Gene Lees Ad Libitum

Jazzletter

PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240

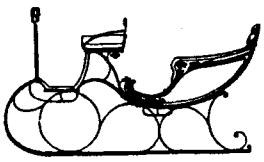
March 2004 *Vol. 23 No. 3*

SONG LAKE SUMMER

Continued

John enjoyed these recitals as much as his audience. There was in his playing something new. He was not trying to impress teachers, not trying to meet anyone's standards but his own. He had begun to practice again, and at times he was so exhilarated by his own playing that he began to wonder if he should return to it as an intended profession. But he pushed that thought aside, and simply played for pleasure — his own and that of the Hannums and visiting friends.

March came, and with it a thaw. But then it turned cold again and David complained that this part of the state had the "wust climate in the country", burning hot in the summer, fiercely cold in the winter. John had not had a letter from Paula since her arrival in Switzerland. Until now, she had been writing to him twice a week, letters about cafés and museums and concerts, always ending on some note of affection and occasionally passion. No doubt she had been kept busy. By now, he thought, remembering her itinerary, she's in Naples.



Toward the end of the month, with a light snow falling, John opened the bank. Peleg came in a few minutes later.

"Five times twelve!" John barked at him. "Quick!"

"Sixty!" Peleg called back with a grin.

"Good," John said, returning the smile.

"It's better'n good," Peleg boasted. "It's perfect!"

Peleg had the morning's mail. He was working at improving his reading and took pride in sorting it. He turned most of it over to John and took Mr. Hannum's mail back to his desk.

Presently David entered, greeted Peleg, went to his office, took off his coat, and, as always, settled down to read his correspondence. But then he got up and closed the door, leaving John with an impression, somehow, that he had received disturbing news. John wondered if something had gone wrong with the sale of Mrs. Randall's land, which had been pending for some weeks. But that was impossible: there was no other practical location for the railway bridge over the creek, and John knew that David would get her the price he had told her to demand.

At noon, when the bank closed for an hour, David sent Peleg on an errand and summoned John to his office.

"Guess you don't want one o' my cigars," he said, settling into his chair. There was a silence. Obviously David wanted to discuss something serious but was having trouble getting started. Once or twice he opened his mouth to speak, then stopped. Finally he said, "You still happy with your job?"

John smiled. "I can't say that I have been overworked."

"You hain't been overpaid, neither." Again David seemed to be seeking a way to broach the subject on his mind. "I never told you why I let Chet Timson go, did I?"

"No."

"Well, Chet was the biggest dumb-head I ever see, an' you know how he lef' things. He hadn't no tack, for another thing. Outside o' summin' up figures an' countin' money, he had the faculty o' gettin' things t'other end to that beat all. I'd tell him a thing an' explain it to him two three times over, an' he'd say, 'Yes, yes,' an' then when it came to carryin' it out, he hadn't sensed it a mite — jes' got it which end t'other. An' talk! I think it must 'a' been a kind o' disease with him. He really didn't mean no harm, mebbe, but he couldn't no more help lettin' out anythin' he knowed, or thought he knowed, than a settin' hen can help settin'. He kep' me on tenter-hooks the whole endurin' time."

"He was honest enough, wasn't he?"

"Oh yes," David replied with a touch of scorn. "He was honest enough, far's money matters was concerned. But he hadn't no tack, nor no sense, an' many a time he done more mischief than if he'd took fifty dollars out an' out. Fact is, the kind of honesty that won't actually steal's a kind o' fool honesty that's common enough. But the kind that keeps a feller's mouth shut when he hadn't ought to talk's about the scurcest thing goin'."

"And Chet's talk created problems, I take it?"

"You know Perce, that keeps the general store? Well, he come to me on the quiet an' said that he wanted t' borrow five hunderd. He didn't want nobody t'know he was anyway pushed for money, because he wanted to get some extensions, an' so on. I made up my mind it was all right, an' I

done it. Well, about a month or so after, he come to me with tears in his eyes, as you might say, an' says, 'I got somethin' I want to show you.' An' he handed out a letter from the house in New York he had some of his biggest dealin's with, tellin' him that they couldn't give him the extensions he ast for, an' that his paper must be paid as it fell due — some twelve hunderd dollars. 'Somebody's leaked,' he says, 'an' they've heard o' that mortgage, an' I'm in a putty scrape.'

"'Hmm,' I says, 'what makes you think so?'"

"'Can't be nothin' else,' he says. 'I've dealt with them people for years, an' never ast for nothin' but what I got it, an' now to have 'em round up on me like this, it can't be nothin' but what they've got wind o' that mortgage.'

"'Any o' their people been up here lately?' I says.

"'That's jest it,' he says. 'One of their travelin' men was up here last week, an' he come in in the afternoon, as chipper as you please, wantin' to sell me a bill o' goods, an' I put him off, sayin' that I had a putty big stock, an' so on, an' he said he'd see me agin in the mornin' — you know that sort o' talk.'

"'Well,' I says, 'I guess I see about how the land lays, an' I reckon you ain't far out about the mortgage bein' at the bottom on't, an' the' ain't no way it could 'a' leaked out 'ceptin' through that dum'd chuckle-head of a Chet. But this is the way it looks to me — you hain't heard nothin' in the village, have you?' I says.

"'No,' he says, 'not yit.'

"'Well, you won't, I don't believe,' I says. 'An' as far as that drummer is concerned, you can bet that he didn't nor won't let on to nobody but his own folks — not till his business is squared up. An' more'n that,' I says, 'seein' that your trouble's been made by one o' my help, I don't see but what I'll have to see you through. You jes' give me the address of the New York parties, an' tell me what you want done, an' I reckon I can fix the thing so's they won't bother you. I don't believe,' I says, 'that anybody else knows anythin' yit, an' I'll shut Timson's yawp so's it'll stay shut.'"

"How did the matter come out?" John asked.

"Oh, Perce went off head up an' tail up. He said he was everlastin'ly 'bleeged to me an' he said 'twas more'n he expected. You see, I charged him what I thought was right on the original deal, an' he squimmidged some, an' I reckon he allowed to be putty well bled if I took holt agin. But I done as agreed on the extension business, an' I'm on his paper for twelve hunderd for nothin', an' that very day I wrote to the New York fellers for Perce, I wrote to General Woolsey to find me somebody to take Timson's place. I allowed I'd ruther have somebody that didn't know anybody in these parts than such a clackin' ol' hen as Chet."

"I remember that letter very well. I read it in the Union Club, with General Woolsey, over lunch. Strange. It seems a long time ago. It was one of the fortunate turns of my life."

"Then you do like it here?"

"Yes, I do. I have found much of what I was looking for here, in this unexpected place. But I suppose that's the way life is: unexpected." At that moment, John felt a glimmering of alarm. Something was not right. Mr. Hannum usually took time to chuckle over a story as he told it. He had been unsmiling throughout this conversation.

"Mr. Hannum," John said, "you didn't ask me in here to talk about Chester Timson, did you?"

"No," David said, "I reckon I didn't."

"Then what is it?"

"I been settin' here all mornin', tryin' to figure out the right way t' tell you this, an' there ain't no right way, an' I still don't know how t' tell you, an' I'm goin' t' hold it agin her that she even ast me to. I got this this morning," he said, opening a drawer and taking out a letter. "It's from Miss Paula." He handed the letter to John, his expression bleak.

John felt drained, hollow, and his face was white as he drew the letter from its envelope. I knew it, he thought as he began to read. The letter was from Venice.

Dear Mr. Hannum,

I am writing this letter with anguish in my heart to request a favor of you. I have tried several times to write this letter to John, but cannot find the words to express what I must say.

As he may have told you, John and I came to have a certain affection for each other, and at the time of our parting we had discussed the possibility of marriage, in an informal way. But during these last weeks, I have had time to think and I have come to realize that my feeling for him was one of infatuation. I am sure that when he has considered the matter at greater length, he will realize that his feelings were of the same kind.

It is not that I do not hold John in the highest regard and affection. He is a wonderful person, and I hope that in time we will be able to be friends. But a more serious commitment would, I feel, be ill-advised.

In any event, I have decided against returning to Homer this summer, and will spend another year in Europe.

I realize that I am asking you to undertake an onerous task, but knowing the affection John has for you, I feel that it would be better if this news came from you. Whatever letter I might write to him could only seem cold and impersonal, which I would not want it to be.

Sincerely, Paula Van Denberg

John sat motionless, his face like stone. Then, slowly, quietly, the words spaced apart, he said, "She is a coward! That's why she wrote the letter to you!" And then: "Why didn't she send it to me? To me! She talks of me in the third person, as if I were an object. Not quite. No. She has 'affection' for me. As she has for her horse."

David let the burst of fury pass. He watched John light a cigarette and smoke it intently, wrapped up in his thoughts, the letter dangling from one hand. "I reckon I don't understand folks," David said at last. "I thought you an' Miss Paula was turnin' into a likely couple. I don't understand why she'd do such a thing."

"Well I think perhaps I do," John said, standing up so suddenly that he knocked his chair back against the wall. "I am not of her social class. I have no money to speak of, and so I am not worthy of her. And it's also possible that somebody told her my mother was a French Canadian servant girl. Probably that idiot John Tenaker." He turned and strode out of David's office. David sat in silence, watching him through the open door. John picked up a ledger and threw it across the bank. It smashed against a wall, the pages flying in all directions. John grabbed his coat from the tall cloak-tree and put it on.

"Where you goin'?" David called after him.

"Skating!" John shouted without looking back, and slammed the front door so hard that David was surprised the glass remained intact.

David walked to the shattered ledger and, stooping, began to assemble its pages. "He hadn't ought t' trust that ice at this time o' year," he said aloud, and prepared to do the afternoon's work alone.

Chapter Fifteen

David apprized Polly of the day's baleful events as soon as he got home.

"An' he never come back all afternoon?"

"Nope," he said.

John did not return until after dinner and, though Sarah had kept his meal warm on the stove, he went straight to his room. He was up and gone before breakfast, but David expected he would be at the bank at opening time, and he was. He was sitting on the teller's stool, writing something, when David arrived. "Good morning," John said, without looking up. A moment after David sat down in his office, John entered. "Here is my resignation," he said, handing David a sheet of paper. David examined it.

Dear Mr. Hannum,

In view of circumstances, I no longer wish to stay in Homer. I hereby tender my resignation.

John Lenox

"It ain't very polite, is it?" David said. "Polly 'n' me been good to you. I don't reckon we deserve treatin' like this."

"No sir, you don't."

"In that case, you ain't goin' t' mind if I throw this in the trash, where it belongs." He dropped the letter into his waste basket.

"You see, Mr. Hannum, it's just that I . . . "

David could see that the boy was on the verge of tears. His heart ached for him. But he realized that if he showed any sign of sympathy, John would break. He had never fully realized how sensitive the young man was.

"John, you're twenty-five year old. You're actin' more like five," David said sternly. "Now sit down. Did you hear me? Are you deaf 's well as stupid? I said: Sit down! You an' me's goin' t' talk as if we was both growed up. Peleg!" he called. "You keep an eye on things out there. Now," he said to John, who was in a wooden armchair, "it seems you lost your girl. You ain't the fust man it happened to, an' you ain't goin' t'be the last. If she don't value you that much, there ain't no reason for you to value her that much neither. Truth is, I'm putty disappointed in her."

"It's not just losing her," John said. "It's the reason. It's this whole matter of social status. It's disgusting to me."

"You sure you got holt o' the right reason?"

"Yes. I'm certain. Once it became known my father had left me no money, people began to shun me."

"Well ain't that the saddest tale I ever hear? The's wuss things, John, much wuss. Why'd you even want t' be 'round people that don't want you? You won't see me smilin' up the Tenakers an' the Swaynes."

Someone entered the bank. It was Mis' Allis. "Excuse me," John said. "Let me take care of this." David watched him count out Mis' Allis's money, smiling at her and enquiring about her health.That's a good sign, David thought. John returned.

"Tell me the story about your mother and father," David said. "Seems like you been avoiding it."

"There's nothing much to tell. She was French-Canadian

from Maine, and she came down to work for my father's family. She spoke English with an accent. My father fell in love with her and wanted to marry her. His father was furious, and forbade the marriage. My father told him he was going to marry her anyway. And he did. And his father cut him out of his will. There was a modest annuity from his grandfather, which couldn't be taken away from him, but when his own father died, he was left not one penny. All the money went to his brothers and his sister. He did well in business for a few years, but in the end he lost his money."

"And what about your mother?"

"I never knew her. She died when I was very young. I know her only from pictures and the reminiscences of friends like General Woolsey. My father never spoke of his family. The combination of things made my father a very quiet man, almost a recluse. We were never close."

"Seems like your folks had a lot o' grit. Mebbe it give out in the second generation." He caught a flash of anger in John's eyes, as he had hoped he would. "Mother a good woman?"

"Everyone says she was a wonderful woman."

"Father a good man? Fair in his dealin's? Sent you t'school an' all?"

"Yes."

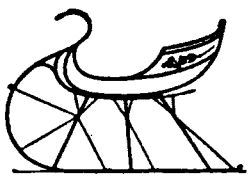
"You ought to 'a' had a father like mine."

"I suppose you're right," John said.

"You bet I am. Now let's get down to brass tacks. Who do you think you are? *What* do you think you are?"

John was thoughtful for a time. "I feel that I'm a New Yorker. To some extent, I feel that I'm French. I feel that I'm a musician. And I am beginning to feel that I'm a banker. And I'm an American."

"I reckon those are the things you are, then. A man is putty much what he thinks he is. Billy P. Randall taught me that. What do you care what people like the Tenakers think? An' if Paula is fool enough to pass up a man as good as you be, then she hain't what I thought she was. Guess I jest didn't know her."



Someone entered the bank. John stood up. "I'll take care of 'em," David said. "You go spend the day skatin', but stay near the shore. They's weak spots this time o' year."

"I can't do that," John said. "I behaved badly enough yesterday, and I apologize."

"'Tain't necess'ry. An' as for you thinkin' you're so important round here, I reckon I still know how t'run m'own bank. You go skatin' an' be home in time for supper, an' don't bring Polly a gloomy count'nance."

There was snow into April, patches and mounds of it, soiled and sullen-looking. Scattered along the town's sidewalks were the patches of ice young boys had created by running and then sliding on the packed snow until it was smooth. Some of the slides had been improved by the surreptitious nocturnal addition of water, and these were truly treacherous to the unwary pedestrian. But to the children, the slides provided one of the small thrills of the winter, and the boys and a few of the more adventurous girls would run toward a slide and launch themselves along it, legs apart, one foot in advance of the other, arms outstretched for balance. Now and then some adult would sew rock-salt on a slide, and some boy would pour water on it again in the night. Next morning it would be as good as new, or better. Stove ashes were more effective as a destroyer of slides. Ashes were strewn along most of the sidewalks in town.

The slides were at their best just before disappearing. Thaws made them slick with water. There was one such slide that John had been using, a long one on Main Street, on the way from the Hannum house to the bank. He used it for the last time one wet April morning. He lost his balance and fell, soaking his clothes and giving his elbow a crack he did not forget for days. On such mornings, the eaves troughs rushed with water and the vertical drainpipes filled to overflowing the big wooden rain barrels that stood by every house, reservoirs of soft water that the ladies used to wash their hair. There were patches of water on the ice of the lake, and no one gave a thought to skating now. Brown grasses showed through the thinning snow on the farm-fields on the hills, and around the bases of trees beige patches of sodden earth appeared in the snow, like collars on the tree trunks.

The ache John felt over Paula was growing dull. The April winds dried up the mud, but its blessing was mixed, since they also blew the winter's accumulation of ash around the town and into everyone's eyes and mouth. The world was drab, all grays and blacks and duns, except when the sky became blue for an hour or so. At last the blossoms appeared on the trees, white on the apple, pink on the cherry, looking at first like misty haloes in the branches, then growing more substantial and startling as the days went by. Then heavy rain pounded the earth. Under every maple tree, patches of red buds lay in the wet. But at last the first fragile yellow-green leaves were born, and the air became soft, and Peleg Hopkins did not have to keep the stove going. A cardinal appeared in Aunt Polly's garden, its bright red a promise of the summer's blossoms.

John opened the windows and let the spring come in.

On one such morning, David called him into the rear room. "Busy?" he said.

"No," John said.

"Set down," David said. He looked up with his grin. "Ever own a hog?"

"No." Now what was this leading to?

"Ever feel like ownin' one?"

"I don't recall ever being overcome by such a craving, no."

"Like pork?"

"In moderation. I presume you have a reason for asking."

"Read this." David handed him a telegram.

Bangs Galilee Raisin, John read. "Fascinating," he said, "if a trifle mysterious."

"What?" David said. "You mean t' tell me you don't know what 'Bangs Galilee' means, nor who Raisin is?"

"I'm afraid not."

"How much money you got?"

"Well," said John, "since the exorbitant rent and board you and Mrs. Bixbee charge me only permits me to save about two thirds of my salary, I have, including what I had when I arrived, two thousand four hundred and ninety-seven dollars and twelve cents."

"Is it where you can put your hands on it?"

John took some slips of paper from his pocketbook and handed them to David.

"Hmm," mused the latter, examining them. "Well, I owe you quite a little bunch o' money, don't I? Couldn't you 'a' done better'n to keep it in this bank at four percent?"

"Perhaps so, perhaps not. I preferred to keep it here, at all events."

"Thought the old man was safe, anyway, didn't you?" David said, trying to hide his pleasure.

"Yes."

"Is that all you got?"

"Well, as you know, I have a beautiful line of worthless mining stocks, and there is that oh-so-promising Pennsylvania property." At this last mention, David looked at him as if about to speak, but whatever thought crossed his mind went unexpressed. He sat silent for a moment, fingering the yellow telegram. "Raisin," he said at last, "is Gen'ral Woolsey. The gen'ral an' I have a friend in the commodities market out to Chicago. We've had a good many deals with him and through him, an' he never give us a wrong steer, far's I know. That is, I never done as he told us without comin' out all right, though he's given me a good many pointers I never did nothin' about. 'Bangs Galilee' means 'buy pork' an' I reckon that means Gen'ral Woolsey's heard from him. I've been watching the market for quite a spell myself, an' the standard pork's a good deal lower'n it costs to pack it. So I've made up my mind to buy a few thousan' barrel for fam'ly use. It's a handy thing to have in the house, an' I thought mebbe it wouldn't be a bad thing for you to have a little too. It looks cheap to me, an' mebbe by 'm' by what you don't eat you can sell."

"Well," John said, "you see me at table every day and you know what my appetite is. How much pork do you think I could take care of?"

"At the present price, I think about two thousan' barrels would give you enough to eat for a spell, an' mebbe leave you a few barrels to dispose of if you should happen to strike a feller later on that wanted it wuss'n you do."

John opened his eyes a little. "I should only have a margin of a dollar and a quarter."

"Well, I've got a notion that that'll carry you," David said. "It may go lower'n what it is now. I never bought anythin' yet that didn't drop some, an' I guess nobody but a fool ever did buy at the bottom more'n once. But I've had an idee for some time that it was about bottom, an' this here telegraph wouldn't 'a' been sent if the gen'ral an' our friend in Chicago didn't think so too. An' I've had some other cor'spondence on it."

"Let me ask you a question," John said. "Do you know something about that property in Pennsylvania that I don't?"

"Well," David said. "Mebbe I do an' mebbe I don't."

John smiled. "If you won't answer that question, perhaps you will answer this one: Would you consider taking that land as collateral?"

"I might. For how much?"

"Twenty-five hundred dollars. 'Bangs Galilee' is too tempting to pass up."

"Well, I don't want to tempt you exac'ly, an' certainly I don't want to urge you. The' ain't no sure things but death an' taxes, as the sayin' is, but buyin' pork at these prices is buyin' somethin' that's got value, an' you can't wipe it out. In other words, it's buyin' a warranted article at a price considerably lower'n it can be produced for, an' though it may go lower, if a man can stick, it's bound to level up in the long run." He sat pensively for a moment. "Have you got that much conf'dence in the gen'ral an' me?"

"Let me put it this way," John said. "I would make a trip to Outer Mongolia if you and the general told me it would be a good thing to do."

"I see."

"The problem is," John said, "that if I invest five thousand, I shall have nothing to remargin the trade in case the market goes below a certain point."

"Well," David said, "that's true. But I'll carry the trade down as far as your money will go, in case more margins have to be called. You're sure you want to do it? It's a mite more than I intended for you."

"Yes, I want to take the risk."

"All right," David said. "Draw up your papers. I'll lend

you the money."

Amos Slocum died that summer.

He took a summer cold in June, and the cold evolved into pneumonia. Doc Hayes was in constant attendance, and as the disease approached its crisis, Slocum's friends came and went on the Eagle Hotel's covered porch, keeping vigil. John was amazed that so seemingly misanthropic a man should have so many friends. But then, John did not know why he himself liked Amos Slocum. He simply did. And that he should have affection for a man he had so heartily disliked on the night of their first meeting was a subject for reflection. Late of an evening, Dick Larrabee came to the Hannum house and said to John, "Ame wants to see you," in a doleful voice that told only too well what Slocum's condition was.

John hurried with him to the Eagle, and Mrs. Slocum, a small work-worn and worried woman, showed him to their private quarters, where John had never been. Amos lay among pillows with glazed eyes, but when he saw John they focused and cleared for a moment. He tried to say something, but the effort failed. John took a chair by the bed.

John looked back into Slocum's eyes, then took the man's right hand between his own hands. "You'll be fine, Ame," he said. Slocum gave an almost imperceptible negative nod. "Yes you will," John said, choking up. "If you don't, where will I go for pickled elephant?"

Amos tried to laugh, but the sound decayed into a feeble cough. And so he smiled. It was the only time John had ever seen him smile.

He died toward morning. John was astonished to learn a few days later that Amos Slocum had designated him executor of his estate.

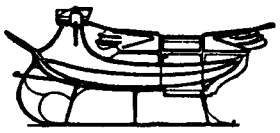
Mrs. Slocum, who shared with a daughter in Baltimore all the proceeds of that estate, told David and John that she would like to sell the hotel and go to live in Baltimore, and the two men arranged for the sale of the property.

Of all Slocum's friends, the most aggrieved was Dick Larrabee. "Who'll I go fishin' with?" he said in despair after Amos died.

"Me," John said. "You can teach me to fish."

Theodore Van Denberg wrote to David saying that the family would not return to Homer that summer. They were going to Europe for the marriage of Paula to a German count, after which they would vacation with relatives in Santa Barbara, California.

As the summer progressed, John noticed that he was invited to none of the social affairs of the town's wealthy set, which fact left him indifferent. Paula had written to David, requesting that he sell Kirby. Somewhat to David's surprise, John bought the animal. And so John had his horses, his piano, his work, the evening companionship of Dick Larrabee, who was turning him into an expert fisherman, and his Bangs Galilee anxieties. There were times when David had reason to wish that all the swine of the world had perished with those whom Shylock said "Your prophet the Nazarite conjured the devil into."



The price of pork dropped off a little, and hung about the lower figure for some time. Then it began to advance by degrees until the quotation was a dollar above the purchase price.

John's impulse was to sell, but David made no sign. The market held firm for a while, even going a little higher. Then it began to drop rather more rapidly than it had advanced, to about what the pork had cost, and for a long period it fluctuated only a few cents one way or the other. This was followed by a steady decline to the extent of half a dollar. As the reports came in, it looked as if it would go lower, and it did. Finally, it reached the point where John did not have the courage to examine the market reports, and for several days he simply tried to keep the subject off his mind. Mrs. Randall's land had been sold and her son Charles had returned to Homer with his wife. They had bought a small house in town and they all lived there along with Charlie's four-year-old daughter. Charlie opened a small grocery shop, and somewhat to David's surprise, it immediately did well.

One morning about ten Peleg brought in the Syracuse paper and laid it on David's desk. More by impulse than intention, John went into the back room and glanced at the first page. One of the headlines read *Great Excitement on Chicago Board of Trade: Pork Market Reported Cornered: Bears on the Run.* John thought it was the most delightful literature he had ever read. David, who had been in Syracuse for two days, had returned the previous night. When he came into the bank, John handed him the paper.

"Well," he said, holding it off at arm's length, and then putting on his glasses, "them fellers that thought they was *all* hogs up west are havin' a change of heart, are they? I reckoned they would 'fore they got through with it. It's been ruther a long pull, though, eh?" He looked at John with a grin.

"Yes it has," John said with a deep sigh.

"Things looked ruther colicky the last two three days, eh? Did you think the jig was up an' the money was in the box?"

"Rather. The fact is, I am ashamed to say, that for a few

days back I haven't looked at a quotation. I suppose you must have carried me to some extent. How much was it?"

"Well, I kept the trade margined, of course, an' if we'd sold out at the bottom, you'd have owed me somewhere along about a thousan' or fifteen hunderd, plus the loan. But it was only in the slump, an' it didn't last long. An' anyway, I cal'lated to carry that pork to where it would 'a' catched fire. I wa'n't worried none, an' you didn't let on to be, an' so I didn't say anythin'."

"What do you think about it now?"

"My opinion is now," David said, "that it's goin' to putty near where it belongs, an' mebbe higher, an' them's my advices. We can sell now at some profit, an' o' course the bears'll jump on again as it goes up, an' the other fellers'll take the profits from time to time. If I was where I could watch the market, I'd mebbe try to make a turn in't occasionally, but I guess as 'tis we'd better set down an' let her take her own gait. I don't mean to try an' git the top price — I'm always willin' to let the other feller make a little — but we've waited for quite a spell, an' it's goin' our way, an' we might's well wait a little longer."

"All right, John said. "And I am very obliged to you."

"Sho, sho," David said, dismissing the thanks.

When the deal was finally closed out, toward the end of August, John's condition in the world was materially altered. David suggested that, now John could afford the ticket, he should perhaps take a little vacation. He said that he and Peleg Hopkins, who had by some miraculous process learned to cipher and read reasonably well and even was taking an interest in the business, could hold the fort for a few days.

When he arrived in New York, John could not escape comparing his condition at present to that at the time of his departure. Was it only thirteen months ago? It seemed an eternity.

Over lunch at the Union Club, he described his adventures — and the experience did indeed, from the perspective of New York City, seem like a series of adventures — to General Woolsey, whose face was a constantly changing mirror of the events described. He smiled, frowned, chuckled, and laughed to the edge of helplessness at the tale of 'Lizer Howe's horse. His laughter drew the disapproving glare of more solemn diners. The general in return favored them with a look of lofty, withering, and aristocratic indifference. "Go on, John," he said. From that point on, however, he and John tried to keep their voices low.

The luncheon stretched into the late afternoon.

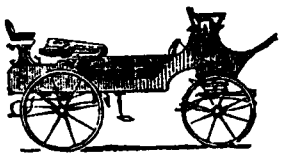
"Then I may conclude," the general said at last, "that I did not advise you wrongly."

"No sir," John said. "You and Mr. Hannum have . . . " He paused, looking for an undramatic way to express his thought. But there was none. "You've saved me," he concluded.

"Nonsense, nonsense," the general said uncomfortably.

"No. With all due respect, I disagree. It is not nonsense. When I look at the poverty and pain in the world, I realize that I was in far better condition than most of humanity when I left New York. But when you have been reared in conditions of unreality, as I was, a slim bank account and a lack of prospects can be terrifying. And now that is behind me."

"Good, good," the general said gruffly. "And I am highly pleased. I am particularly pleased that you like David. I have always respected the man."



"I assure you that I do," John said.The general nodded thoughtfully.

John and the general, resplendent in formal clothes, went that evening to a symphony concert. John spent the next day shopping for things he needed for a social event he had in mind. The following day he revisited old haunts. He watched the equestrians in Central Park and felt sorry for them because they had no open fields and hills in which to ride, as he did. He dropped in at his old club and encountered a few of his old "friends". They sensed a change in him, apparently, for they were eager to know where he had been and what he had been doing. He gave them evasive answers and a pleasant smile, and imagined the comments about them that Dick Larrabee would offer if he were here now to observe them.

He spent his last day shopping for books and, at Schirmer's, for music. He found some music that interested him and bought it. How different were his feelings about music, as they were about other things, now that it was a thing he pursued only for his own joy, rather than for some ultimate professional purpose. He considered buying a grand piano but rejected the idea. There was no place in the well-furnished Hannum home that he could put it. He would have to be satisfied for the present with his upright.

The train took him to Syracuse, where he transfered to the southbound Binghamton line. He reached Homer on Sunday night, as he had planned in advance, and David was at the station to meet him.

The next day, John announced his grand plan for a party the following Saturday evening, assuming that Mrs. Bixbee would give her permission for it, which of course she did. He said that he planned to do all the cooking himself. He would prepare a French dinner. This part of the plan, however, was

immediately vetoed by Sarah, who said firmly that no man was going to set foot in her kitchen and make a mess of it. A French dinner was therefore out of the question, and so John settled for a good American dinner in which, Sarah assured him with a sniff, he would not be disappointed. He settled for whatever small Gallic touches he might be able to superimpose on the proceedings. He took David into his confidence about these.

John's guests assembled at six o'clock Saturday evening. David was shaved pink and his face shone with soap and satisfaction. He wore what was apparently a new suit.

"I bought these clo'es," David said, "to wear when bein' entertained by the fust families. How do I look?"

"Turn around," Mrs. Bixbee said. "Well," she said, "you look from behind like a red-headed snappin' bug, an' in front like a reg'lar slinkum. I'll bet that you hain't throwed away less'n twenty dollars on that foolishness." David laughed at her indulgently, which only heightened her annoyance.

Mrs. Bixbee herself was grand in black silk and lace collar fastened with a shell-cameo pin not quite as large as a saucer. Mrs. Randall had been transformed and transfigured, utterly unlike the forlorn woman John had met. Only the fine eyes, large and brown, were the same, and even they were different in that there was now a calm happiness in them. Dick Larrabee looked a little stiff in his best suit, but his wife seemed at ease in her dark dress, a shy but bright little woman whose eyes indicated a sense of humor she would surely need to live with Dick Larrabee.

His guests now assembled, John gave a wink and a slight nod to David, who started for the door.

"Where you goin'?" Mrs. Bixbee demanded.

"Woodshed," David answered cryptically.

"Woodshed?" she exclaimed, and started to rise from her armchair, as if to follow him.

"You set still," David commanded. "Somethin' I forgot."

"What do you want in the woodshed? Can't you let Sairy git it for you?"

"No," David said with a grin. "Sairy might skoosh it."

Mrs. Bixbee shook her head and settled back in her chair. David returned a few minutes later, carrying a battered old pail that contained crushed ice and two bottles. He was accompanied by Sarah, who carried a tray of shallow crystal wine glasses. "Aunt Polly," John said, "these glasses are my first present to you."

"John!" she said, shocked. "You hadn't ought to 'a' done that. You can't afford it."

John exchanged a glance with David, who had apparently said nothing to her about the pork deal. "Oh yes I can," John said, "thanks to your brother."

David by now was struggling to unwire one of the bottles with an ice pick, and Mrs. Bixbee turned toward him. "What you got there?" she demanded.

"Vewve Clickot's universal an' sovereign remedy," David said, reading the label and bringing the corners of his left eye and mouth almost together in a wink to John and Dick Larrabee. "For toothache, earache, burns, scalds, warts, dispepsy, fallin' o' the hair, wind-gall, ring-bone, spavin, disappointed affections, and pips in hens." The cork came out of the bottle with a loud pop, bounced off the ceiling, and was caught in mid-air by Dick Larrabee.

"David Hannum," Mrs. Bixbee declared, "I believe that that's a bottle of champagne."

"If it ain't," David said, pouring it into one of the new glasses, "John's been swindled out of a few shillin'." He handed the glass to John, who offered it to Mrs. Bixbee.

"No, thank you," she said with a little toss of the head. "I'm a daughter o' temperance. I don't believe," she said to Mrs. Randall, "that that bottle ever cost less'n a dollar." David burst out laughing, and spilled some of the champagne he was pouring into another glass. Mrs. Bixbee looked at him suspiciously, unable to fathom what had made him laugh.

"Please, Aunt Polly, try some," John said. "After all, this is a special occasion for me."

Surrendering to this sophism, Mrs. Bixbee took the glass and sipped the wine.

"How'd you like it?" David asked.

"Well," she said, as she wiped her eyes, into which the gas had driven tears, "I guess I could get along if I couldn't have it regular."

"Don't taste good?" David teased.

"Well," she said, "I never did care any great for cider, an' this tastes to me about as if I was drinkin' cider an' sniffin' horseradish at one an' the same time."

"How is it, John?" said David, sipping his wine, now that he had served everyone.

"Good. Very good. I suppose it's an acquired taste. But I must say that I'm enjoying it."

"Me too," Dick Larrabee said.

"Well," Mrs. Bixbee said to David, "you hadn't ought to 'a' let John spend his money like this."

"Well, I never!" David said. "I believe if the meetin' house roof was to blow off you'd lay it onto me somehow. You got the wrong pig by the ear, as usual. It was John's doin's, not mine."

To be continued