

## SONG LAKE SUMMER

### *Continued*

Slocum took a key, attached to a huge brass tag, from a hook on a board behind the bar, lighted a small kerosene lamp and, shuffling from behind the counter, said, "Say, Dick, can't you an' Bill carry the gentleman's luggage up to thirteen?"

"It's on the veranda," the stranger said. "Thank you."

Dick and Bill went out into the night and returned, each of them holding the trunk by a strap at either end. Dick carried a haversack as well. They mounted the stairs and the stranger followed. Amos Slocum shook his head, amazed at the oddity of nature that had just checked in, took a cigar from the glass case, and lit it.

When Dick and Bill returned, Bill said, "You shoulda got his name, Ame. Wonder who he is?"

"Some drummer, I reckon," Amos Slocum said.

"No," Dick said. "I can pretty near guess who he is. That's the feller that's ousted Chet Timson, an' I'll bet yeh the drinks on it. Name's Landon or Lyndon or somethin' like that. Dave told me this afternoon."

"So that's the feller, is it?" Bill said. "I guess he'll find he's a little too tony for these parts, and in particular for Dave Hannum. Dave'll make him feel 'bout as comfortable as a rooster in a pond. Lord, Dick, 'd you notice Ame's face when he said he didn't want much fer supper, only beefsteak an' eggs an' tea an' coffee? I thought I'd split." And he began slapping his knee and laughing again.

"If you loafers are through laughin'," Amos Slocum said, "I'll see if I can find him some doughnuts."

"I forgot, Ame," Dick said. "He said t' tell yeh he didn't want 'em."

John sat on the bed in his room. There were two small-paned windows overlooking the street and curtained with red cotton. Near them was a small wood stove and a box, still containing the bark of last winter's firewood, a small chest of drawers on which stood a wash basin and a clouded glass that John would not dream of drinking out of, an earthenware water jug, empty, and soap dish, also empty; a stiff wooden chair and a rocking chair, and the bed on which he sat, whose

mattress crackled when he moved. It was hard and lumpy. Well, John thought, at least it will assure that I awake early. He looked down at the floor. The faded carpet was worn through in one place.

He stood up, took off his coat and hung it on one of six pegs protruding from a narrow strip of unpainted pine on the wall.

What a hole, he thought, shaking his head.

### Chapter Five

From the window John saw a town of surprising prettiness in the slanting morning light. The window faced west across a broad main street onto the square in which there were benches, tidy graveled walks, and a statue of a Union soldier whose head was lowered and whose hands rested on the butt of his downturned rifle. It was a sad and, at least from a distance, surprisingly good piece of work. Elms overhung the park and the streets that led away from it. To its left was a tall, graceful red-brick church. Beyond all this, to the west, green slopes rose to a blue sky.

John went downstairs, asked for water, went back upstairs, washed — he had brought soap — and shaved. He descended again to the lobby, there to encounter Amos Slocum in the same rumpled clothes he had worn the night before.

"Dave Hannum's bank is off to your right," Slocum said, thereby letting John know that his identity had been deduced. "Up Main Street five blocks."

"Thank you," John said. He went out into the street and inhaled a deep clean breath. He heard birds and wondered what they were. His musician's ear made note of the intervals they sang but he tried to stop doing this, thinking, *All that is behind me now*, and lit one of his French cigarettes, a large supply of which he had had the foresight to bring with him. The avenue was surprisingly broad in so small a town, lined by homes with broad verandas and turrets and bay windows and cupolas, faced with red brick or white clapboard or shingles.

He finished the cigarette and continued to the bank, which had a sign suspended in front of it saying Hannum Bank. It occupied the ground floor of a building three stories high,

built of red brick. Presumably there were rented apartments above it. John stopped long enough to muster his composure, and went in to face further unknowns.

A large room was furnished with the expected desks and counters. The cashier's counter faced the door. To the left was a high-standing desk with a rail, and, to the right, an area enclosed by glass. Behind the counter stood a man he presumed was the Mr. Timson of growing legend, a small man about forty with suspicious blue eyes, freckles, and red-blond hair. His head seemed a little too big for his body.

"Good morning," John said.

"You lookin' for Dave?"

"I am looking for Mr. Hannum."

"He hain't come in yet. Up t' the barn, I reckon. You can step into the back room an' wait for him." He waved toward a door on the back wall. John entered it somewhat uncertainly and looked about for a place to sit down, not wanting to take a chair that might be someone else's. The room contained a rolltop desk, a leather-covered armchair in front of it, and two wooden armchairs obviously for visitors, one of which John took. The probable Mr. Timson entered the room, leaned against the wall with his legs crossed at the ankles and his arms folded, and confirmed that he was indeed "Timson. Chester Timson's the name."

"Happy to meet you," John said, rising and extending his hand. Timson offered him four limp fingers. John sat down again.

"What put it in your head to come up here?" Timson said.

"That's a personal matter."

"D'you know Dave?"

"I have never met him."

"Ever been in the bankin' business?"

"No."

"Ever keep books?"

"No."

"Well, I can tell yeh, young man, you hain't no idea of what you're in for. An' if you don't wish you was back in New York 'fore you git through, I ain't no guesser."

"That's possible," John said, still a little stiff from the lumpy mattress. And now that he thought about it, he was desperately hungry.

"Yes sir," said Timson. "If you do what I've had to do, you'll do the whole darned thing, an' nobody to help you but young Peleg Hopkins, who don't count for a row o' crooked pins. Dave don't know no more about bankin' 'n a cat. He couldn't count up a row o' figures an' git it twice alike."

"He must understand the meaning of his own books and accounts."

"Oh," Timson said scornfully, "anybody could do that.

But as fer's the real business is concerned, he don't have nothin' to do with it. It's all been left to me — chargin' an' creditin', bill-book, discounter register, tickler, foreign register, checkin' off the New York accounts, drawin' off statements from the ledgers and bill-book, writin' letters. Why they ain't an hour o' the day I ain't busy 'bout somethin', no sir. Dave don't give himself no trouble about the business. All he does is to look after lendin' the money an' seein' that it gits paid when the time comes an' keep track of how much money they is here an' in New York an' what notes is comin' due, an' a few things like that that don't put pen to paper nor take an hour of his time. He ain't around here half the time. Now when I work for a man I like to have him 'round so't I can say to him, 'Shall I do so or shall I do so?' Then when I make a mistake, as anybody's liable to do, he's as much to blame as I be."

"I see," said John. "Then I suppose that you must have to keep Mr. Hannum's private accounts as well."

"No sir," Timson said. "He's got a safe in the vault, and I hain't no more idee of what's in it'n you have. He's close, Dave Hannum is. On the hull, the closest man I ever see. I believe if he was to lay out to keep it shut, lightnin' might strike him in the mouth an' it wouldn't go in an eighth of an inch. An' yet he can talk by the rod when he takes a notion."

"You make him sound difficult to deal with."

"I couldn't stan' it no longer," Timson said with the air of a man who had endured to the end of all virtue. "I says to him the other day, 'Well, I says, 'if I can't suit yeh, mebbe you'd better suit yourself.'"' He paused dramatically, awaiting some sign of approval for his riposte, or at least interest in it.

"Ah," John said. "And what he say to that?"

"He ast me if I meant by that to throw up the situation. 'Well, I says, 'I'm sick enough to throw up most anythin', along with bein' found fault with for nothin'.'"

"And then?"

"Well," said Timson, not quite so confidently, "he said somethin' about my requirin' a larger sphere of action, an' that he thought I'd do better on a mile track — some of his hoss talk. That's another thing. He's all for hosses. He'd sooner make a ten-dollar note on a hoss trade than a hundred here in his office."

"Well then," John said, "I hope that since you are leaving of your own accord, you will have no ill feeling toward me."

"Cert'nly not, cert'nly not," Timson said, a little uneasily. "If it hadn't been you, it woulda been somebody else. I better git back into the other room. Dave's liable to come in any minute. But I'll give yeh a piece of advice: keep your bags packed."

Doug Robinson had evidently quoted him accurately enough last night. "Thank you," John said with a slight smile.

Chester Timson went back to the outer room. His feeling for the imminent was apparently an acute one, for no sooner had he taken on an air of worried preoccupation behind the counter than David entered the bank and said, "Mornin', Chet. Did Mr. Lenox arrive?"

"He's in your office," Timson said, not looking up from his papers.

David entered the inner office, saying, "I reckon you be Mr. Lenox. I'm Dave Hannum. How are you? I'm glad to see you." He was, John noted, a sturdy, well-fed, ruddy-skinned man. Somehow John had expected him to be tall and lean. He found himself shaking a plump but very strong hand.

"Yes sir, I'm John Lenox. How do you do?"

"Walli," David said in a drawl, "I'm improvin' slowly. I've got so't I can set up long enough t' have my bed made. You put up at the Eagle last night." It was not a question.

"Yes sir," John said.

"Mmm," David grunted. "How'd you leave the general?"

"He's very well, sir."

"Set down, Mr. Lenox, set down. Fine man, the general." David Hannum took a chair himself, not the leather chair at his desk but the other guest chair, which had the effect of putting John more at ease. "Yes sir, when the general gives his warrant, I don't care whether I see the critter or not. Know him much?"

"He and my father were friends. I have known him a good many years. He has been very kind to me."

"Now you said you hadn't had much experience o' bankin' an' book-keepin'."

"That's true, sir, but I have read several books on the subjects since the general wrote to you."

"Several?"

"Well, five, to be precise."

"You read five books *in a week*? My stars and garters."

John misunderstood David Hannum's amazement. "I can't claim that I mastered them, but I . . ."

"Five books in a week!" David said, shaking his head. "Wait'll I tell Polly 'bout that." Polly, John assumed, was his wife. "I meant to been here when you come, but I got hindered on a matter of a hoss I'm lookin' at. I guess I'll shut the door."

"Allow me, sir," John said, getting up and shutting it.

"Thank you," David Hannum said as John resumed his seat. "I hain't got nothin' very private, but I'm 'fraid of distractin' Chet's mind. Did he introduce himself?"

"We had a few minutes conversation."

"Rubbed a little furniture polish into my character an' reputation?" David said with a chuckle, then stopped and looked John evenly in the eyes. "I guess you've seen folks before."

"But no one quite like Mr. Timson," John said with a smile.

"Fortunately them kind is rare," David Hannum said drily. He rose and went to his desk, opened a drawer and produced two cigars, one of which he proffered to John, lighting it for him with a lucifer, then lighting his own. It was the worst cigar John had ever tasted.

"How do you like that cigar?" his new employer asked with great sincerity.

"It burns very nicely," John said.

"I've been wonderin' some, particularly now I see you, how't was you wanted to come up here to Homer. The general give his warrant, and so I reckon you hadn't been gettin' in no scrape nor nothin'. But a good-lookin' young feller with nice clo'es like you comin' t' Homer jes' sets me wonderin'. But I guess it ain't none o' my business, so . . ."

"There's no secret about my situation, Mr. Hannum. Certainly not in New York, I'm sorry to say, and I think your interest is quite natural." John told the banker as much of the story as he thought pertinent, watching the man's face as carefully as David Hannum was watching his. John had the feeling that the man combined acuteness with suspiciousness into a shrewd perception. "And here I am," he concluded.

"Here you be for a fact," Mr. Hannum said. "Well, there's wuss places'n Homer. I guess you'll git along after a spell, though it mayn't set fust-rate on your stomach till you git used to the diet. If I was to lose what little I've got, I can allow I might be willin' for a change of scene to make a fresh start in. You feel like takin' holt today?"

"Yes indeed, but . . ."

"You'd rather wait?"

"No, it is just that . . . I haven't eaten since yesterday noon."

David laughed. "The service at the Eagle ain't what it could be. Come on with me. We'll mosey up t' the Lake House an' have some breakfast. When you git back, you tell Timson what you want an' make him show you everythin'. He understands, an' I've paid him for it. He's agreed to stay any time in reason you want him, but I guess you can pump him dry in a day or two. It hain't rained wisdom 'n' knowledge in his part o' the country for a consid'ble spell."

John walked with David Hannum up Main Street. Every-one they passed nodded or smiled or said, "Good morning, Mr. Hannum." A small girl came out and took his hand, without a word, walked with them a way, and then left him.

David Hannum returned all these greetings, and small boys called out to him — by his first name, at that. The houses on the way were not what John had expected of a hinterlands hamlet. On the contrary, they were quite grand. At last they reached the end of town, and just beyond it, on the lakeshore, there was a hotel built, like the Eagle, of clapboard, but smaller.

"This is the Lake House," Mr. Hannum said. "The lodgin's ain't as good as the Eagle, but the food's better." They mounted five broad steps to a veranda. Mr. Hannum led the way to the back of the hotel, which looked out on the lake, and into the dining room. A few couples sat at tables — "Summer folks," Mr. Hannum said — but most of the tables were empty. A plump elderly woman emerged from the kitchen and said, "Mornin', Dave."

"Mornin', Mary. Can we set out on the verandy?"

"Sure." She led them through another door to the rear veranda, furnished with several wicker tables and chairs. "Polly didn't fix yeh breakfast this mornin'?" she said.

"I don't need no breakfast," David Hannum said. "But my friend here does. Mis' MacCormack, this is John Lenox, come from N'York to work at the bank." She exchanged greetings with John. He and David sat down. "I jes' want some tea," Mr. Hannum said, "but John'll have a steak and two fried eggs and some stewed tomatoes an' some coffee. That's what he couldn't git last night." And he chuckled. Obviously he had received this intelligence before he had arrived at the bank.

"Ain't got no stewed tomatoes," Mrs. MacCormack said. "Fried potatoes all right?"

"Yes. Yes indeed. That would be excellent."

"You'll find folks around here like to gab," Mr. Hannum said. "I notice you tol' me jes' as much 'bout yourself as you want me to know. Good. A close mouth is a good thing in bankin'."

"I can well imagine it," John said. He was beginning to understand General Woolsey's feelings about Mr. Hannum. There was a quality about the man he could not define, but one that, whatever it was, he liked.

And he liked the view from the Lake House. Not far away, a low and rickety pier of weathered wood stretched out into the lake, with four or five rowboats tied to it. Green moss clung to its four-by-four pilings and seaweed waved indolently in the clear water. A few fish were moving there, and above them several ducks with iridescent green heads coasted effortlessly about. From time to time one of them would plunge its head and body into the water, seeking food on the bottom, leaving its tail protruding comically into the

air. John had watched ducks do this uncounted times in the Bois de Boulogne. Yet for the first time in two months he did not miss Paris, and he wondered why. He felt a kind of peace, tenuous and slight, but peace nonetheless and wondered how long it would last.

"Mr. Hannum, what kind of ducks are they?"

The banker turned in his chair, hitched an arm over its back, and looked over his shoulder. "Mallards."

"They are beautiful birds."

"Good eatin' too," David Hannum said.

"No sir," Chet Timson was insisting to a friend when John returned to the bank. Chet slapped a hand on the counter. "I tol' Dave, 'I won't stand it, an' what's more . . .'" He stopped when he saw John. His friend, whoever he might be, turned away, saying, "See yeh later, Chet," and left.

"Well," Chet said to John, "the old man picked yeh to pieces all he wanted?"

"We are through for the day, I fancy," John said. "If you are ready to begin my lessons, I am ready to take them."

"All right," Chet said. And for the rest of the day he showed John the bank's rather simple practices, retarding the pupil's progress by unceasing digressions and complaints. John was pleased to discover how much useful information he had gleaned from his recent readings. By the end of the day he was waiting on customers under Chester Timson's supervision. He dined that evening at the Lake House, and while the cuisine was hardly *cordon bleu*, it was fairly good, in a homely way. Afterwards he sat on the veranda until the mosquitoes forced him to retreat. He resolved to buy a bottle of citronella.

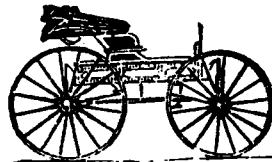
Somewhat to John's surprise, David Hannum did not come to the bank at all the next day. Late on the third morning he arrived and, after a perfunctory greeting, went to his office where he could be seen studying papers. After a time he came to the open door and, with a backward toss of the head, directed John to join him. With another nod he told John to shut the door behind him. He sat down at his desk and waved John to a chair.

"How'd you make out yesterday?" he said. "Git anythin' out of ol' tongue-tied?"

"Oh yes."

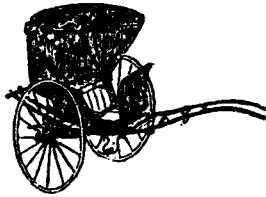
"How much longer do you think you'll have to have him around?"

"Well, of course, your customers are strangers to me, but so far as the routine of the office is concerned, I think I can manage after today. I should have to appeal to you rather often for a while, however."



"Good for you. You've took holt a good sight quicker'n I thought you would. I tol' Polly—Polly's my sister—that you read ten books on bankin' in a week."

"It was only five, sir," John said.



"Only five, was it?" David said with amusement. "Well, a little frostin' always moistens a cake, an' it don't matter. Now if you think you can take over, I'll spend more time'n usual 'round here for a while, an' if I ain't here I'll be where you can reach me. It's like this, John." John was surprised to be so addressed so soon. Somehow, from Mr. Hannum, he didn't mind it. "Chet Timson's a helpless kind o' critter, for all his braggin' an' talk, an' I been feelin' kind o' wambly about turnin' him loose. Though the Lord knows..." He sighed and shook his head. "The Lord knows for a fact that he's given me bother enough to kill a tree. But, anyway, I wrote to some folks I know up to Syracuse to git somethin' for him t'do, an' I got a letter to send him along and mebbe they'd give him a show. See?"

"Yes sir," John said. "All I can tell you is that if you are willing to take the chance of my mistakes, I will undertake to get on without him."

"Good. We'll call it a heat. And, say, don't let on what I've told yeh. I want to see how long it'll take to git all over the village that he didn't ask no odds o' nobody. Hadn't been out of a job three days 'fore they was a lot o' chances, an' all't he had to do was take his pick o' them."

"Do you think so, Mr. Hannum?"

"Yes sir! Some folks is gaited that way. Amusin', ain't it?"

There was a knock at the door. David nodded and John opened it. "I'm goin' t'eat," Chester Timson said. "An' Dick Larrabee's here t'see yeh."

David rose. "Dick's a friend o' mine," he told John. "Come on."

Dick Larrabee turned out to be the loafer whose chair had fallen down the wall at the Eagle. That he was a friend of Mr. Hannum's explained, of course, how his employer had known what John had requested for his first night's supper.

"Seen yeh before," Dick Larrabee said with a grin as he shook John's hand.

"I remember," John said.

"Excuse me for that," Dick said. "I wa'n't laughin' at you, not in partic'lar. I couldn't see your face when Ame offered yeh pie an' doughnuts instead o' beefsteak an' fixin's. I could only guess at that. But Ame's face was enough for

me." And he began laughing almost as hard as he had laughed the other night.

"Oh shet up," David Hannum said. "You'd keep that yawp o' yourn goin' if it was the judgment day."

"Well," Dick Larrabee said, grinning, "there might even be some fun to be got out o' that, if a feller wa'n't worryin' too much for his own skin. An' as fur's I'm concerned..."

David cut him off with a quick squint of the eyes and Dick turned, as did John, as two men entered the bank. The foremost of them, a hulking, shambling man with a sullen expression, came forward to within six feet of David Hannum; his companion held back near the front door.

"I got this here notice this mornin'," the man said, throwing a paper on the counter, "sayin' my note'd be due tomorrer, an' 'd have to be paid."

"Well," David said, resting an arm on the counter and turning the paper indolently with his fingers to look at it, "that's so, ain't it?"

"Mebbe so, fer's the comin' due's concerned, but the payin' part's another matter."

"Was you calculatin' t'have it renewed?" David said calmly, almost pleasantly.

"No. I don't know's I want to renew it fer any partic'lar time, an' I guess it can run along a while jest as it is."

Unable to evaluate the situation, John looked to Dick Larrabee for guidance but found in his face only an expression of utmost amusement.

"I'm glad t'have your views on the subject," Mr. Hannum said. "I guess it can run along at that—*until tomorro' at four o'clock*. After that you can settle with Lawyer Johnson or the sheriff."

The man gave a disdainful laugh. "I guess it'll puzzle yeh some t' collect it."

David Hannum's bushy reddish eyebrows almost met above his nose with the intensity of his expression. "Look here, Bill Montaig, I know more about this matter'n you think. I know't you been makin' yer brags that you'd fix me in this deal. You allowed that ye'd set up usury in the fust place, an' if that didn't work I'd find you was execution-proof anyways. That's so, ain't it?"

"That's about the size on't," Bill Montaig said, spreading his feet and folding his arms on his chest.

David moved slowly toward him. "You didn't talk that way when ye come whinin' 'round here for the money, an' as I reckon some o' the facts in the case has slipped yer mind since that time, I'd better jog yer memory a little. In the fust place, I didn't lend yeh the money. I borrowed it for yeh from Syracuse on my endorsement an' charged yeh for doin' it, as I told you at the time. An' another thing that you appear

to fergit is that you signed a paper statin' that you was wuth, in good and available personals, free and clear, over five hundred dollars, an' that the statement was made to me with the view of havin' me endorse your note for one-fifty. Recollect that?" He smiled grimly at Montaig, who began to appear disconcerted.

"I don't remember signin' no paper."

"I bet you don't."

"I'd like t'see that paper," Montaig said.

"You'll see it when the time comes," David said with an emphatic nod. He squared himself, planting his feet apart, his hands still in his pockets. "Do you think, Bill Montaig, that I didn't know who I was dealin' with? That I didn't know what a low-lived roost-robbin' skunk you was? An' didn't know to protect myself agin such animals as you be? Well I did, an' you'll pay that note or I'll put you where the dogs won't bite you. Now have you got any further business with me?"

Dick Larrabee's laughter at last escaped him in huge guffaws. The laughter was too much for Montaig, and he swung a big fist at David who, with surprising agility, sidestepped it, seized Montaig by his outflung arm, spun him around, and twisted his arm up his back. Montaig's companion had rushed forward, hands outstretched for David. John seized him by the collar as he passed, jerking him so hard that he would have fallen to the floor had John not caught him. The man was dizzy and choking as he held his hand to his throat, his eyes watering. He needed no encouragement to leave the bank. He stumbled toward the door, through which David was ejecting Bill Montaig.

David returned breathless and red in the face but in high good humor. "Scat my — Hain't had such a good tussle since I dunno when. Who was the feller with him?"

"Name's Smith, I b'lieve," Dick Larrabee said. "I'll bet his neck's achin' some."

"How's that?" David said.

"He made a move on yeh, an' Mr. Lenox there caught him by the collar an' give him a jerk that putty nigh broke his neck. He went off wriggling it to make sure it wa'n't. Where'd you learn to move around like that?" he said to John.

"Well," John said, "it was nothing, really. I was . . ." He hesitated. "I was on the Princeton boxing team."

"The Princeton boxing team? You hear that, Dave? Well scat my dogs! I never met a Princeton man before! A Princeton man!"

And John began to laugh at his teasing.

"John," David Hannum said, "I'm much obliged to you."

"Not at all," John said, and by now he was laughing too.

"I rather enjoyed it."

David affected a stern sobriety. "Well now, I don't want you to go gettin' spoiled your first week an' calculatin' to have such fun every mornin'. This here is a business office."

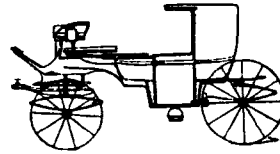
And the three of them laughed again.

When the day's business was finished, John spent an hour in his room at the Eagle, poring over books on banking, which he found more interesting than he had ever imagined it could be. About seven he came downstairs and said to Amos Slocum, "Do you think I might have an ale, please?"

"I guess yeh can," Slocum said, as sullenly as ever; but, to John's surprise, he volunteered, "You want it out on the verandy?"

"Yes," John said, "that would be nice."

John took a chair on the veranda and lit one of his French cigarettes. He looked out at the



park, where two little girls were skipping rope. Slocum brought him a bottle and a glass and handed them to him, without, however, offering to pour. John

poured his own drink, sipped it, and licked away the foamy mustache it left. Slocum made no move to leave. At last he said, "Bill Montaig's an awkward customer. He ain't liked. Neither is Smith."

"So I gather," John said.

"If they either one of 'em gives you any more trouble, you send for me or Dick Larrabee, though from what Dick said, you don't need no help."

"Well thank you, Mr. Slocum. I will remember that."

"You like a steak t'night?" Slocum said, still unsmiling.

"Well . . ." John hesitated. He had been planning to go again to the Lake House. Mrs. MacCormack had already taken to calling him John and the food there was good.

As if reading his mind, Slocum said, "We got some nice pork loin too. Tried it m'self. With apple-sauce."

John thought it would be impolitic to refuse. "Thank you, Mr. Slocum. I'll be in shortly."

Satisfied, Slocum turned to go in. "If you want another ale," he said, "jest yell for me." He paused in the doorway and looked back at John. "Was you really on the Princeton boxing team?"

**To be continued**

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