

## SONG LAKE SUMMER

### *Continued*

"My brothers an' sisters — 'ceptin' of Polly — was putty nigh as bad in respect of cuffs an' such like," David continued. An' my stepmarm was, on the whole, the wust of all. She hadn't no children of her own, an' it appeared's if I was jes' plain pizen to her. 'Twa'n't so much slappin' an' cuffin' with her as 'twas tongue. She could say things that'd raise a blister like pizen ivy. I s'pose I was about as ordinary a no-account-lookin' little cuss as you ever see, an' slinkin' in my manners. The air of our home circle wa'n't calculated to raise heroes in."

After a pensive pause, David said, "I got three, four years o' schoolin' an' made out to read an' write an' cipher up to long division 'fore I got through, but after I got to be six year old, school or no school, I had to work reg'lar at anything I had strength for, an' more too. Chores in the mornin' an' after school, an' a two-mile walk to git there. As far's clo'es was concerned, any ol' thing that'd hang together was good enough for me. But by the time the older boys had outgrown their duds, an' they was passed on to me, they wa'n't much left on 'em. A pair of old cowhide boots that leaked in more snow 'n' water'n they kept out, an' a couple o' pairs o' woolen socks that was putty much all darns, was expected to see me through the winter, an' I went barefoot from the time the snow was off the ground till it flew agin in fall. The' wa'n't but two season o' the year with me — them of chillblains an' stone bruises."

David paused and stared into the comfortable glow of the fire and then, discovering to his apparent surprise that his cigar had gone out, lighted it from a coal picked up with the tongs.

"Farming's indeed a hard life," Mrs. Randall said.

"An' yet, as it seems to me as I look back," David resumed pensively, "the wust on't was that nobody ever give me a kind word, 'cept Polly. I s'pose I got kind o' used to bein' cold an' tired, dressin' in a snowdrift where it blowed into the attic, an' goin' out to fodder cattle 'fore sunup, pickin' up stone in the blazin' sun, an' doin' all the odd jobs my father set me to, an' the older ones shirked onto me. That

was the reg'lar order o' things. But I remember I never did git used to never pleasin' nobody. Course, I didn't expect nothin' from my stepmarm, an' the only way I ever knowed I'd done my stint, far's father was concerned, was that he didn't say nothin'. But sometimes the older ones'd git settin' around, talkin' an' laughin', havin' popcorn an' apples an' that, an' I'd kind o' sidle up, wantin' to join 'em an' that, an' some on 'em'd say, 'What you doin' here? Time you was in bed,' an' give me a shove or a cuff.

"Yes ma'am, the wust on't was that I was kind o' scairt the whole time. Once in a while Polly'd give me a morsel o' comfort, but Polly wa'n't but little older 'n me, an' bein' the youngest girl was chored to death herself."

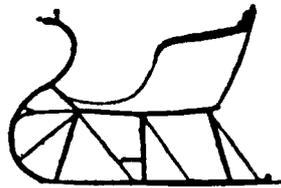
It had stopped snowing, but the wind still came in gusty blasts, whirling the drifts against the glass of the bank.

"It's amazing," Mrs. Randall said, "how much trouble and sorrow there is in the world, and how soon it begins. Mr. Lenox, could I have a little more of that whisky?" John, somewhat amazed, leaned forward and poured it into the outheld glass. A soft steam was rising from Mrs. Randall's shoes as they rested, one upright and the other on its side, near the stove. "You know, David," she said, talking to him a little as if he actually were still a boy, "I have never been able to reconcile how many good things there are in the world and how little of that pleasure most of us get. I go to church out of habit, perhaps, and I enjoy the Christmas service. But it is hard to have faith in the Lord's providence when you go to bed hungry every night."

"That's so, Mis' Randall, that's so. 'Doubts assail an' oft prevail,' as the hymn book says. I hope I ain't tirin' you with my goin's on."

"No, it's pleasant to sit here listening to you. But I must say that nobody would suppose, seeing you now, that you were such a forlorn little creature as you portray."

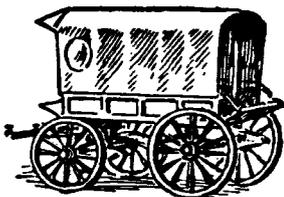
"It's jest as I'm tellin' an' more besides," David said, and took a long breath, which suggested to John that he was coming at last to the point of this narrative. "Well," he said, "it come along to a time when I was 'twixt thirteen and fourteen. They was a circus billed to show down here in Homer, an' every barn an' shed for miles around had pictures



stuck onto 'em of elephants an' rhinoceroses an' every animal that went into the ark, an' girls ridin' bareback an' jumpin' through hoops an' fellers ridin' bareback an' turnin' summersets, an' doin' turnovers on swings, an' clowns gettin' hoss-whipped, an' every kind of a thing that could be pictured out; an' how they was to be a grand procession at ten o'clock, with golden chariots an' scriptural allegories, an' the whole business — admission twenty-five cents, children under twelve et cetera an' so forth.

"Well, I hadn't no more idee o' goin' to that circus'n I had o' flyin' to the moon. But the night before the show somethin' waked me 'bout twelve o'clock. I don't know how 'twas. I'd been mendin' fence all day, an' generally I never knowed nothin' after my head struck the bed till mornin'. But that night somethin' waked me, an' I went an' looked out the window an' there was the whole thing goin' by the house. They was more or less moon, an' I see the elephant an' the big wagons, the drivers kind o' noddin' over the dashboards. An' they was chariots with canvas covers, I don't know how many on 'em, an' the cages of the tigers an' the lions, an' all.

"Well, I got up the next mornin' at sunup an' done my chores. An' after breakfast I set off for the ten-acre lot where I was mendin' fence. The ten acre was the farthest off of any, Homer way, an' I had my dinner in a tin pail so't I needn't lose no time goin' home at noon, an' as luck would have it, the' wa'n't nobody with me that mornin'. Well, I got down to the lot an' set to work. But somehow I couldn't git that show out o' my head nohow. As I said, I hadn't no more notion o' goin' to that circus'n I had of kingdom come. I'd never had two shillin' o' my own in my whole life. But the more I thought on't the uneasier I got. Somethin' seemed pullin' an' haulin' at me, an' finally I give in. I allowed I'd see the procession anyway, if it took a leg, an' mebber I could git back without nobody missin' me. 'T any rate, I'd take the chances of a lickin' jest once — for that's what it meant — an' I got up an' put out for the village lickity-cut. I done the distance lively, I can tell you, an' the stone bruises never hurt me once."



"When I got down to the place 'tween Homer an' Cortland where the circus was, it seemed to me as if the whole population o' the county was there. I'd never seen so many folks together in my life, an' for a spell it seemed to me as if everybody was a-lookin' at me an' sayin', 'That's old Hannum's boy Dave, playin' hooky.' An' I sneaked round dreadin' somebody'd give me away. But I finally

found that nobody wa'n't payin' any attention to me. They was there to see the show, an' one red-haired boy more or less wa'n't no partic'lar account. Well, putty soon the procession hove into sight an' the' was a reg'lar stampede among the boys, an' when it got by, I run an' caught up with it agin, till they fetched up inside the tent. Then I went off to one side — it must 'a' been about eleven or half-past — an' eat my dinner. I had a devourin' appetite. An' then I thought I'd jes' walk 'round a spell, an' light out for home. But they was so many things to see an' hear — all the sideshow pictures o' fat women an' livin' skeletons an' wild women o' Madygaskar an' wild men o' Borneo an' snakes windin' round women's necks, hand organs, fellers that played the 'cordion an' mouth-pipes an' drum an' cymbals all at once, an' such like — that I forgot all about the time an' the ten-acre lot an' the stone fence. An' fust thing I knowed the folks was makin' for the ticket wagon an' that band begun to play inside the tent. Be I taxin' your patience over the limit, Mis' Randall?"

"No," she said. "I was only thinking of a circus I went to once." And she gave a little laugh and sipped her whisky decorously.

"Well," David said, taking a pull on the cigar and then throwing it into the stove, "mebbe what's comin'll interest you more'n the rest on't has. I was standin' gawpin' round, listenin' to the band an' watchin' the folks git their tickets, when all of a sudden I felt a twitch at my hair. It had a way o' workin' out o' the holes in my old chip straw hat, an' somebody was pullin' on it. I looked up an' I knowed who he was, for I'd seen him before, but o' course he didn't know me. It was Billy P. Randall, an' wa'n't he rigged out to kill."

For the last few minutes John had been feeling an anticipation of something of this kind. Mrs. Randall leaned forward and cried, "What did he have on? David! What did he have on?"

"Well, David said, "near's I can remember, he had on a blue broadcloth claw-hammer coat with flat gilt buttons, an' a double-breasted plaid velvet vest, an' pearl-gray pants strapped down to his boots, which was of shiny leather, an' a high pointed collar an' blue tie with a pin in it — I remember wonderin' if it could be real gold — an' a yeller-white plug beaver hat."

At the mention of each article, Mrs. Randall nodded affirmation, her eyes fixed on David's face, and when he concluded she broke out breathlessly, "Yes! Yes yes! David, he wore those very same clothes and he took me to that very same show that very same night!"

John listened through the bank parlor's intense hush to the whipping of blown snow, sudden sleety hisses against the

window. Then Mrs. Randall regained her composure and said, "Please continue, David. What did he say to you?"

"I'll tell you near's I can remember, an' I can remember putty near. As I told you, I felt this twitch at my hair."

"What are you thinkin' about, sonny?" he says.

"I dunno, I says, lookin' away an' diggin' my big toe into the dust. An' then, I dunno how I got the spunk to, for I was shyen a rat, I says, 'Guess I was thinkin' 'bout mendin' that fence up in the ten-acre lot.'

"Ain't you goin' to the circus?" he says.

"I hain't got no money to go to circuses, I says, rubbin' the toes o' one foot over t'other.

"Well, he says, 'why don't you crawl under the canvas?'

"That kind o' riled me, shy's I was. 'I don't crawl under no canvases, I says. 'If I can't go in same's other folks, I'll stay out,' I says, lookin' square at him for the fust time. He wa'n't exactly smilin' at me but the' was a look in his eyes that was the next thing to it."

"How well I remember that look," Mrs. Randall said with a smile, an almost imperceptible affirmative nod, and a far expression in the eyes. "It was as if he were laughing at you, and yet he wasn't, with his arm around your neck. He had a quality of gentle amusement at life."

David nodded in reminiscent sympathy and rubbed his bald pate with the back of his hand, then resumed. "Well, he says to me, 'would you like to go the circus?' An' it occurred to me that I did want to go, more'n anythin' I ever wanted to before — nor since, it seems to me. But I tell you the truth, I was so far from expectin' to go 't I really hadn't knowed I wanted to. I looked up at him, an' then down agin, an' I began tenderin' up a stone bruise on one heel agin the other instep, an' all I says was, bein' so dumb shy, 'I dunno.'

"But I guess he seen in my face what my feelin's was, for he kind o' laughed, an' pulled out half a dollar an' says, 'D'you think you could git a couple o' tickets in that crowd? If you can, I think I'll go myself, but I don't want to git my boots all dust.'

"I allowed I could try. An' I guess them bare feet o' mine tore up the dust some gettin' the tickets, for fear some one that knowed me'd see me with a half a dollar an' think I must 'a' stole it. But I got 'em, an' carried 'em back to him, an' he took 'em an' put 'em in his vest pocket, an' handed me a ten-cent piece an' says, 'Mebbe you'll want somethin' in the way of refreshments for yourself an' for the elephant,' he says, an' walked off toward the tent. I stood stone still, lookin' after him. He got off about rod or so an' stopped an' looked back. 'Ain't you comin'?' he says.

"Be I goin' with you?" I says.

"Why not?" he says. 'Unless you'd rather go alone.' An'

he put his finger an' thumb into his vest pocket. Well, ma'am, I looked at him a minute, with his shiny hat an' boots an' fine clo'es an' gold pin an' I thought of my ragged ol' shirt an' cotton pants an' ol' chip hat with the brim 'most gone an' my tin pail an' all.

"I ain't fit to, I says, ready to cry.

"He jes' laughed an' says, 'Nonsense. Come along. A man needn't be ashamed of his workin' clo'es.' An' if he didn't take holt o' my hand! No man'd ever took my hand before. An' in we went that way together."

"How like him that was," Mrs. Randall said softly.

"Yes ma'am," David said, "I reckon it was. Well, I was ready to sink into the ground with shyness, but that wore off some after a while, an' we two seen the whole show, I tell you. We walked round the cages an' we fed the elephant that is, he bought the stuff an' I fed 'em. He says t'me, he says, 'Mind you git the right end.'" David laughed quietly. "Well, ma'am, then we got a couple o' seats, an' the doin's begun."

"I remember exactly how he looked that day," Mrs. Randall said with a distant smile. "So splendidly dressed, so debonair. And I will confess that I was very proud to sit by his side that night, envied by every girl in the village." She fell silent, as she and David lingered on the memory of this man long gone. Gone, like my mother, John thought. The difference is that they remember Billy P. Randall. No one remembers my mother now but General Woolsey. John felt, watching David and Mrs. Randall in their silence by the fire, that he should not be here, that their conversation was far too private. Yet he would not have missed it for the world. At last Mrs. Randall stirred herself, and came back into the present. "Do go on, David," she said.

David nodded assent. "I hain't goin' to go over the whole show, as well's I remember it. The' didn't nothin' git away from me that afternoon. Once I come near to stickin a piece o' gingerbread into my ear, 'stead o' my mouth. I had my ten-cent piece that Billy P. give me, but he wouldn't let me buy nothin'. An' when the gingerbread man come along again he says, 'Are you hungry, Dave?' I'd told him my name by then. Well, I was a growin' boy an' I was hungry putty much all the time. He bought two big squares an' give me one, an' when I'd swallowed it, he says, 'Guess you better tackle this one too,' he says, 'because I've dined.' I didn't exactly know what 'dined' meant, but I tackled it all right. Mm, mmm.

"Well, we done the whole programmy: gingerbread, pink lemonade — an' he took some o' that — popcorn, peanuts, pep'mint candy. Scat my dogs! An' he was payin' for everythin'. I thought he was jes' made o' money! An' I remember how we talked about all the doin's, the ridin' an'

jumpin' an' summersettin' an' all. An' once I looked up at him, an' he looked down at me with that curious look in his eyes an' put his hand on my shoulder. Well now I tell you, I had a queer feelin' go up an' down my back, an' I like to up an' cried."

"David," Mrs. Randall said, "he was always like that. Oh my yes. Oh my, David." John saw that two tears were tracing their way down her old face. "We lived together, husband and wife, for seven years, and he never gave me a cross word."

"I don't doubt it a morsel," David said, leaning forward to poke the fire, which action, John noticed, kept his face hidden from Mrs. Randall. Finally he straightened and blew his nose like a blast on a French horn. No, John thought, more like a tuba.

"Well, the circus finally come to an end, an' the crowd hustled to git out's as if they was afraid the tent'd come down on 'em. I got kind o' messed up in 'em, an' somebody tried to git my tin pail, or I thought he did, an' the upshot was that I lost sight o' Billy P. an' couldn't make out to catch a glimpse of him nowhere. An' then I come down to earth, kerchug! It was five o' clock, an' I had better'n four mile to walk, mostly up hill, an' if I knowed anythin' 'bout the old man, I had the all-firedest licking ahead o' me I'd ever got, an' that was sayin' a good deal. But boy's I was, I had grit enough to allow 'twas wuth it, an' off I put."

"Did he lick you much?" Mrs. Randall asked anxiously, as if these events had passed very recently.

"Well," David replied, "he done his best. He was layin' for me when I struck the front gate — I knowed it wa'n't no use to try the back door — an' he took me by the ear, 'most pulled it off, an' marched me off to the barn shed without a word. I never see him so mad. Seemed like he couldn't speak for a while, but finally he says, 'Where you been all day?'"

"Down to the village," I says.

"What you been up to down there?" he says.

"Went to the circus," I says, thinkin' I might's well make a clean breast on't.

"Where'd you git the money?" he says.

"Mr. Randall took me," I says.

"You lie!" he says. 'You stole the money somewheres an' I'll trounce it out of you, if I kill you.'

"Well," David said, twisting in his chair almost, John thought, as if he could still feel the beating, "as I told you, he done his best. I was willin' to quit before he was. Fact was, he overdone it a little, an' he had to throw water in my face 'fore he got through. An' he done that as thorough as the other thing. I was somethin' like a chicken jest out o' the cistern. I crawled off to bed the best I could, but I didn't lay

on my back for a good spell, I can tell you."

"You poor little creature," Mrs. Randall said.

"'Twas more'n wuth it, Mis' Randall," David said emphatically and cheerfully. "I'd had the most enjoyable day, I might say the only enjoyable day, I'd ever had in my whole life, an' I hain't never forgot it. I got over the lickin' in course of time, but I've been enjoyin' that circus for forty year. The' wa'n't but one thing to hinder it, an' that's this: that I hain't never been able to remember — an' to this day I lay awake nights tryin' to — if I said 'Thank you' to Billy P. An' I never seen him agin after that day."

"How was that?"

"Well, that day was the turnin' point with me. The next day I lit out with what duds I could git together, an' as much grub's I could pack in that tin pail, an' the next time I see the old house near Preble, the' hadn't been no Hannums in it for years." David rose from his chair, stretched, and stood with his back to the fire. Mrs. Randall looked anxiously into his face. "Is that all?" she said.

"Well," David said, "it is an' it ain't. I've got through yarnin' about Dave Hannum, at any rate. An' mebbe it's time to have a little confab on your matters, seein's I got you here an' have the honor o' your company. I generally do business fust an' the talkin' afterward, but I kind o' got to goin'."

He put his hand into the breast pocket of his coat and took out three papers, which he shuffled in review as if to verify their identities. Then he held them in one hand, tapping them softly on the palm of the other. Presently he spoke.

"About this mortgage o' yourn," he said. "I told you I ain't goin' t'foreclose you, but I'd still like to git the matter cleared up. Fact is, if you want to extend the mortgage for a spell longer, say one year, or two, or even three, you may."

"Oh thank you, David," Mrs. Randall said, almost sinking with relief. "Perhaps Charles's fortunes will change by then."

"I said that you may," David said. "But I've got somethin' to say to you 'fore you elect. When I git through, if you don't think I've treated you right, includin' this mornin's confab, I hope you'll forgive me. It's this, an' I'm the only person livin' that's knowin' to it, an' in fact I may say that I'm the only person that ever was knowin' it. It was before you was married, an' I'm sure he never told you, for I don't doubt he forgot about it. But your husband, Billy P. Randall that was, made a small investment once on a time. Yes ma'am, he did. An' in his kind of careless way it jes' slipped his mind. The amount o' the cap'tal wa'n't large, but the rate of interest was uncommon high. Now, he never drewed no dividends on't an' they've been 'cumulatin' for forty year, more or less, at compound interest."

John stared and Mrs. Randall began to rise from her chair. David put his hand out to gentle her and said, "Jest a minute, Mis' Randall, jest a minute. I ain't quite through. Part o' that cap'tal, consistin' of a quarter an' some odd cents, was invested in the circus business. The rest on't, the capital — an' all the cash cap'tal that I started in business with — was the ten cents your husband give me that day. An' here," David said, striking the papers in his left hand with the back of his right, "here is the dividends. This here second mortgage may jest as well go into the fire." He tossed it into the Franklin stove. "An' here's the satisfaction piece, which I'm goin' to execute now, that'll clear the thousand-dollar one."

Mrs. Randall's face for a moment drained of color, then flushed. "Is it true, David? Is my place clear, and I don't owe anyone? Tell me again." She began to cry, softly, then harder. John gave her his handkerchief. "Thank you," she said. "I'll wash it and return it to you." Gradually her composure returned. "Is it true?" she repeated, and started out of her chair again.

"Set right down an' take it easy, Mis' Randall," David said soothingly, putting his hands on her shoulders and pushing her back.

He handed the papers to John. "I acknowledge that I signed that," he said. "You're a witness to this transaction. Yes ma'am, it's true. I wouldn't no more fool you — you know I wouldn't, don't you? — than I'd jerk a hoss. Your place is clear now, an' by this time tomorrow, the' won't be the scratch of a pen agin it. I'll send the satisfaction over for the county record fust thing in the mornin'. I couldn't tell you 'bout this before, an' I couldn't tell John neither, 'cause I wa'n't sure I could git that mortgage off'n Zeke Swinney. You see, Mis' Randall, the's some fellers in New York anxious t'buy your land. It's wuth far more than you know it is. I didn't know if Swinney had got wind of it, an' I had to do it all in my own way. But I'll tell you," he said, chuckling, "it took some doin' to make it all work out in time for Christmas, an' I jes' barely made it."

Even Mrs. Randall chuckled now, drying her eyes. "Well now, David," she said, "I suppose you know what you're doing."

"Yes. I calculate I do, putty near. I'm payin' off an old score, an' gettin' off cheap too. That's what I'm doin'! I thought I'd hinted up to it putty plain, but I'll sum it up, if you like."

He stood with his feet aggressively wide apart, one hand in his trousers pocket. "You can estimate, I reckon," he began, "what kind of bringin' up I had, an' what a poor, miserable, God-forsaken, scairt-to-death little forlorn critter I was — put upon an' snubbed, an' jawed at till I'd come to

believe myself what was rubbed into me the whole time, that I was the most all-round no-account animal that was ever made out o' dust, an' wa'n't never likely to be no different. Lookin' back, it seems to me that, exceptin' of Polly, I never had a kind word said to me, nor a day's fun. Your husband, Billy P. Randall, was the fust man that ever treated me human up to that time. He give me the only enjoyable time I'd ever had, an' I don't know 't anythin's ever equaled it since. He spent money on me an' he give me money to spend, that had never had a cent to call my own. An', Mis' Randall, he took me by the hand an' he talked to me, an' he give me the fust notion I'd ever had that mebbe I wa'n't only the scum o' the earth, as I'd been teached to believe. I told you that that day was the turnin' point o' my life. Wa'al, it wa'n't the lickin' I got, though that had somethin' to do with it, but I'd never have had the spunk to run away's I did if it hadn't been for the heartenin' Billy P. give me, an' never knowed it. An' he never knowed it," he repeated mournfully. "I always allowed to pay some of that debt back to him, but seein's I can't do that, Mis' Randall, I'm glad an' thankful to pay it to his widow." He fell silent. He seemed, as John observed him, to be incapable of further speech. The snow hissed on the bank's windows.

"Maybe he knows, David," Mrs. Randall said softly.

"Mebbe he does," David assented in a low voice.

Neither spoke for a time. Then Mrs. Randall said, "David, I can't thank you as I ought to. Oh, I can't wait to write to Charles."

"I've already wrote to Charlie," David said. "Sent it off yesterday. I've told him to sell out there, an' come home an' to draw on me for any balance he needs to move him. When your land's sold, he'll find things easier an' better payin' than fightin' grasshoppers an' drought in the west. An' now's we've got through with our business, s'pose you step over to the house an' see Polly. She's expectin' you for dinner. And we can't take 'No' for an answer on Christmas day."

"You have no argument from me," she said. "I have nowhere else to go, and there is no one I would rather spend this day with than you and Polly."

"All right," David said, "you go on up to the house, an' I'll see you later. Oh by the way, there's somethin' I forgot. I want to make you a proposition — ruther an unusual one. But seein's everythin' is as 'tis, perhaps you'll consider it."

"David, if I could, and you asked for it, I'd give you anything on the face of this mortal globe."

"Well," David said, nodding and smiling, "I thought that mebbe, long's you got the interest o' that investment we been talkin' about, you'd let me keep what's left o' the princ'pal.

Would you like to see it?"

Mrs. Randall and John both looked at him with puzzlement.

David took from his pocket a large wallet, secured by a strap, and, opening it, extracted something wrapped in faded brown paper. Unfolding it, he displayed upon his broad pudgy palm a ten-cent silver piece black with age.

"There's the cap'tal," he said.

It was John's turn to turn his face away. He moved to the window and looked out at whirlwinds of snow sweeping along the street. Your friend David Hannum, he said to himself, remembering the inscription on his Christmas present. The words kept repeating in his mind. Your friend David Hannum.

Mrs. Randall left. David told John to damp the stove. He said he had some odds and ends to clean up in his office, and then he'd be along.

"Mr. Hannum," John said. "This may seem like a mundane question on such a happy occasion, but who wants that land and why?"

"The railway," David said. "They'll be puttin' in a spur line out that way. An' Mis' Randall's land is right where they have t' bridge the creek. Course, I'll negotiate for her an' get her top money. She'll make a few dollars, I can tell yeh. An' the railway, o' course, 'll be doing their local bankin' with us. Why John, we might make a few shillin' ourselves on the deal. Now you get along now."

#### Chapter Fourteen

If necessity be the mother of invention, John mused, then indolence is the mother of efficiency. It was easier to remember accounts than to look them up. It was easier to master a task than to struggle against it. In the process of detecting and reconciling oversights and errors, John had assimilated the bank's business into his own thought. If David asked him a question about an account when he was otherwise occupied, John would answer him almost absently without looking up from his work, and always accurately, which on occasion would cause David to chuckle and shake his head. The more John learned about banking in general and this bank in particular, the easier it was to capture and keep a new small piece of information: he attached it to some other piece of information already in his possession and there it stayed. Learning a business was not so very different from learning music, say, or French. They were all in a sense languages. Perhaps the countless hours he had spent on scales and arpeggios, on Hanon and Czerny and all the other exercises, had left him with the discipline to conquer new

problems slowly and systematically, which in the end meant very quickly. Beyond that, his years in various schools had given him that most invaluable of all skills: he had learned how to learn.

What had taken up all his waking hours and some of his dreams when he had first gone to work at the bank last summer now consumed only a little of his day. In the evenings, of course, he continued to study. But his day in the bank was leisurely, particularly now that all the summer customers were gone.

He was sitting behind the counter one January afternoon, his chin on one hand, the fingers of the other on the countertop, when Peleg Hopkins returned from scattering the stove ashes on the icy stone sidewalk in front of the bank. Peleg, that skeezicks, as David always called him, was a tall, awkward, blond farm boy of seventeen with careless habits and a resentful manner.

As Peleg put the pail back in its place by the stove, John asked, out of boredom as much as interest, "Peleg, can you read?"

"O' course I can," the boy answered sullenly. If he could, John had reason to know, he certainly could not read well.

"Can you cipher?" More and more John was using local idiom. It saved time.

"Sure I can." And this John truly doubted.

"What is five plus ten?"

Peleg chewed his lip.

"What is five times eleven?"

"Dunno," the boy said sullenly.

"Fourteen divided by two?"

"Dunno."

John got up from his stool and came around the counter. "Sit down, Peleg," he said, approaching the boy. "I am not asking these question to embarrass you." Peleg took one of the chairs by the stove. John took the other and leaned forward. "What is two and two?"

"Four," Peleg said.

"Good," John said warmly. "But you don't know much about arithmetic, do you?"

"Well," Peleg said defensively, "nobody never teached me much."

"If I were to explain it to you, would you like to learn it?"

"Dunno."

"Well then, do you think you would like to learn?"

"Mebbe." The boy stared glumly at the floor. Then he looked up with a feral shy distrust. "You don't allow t' laugh at me, do you?"

"No," John said gently, "I don't allow to laugh at you."

John continued exercising Deacon and Kirby after work, often now in the dark. On Saturdays and Sundays he would skate. Children had poured water in the Homer square to form a rink of sorts but the ice, half-formed of packed snow, was uneven, suitable for use only by little beginners on double-bladed skates. The real skating went on down on the lake, where boys had shoveled clear a great oval rink on the frozen waters. There the older children and a good many adults as well would go in the evenings, when the weather was good, and on the weekends whether it was good or not. When the snow was falling, older boys would from time to time skate around the oval, pushing wide wooden shovels, piling up the snow around the perimeter and in the middle, so that it was shaped rather like the Roman circus.

John's nurse — good old stolid Mrs. Monroe, dead several years now — had taught him to skate in Central Park. But the skating here on the lake was much better.

Sometimes boys would grow tired of endlessly circling, teasing the girls, and they would climb over the rink's wall of snow to go streaking off across the lake. Everyone assured John that the ice by now was two feet thick at least, even in the middle. John decided to follow one such group of adventurers, a gaggle of shouting boys between ten and fourteen, and he raced a little behind them over the smooth, greenish surface, the wind biting his face. This, he thought, must be what flight is like. They crossed to the other side of the lake, then came speeding back. As they neared the rink, John turned his blades expertly lateral to his course, sending a small shower of ice and snow before him as he scraped to a halt.

"Hey," one of the boys, about twelve, said to him, "for a city feller, you're putty good, Mr. Lenox."

"Thank you," John said. He had not known the boy knew his name. It pleased him that he did.

His face was bright red with cold. He took off his skates, waved a farewell to his companions, and walked with the skates over his shoulder toward home, where Aunt Polly would be just about ready to serve supper.

On a Friday night early in February, he woke up about two o'clock in the morning. A patch of moonlight lay on the floor near his bay window. He arose and looked across the street at the now-black trees on the valley's eastern wall. He wondered what it would be like, skating alone out there by moonlight. Soon he was dressing. He put on thick socks, a white turtle-neck sweater, a warm black sailor's jacket that he had purchased in Le Havre, and a thick-knit rolled cap that he could pull over his ears if need be. He crept down the stairs and out the front door to the veranda, where he picked up his skates.

It was a night of astonishing brightness. The light of a full moon fell on and reflected from the snow, dazzling his

senses. Everything was painted in shades of blue, excepting the trees and the deepest shadows, which were black. The great elms looked like fans made of Spanish lace. John walked south on Main Street a block, then east a block to the a stone bridge across the frozen Tioughnioga. He looked up with wonder at the moon's marked face and the cold winter stars, which burned without a flicker in a sky of blackest ink. He brushed a cap of snow from the stone rail of the bridge, sat down, and strapped on his skates. Then he made his way awkwardly down the river-bank.

He skated north until the river widened into the lake, then farther up the river, moving swiftly through the silver-blue land. He had never seen such beauty, he had never heard such silence. His heart ached with something that could not be called sadness and certainly could not be called happiness. The feeling, for which there was no name in French or English, was compounded of both. He continued to course his way north, the only sound the rhythmic scrape of his blades. He moved by instinct, not knowing whether he could actually get there through the creeks that fed the Tioughnioga.

And suddenly he was there, almost to his own amazement, although he realized he had intended to come here from the moment of leaving the house. He scraped to a stop. He was standing on Song Lake.

He shoved off with his right foot, gained speed, and soon was coursing across the lake, the skates making their guttural cutting hiss on the ice, his own black shadow racing before him. Soon it seemed that the shadow was real and he was not. He was a ghost in a silent, frozen, timeless world, and thus disembodied, he was filled with a joy that at last escaped him in a trail of laughter. Such a foolish thing I am doing, such a mad thing. By now he was at speed, and he maintained it with economical effort, hands clasped behind him.

When he reached the far side of the lake, he began to search for something, unsure that he could find it in this altered world of winter night. But after coasting for a long time along the shore, which looked so different in the moonlight and under snow and with all the trees bare, he came to the beach, a strange, still, silent place where a few months before he had heard the songs of birds, the rustle of autumn leaves, the sound of small waves, and Paula's desperate sighs. He wondered where she was tonight. In Europe it was already daylight. Her last letter had said she was going to Switzerland for the ice carnivals and winter sports. She was, then, somewhere in Switzerland, perhaps high on a mountain in bright sunlight.

He stood stock still on the ice, loving the night, loving the cold, loving Paula, loving her memory, the memory of their warm afternoon in this now-frozen place, loving his feeling

of freedom, and loving himself. The only thing that could have made the moment better was her presence. But no. He would not want to share this moment even with her. He loved being alone in this moonlit silence, no one in all the world knowing where he was.

He pushed away from the frozen beach. He traveled around the perimeter of the lake, the wind in his face, exploring the marshes, gliding among cattails and bullrushes that protruded from the ice, and coasting a long way up a creek that meandered past sleeping houses, split-rail fences, and old black barns. He was the only moving conscious thing in all this eerie silent land. Then he turned south, hoping he could find his way through the creeks and marshes back to the Tioughnioga.

It was at least five o'clock in the morning when he reached home and slipped quietly into his bed.

"Where is John?" Mrs. Bixbee said when she and her brother were finishing breakfast.

"Sleepin', I reckon," David said, and then chuckled at her anxiety. "'Course, you could go up an' see if he's dead."

When David left the house, she did in fact open John's door and look in for just that purpose. Seeing him stir, she was relieved, but puzzled.

John did not descend until mid-day. Mrs. Bixbee said he was just in time for dinner.

John's expenses in Homer had been small, as General Woolsey had predicted they would be. There was neither temptation nor opportunity to spend. At the time he had moved into the Hannum household, he had raised the question of his contribution to expenses, but Mr. Hannum had refused to discuss the matter and referred him to Mrs. Bixbee, since the house was her domain, and so it was to Mrs. Bixbee that he now addressed a question.

"Aunt Polly," he said, "would you object if I bought a small piano?"

"Why o' course not!" she said. "You needn't have ast me. Fact, I'd like it. David an' me ain't never heard you play. I like music so much, an' so does David, though I guess it would floor him to try an' raise a tune. I used to sing quite a little when I was younger, an' generally I help at church an' prayer meetin' now. Why, cert'nly. Why not? When would you play, if it wa'n't in the evenin'?" David sleeps over the wing. Do you hear him snore?"

"Hardly ever," John replied, smiling. "That is to say, not very much — just enough sometimes to know that he is asleep."

"Well," she said decidedly, "if he's far enough off so't you can't hear him, I guess he won't hear you much, an' he

sure won't hear you after he gits to sleep."

And so, with David's permission, John took a day off to go to Syracuse. Since he did not know where to search for a piano, he had no choice but to enlist the aid of Mrs. Benson, who took him to different shops where he tried out pianos until he found a small upright that he liked. He managed to hold in abeyance her extra-musical interest in him, played for an hour for her and her husband, and escaped on the earliest train.

The piano arrived four days later.

Mrs. Bixbee's estimate of her brother's behavior was quite correct. David would sometimes lie awake for hours, listening to John play music he did not know, although in time he came to recognize pieces that John had played before, enjoying it immensely, but wishing now and then that John would play something with more of a tune to it.

In time he deferentially made a request. He wanted to know if by chance John knew a song he had heard once in Syracuse. Alas, he had never learned the title, but it was, he assured John, a song to thrill a man to his very foundation. "It's about," he said, "a feller sittin' one day by the organ, an' not feelin' exactly right — kind o' tired an' out o' sorts an' not knowin' jes' where he was drivin' at — jes' joggin' along with a loose rein for quite a piece, an' so on. An' then, by and by, strikin' right into his gait an' goin' on stronger an' stronger, an' finally finishin' up with an Amen! that carries him quarter way round the track 'fore he can pull up."

John managed, he knew not how, to suppress laughter, and said, "I'm familiar with it, yes. You're describing The Lost Chord by Sir Arthur Sullivan."

"D'you know it?" David asked eagerly.

"I think I have the music in my room. If you and Mrs. Bixbee would care to come up, I shall be glad to look for it."

He found the sheet music and sang the song for them in that restrained, correct, undramatic kind of voice to which musicians are prone. David thought nonetheless that it was the most wonderful thing he had ever heard, and later he reported to Dick Larrabee on the musicales that had become part of the life of the Hannum household. He boasted of John's "little pianny that stands up on its hind legs," and said, "I don't believe the's a dum thing that young feller can't do. Did you know he speaks French? Yes sir, we have reg'lar concerts at my house every Sunday night, admission free, children allowed, an' you'd ought to hear him an' Polly singin'!" He laughed. "You'd ought to see her singin' — tickleder'n a little dog with a nosegay tied to his tail."

**To be continued**

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