, "but I prefer a cigarette."

David poured two glasses of sherry, handed one to John, then sat down. "I guess I oughter 'poligize for what I did. But in bankin' an' hoss-tradin' you run into many a bad egg. I been fooled by folks before. Course, I knew the general wouldn't recommend no dead-beat, an' if the feller was right an' got gumption, I could break him in. I liked your letter, an' when you come I liked your looks. Of course I couldn't tell jest how you'd take holt, nor if you an' me'd hitch. An' then again, I still don't know if you can stan' it here after livin' in a city all your life. I seen right off that you was goin' t' fill the collar far's the work's concerned. An' though you hain't no friends here your own age, which a young feller needs t' have, you ain't been mopin' nor sulkin' neither. An' folks 'round here like you already. That's important in a bank. You got some friends here an' prob'ly don't even know it. It ain't every day that Ame Slocum speaks well o' somebody, an' Dick Larrabee thinks you're the best they is. It's been a putty impressive pufformance, an' what you did today in burnin' them counterfeits clinches it. If you feel like stayin', I surely want you to."

John sat deep in his chair, legs crossed, pensive. He had, David thought, the gentlest smile he had ever seen on a man. "Come to that," John said at last, "I do not have any friends my own age in New York either." And again he fell silent. The ticking of the grandfather's clock seemed very loud and very slow to David. "Yes, Mr. Hannum," John said, "I should like very much to stay."

"Polly!" David called, and Mrs. Bixbee appeared in the door so quickly that he suspected she had been listening all along, "Mr. Lenox'll be stayin' for supper." She beamed.

Dick Larrabee entered the bank one afternoon when John was alone. "Say, John," he said, "got stuck with any more countyfit money lately?"

John flushed, and Dick laughed. "The old man told me about it," Dick said. "Say, you'd ought to done as he told you to. You'd 'a' saved twenty dollars."

"I don't quite understand," John said.

"He told me how you burned 'em," Dick said, and laughed some more. "I dunno's I ever see the old man more kind o' womble-cropped over anythin'. Why, he wouldn't no more 'a' passed them bills 'n he'd 'a' cut his hand off." He laughed again. "He was jes' ticklin' your heels a little to see if you'd kick, an' you surely did."

Dick Larrabee's laughter was nothing if not contagious and soon John was laughing too, remembering his own indignation. "Well," he said, "I was hardly in a position to know that at the time. I do not know Mr. Hannum as well as you do."

"Well," Dick said, "Dave's got ways of his own. I've summered and wintered with him now for a good many years, an' I ain't got to the bottom of him yet. An' I don't know nobody that has."

Chapter Eight

David took John's discovery about the bay horse with equanimity. After his usual expressions of doubt about the mental equilibrium of anyone who would voluntarily ride *on* a horse, he asked if John had thought of a name for the beast. When John said he had fallen into the habit of calling him Deacon, David nearly choked on his dinner. Recovering at last, he said that John was welcome to ride the animal all he wanted, and that while he was about it, he might as well ride Miss Van Denberg's horse Kirby as well, since the one horse needed exercising as much as the other. And that is how John spent the following weekend — riding Kirby on Saturday, trailing Deacon, as the animal was now and ever afterwards called, behind him. On Sunday he rode Deacon. When he returned and was watering the animals in the paddock, David leaned on a rail and watched him.

"Looks t'me like you be a putty good hand with hosses, John," he said. "Y'know, I didn't cheat Deacon Perkins on that hoss, an' if you look on't the right way, them two fellers didn't cheat me, neither. From the looks o' that hoss with you settin' on him, seems like they cheated themselves." He chuckled. They ain't no gamble like a hoss, John. You may think you know him through an' through, an' fust thing you know he'll be cuttin' up a lot o' didos right out o' nothin'. It

stands to reason that sometimes you let a hoss go all on the square — as you know him — an' the feller that gits him don't know how to hitch or treat him, an' he acts like a diff'rent hoss, an' the feller allows you swindled him. Seems like you're the only one knows how t'handle this hoss. That's why he keeps nuzzlin' you like that. You see, hosses gits used to places an' ways to a certain extent, an' when they're changed, why, they're apt to act diff'rent. Hosses don't know but dreadful little, really. Talk about hoss sense — well, they ain't no such thing."

David followed John into the barn. John put Kirby into a stall, hitched Deacon to cross-ties, and unsaddled him. He led the horse into his stall and began to curry him. David, in the adjacent stall, took up a second currycomb and began to work on Kirby.

"What church is it you stay away from, John?" he said.

"Sir?" he said, puzzled by the question.

"Well, I notice you don't go t' church. So what church is it you don't go to?"

John stopped currying Deacon for a moment. He said, "My mother was Catholic, but she died when I was a baby, and I have had little exposure to that religion. My father was Episcopalian, but he never went to church, and he was not sympathetic to his church. I have no religious affiliation."

"I'm a little like you," David said. "Yes sir. I should have to admit that I ain't much of a hand for church-goin'. Polly has the princ'pal charge o' that branch o' the business. But the one I stay away from when I don't go is the Presbyterian."

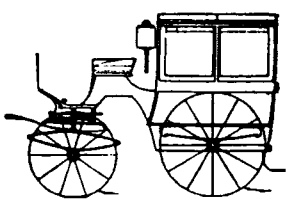
John smiled.

"No sir," said David. "I ain't much of a hand for't. Polly used to worry at me about it fill I fine'ly says to her, 'Polly,' I said, 'I won't undertake to foller right along in your track — I hain't got the requisite speed,' I says, 'but from now on I'll go to church reg'lar on Thanksgivin'. It was putty near Thanksgivin' at the time, an' I dunno but she thought if she could get me started I'd finish the heat."

"Did you keep your promise?" John asked, laughing and taking up a rag to rub the horse down.

"Well sir," David said with utmost gravity, "for the next five years I never missed attendin' church on Thanksgivin' day but four times. But after that I had to beg off. It was too much of a strain, an' it took more time'n Polly could really afford to git me ready."

John had supper with his employer and Mrs. Bixbee that evening, after protesting that this was the third evening in a row he had done so. He felt that he was imposing on them, which feeling lingered into the following morning at the bank. His attention was taken during the afternoon by the curious behavior of his employer. Mr. Hannum would from time to time go to his window and look out in an expectant manner.



When the day's work was ended, John was again invited to the Hannum house to dine. Mr. Hannum said, "It ain't my doin', it's Polly's, an' if you don't show up, my dinner ain't goin' t'be none too pleasant."

"Well, if you insist, Mr. Hannum. Let me go back to the Eagle an' wash up."

"No, Polly wants you right away. You can wash up t'the house."

John protested again to Mrs. Bixbee that he was imposing on her hospitality. "It's all right," she said. "Now mebbe you'd like t'wash an' fix up 'fore dinner, so I'll jes' show you where to go." And she led him upstairs to what she called the "front parlor bedroom".

John stopped, startled, in the doorway. "I don't know what to say, Mrs. Bixbee, I . . . "

"Don't say nothin'," she said. "I done it jes' t'relieve my mind, because ever since you fust come I been worryin' about your bein' at that nasty tavern, with all those drinkers an' loafers. Now jes' make yourself comf'table, an' dinner'll be ready in a while." And she left him.

John entered the room with diffidence. All his belongings were there. His books were lined up neatly on a shelf, some of his clothes were hung in a capacious closet, and the rest of his trunks awaited unpacking. The room was delightful, and of course an immeasurable contrast to that at the Eagle: the spacious bed, with its white counterpane and silk patchwork "comfortable" folded across the foot, a big bureau and looking glass, a soft carpet, a table for writing and reading standing in the bay window, his dressing things laid out ready to his hand, and an ample supply of *dry* towels on a rack.

He threw himself down on the bed and stretched out, hands interlaced behind his head, staring contentedly at the ceiling. There was a knock at the door. He rose, opened it, and found Mr. Hannum standing there.

"Come in," John said warmly, yet feeling strange to be inviting the man into a room of his own house.

To be continued