TWO TURTLE HUNTERS PADDLED TO OUR CAMP

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

Being a Journal of Misadventure in Search of It

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

CHAPTER I

We Take a Chance with Each Other

NEVER laid eyes on Hen until the day we were introduced at the University Club. It was the North and February, and a gray day of dirty snow; and Hen had one of his spells of dyspepsia. I also was peeved over something—a telephone call, an appointment, cocktail—some triviality which, added to the weather and an accumulated grouch about business, made me eye Hen, as Hen did me, with frank irritation.

What the mischief did Smith mean by introducing two strangers who merely desired to nurse their gourches alone?

Well, it was done, and Hen and I looked gloomily at one another across the table. I muttered something against the weather.

"Yah!" growled Hen. "Wish I was out of it!"

"Rotten!" I rejoined. "And I'm going to cut it."

He looked suspiciously at me. "What's the matter?"

"I don't know. Hair, I guess. Look at it—suddenly struck me I was thirty-five and feel fifty, and have got into a 'Oh, what's-the-use?' state of mind, and—well, what's the matter with you?"

"Stomach. Spent the winter up in Northern Wisconsin trying to forget it. Snowshoed around and ate beans with the lumberjacks and washed my own dishes in ice water—and then my shack got snowed in for fifteen straight days on Lake Flambeau. I couldn't get out. No one could get in. Devil of a session with my stomach—and beans. I got out and blew down here to what they call civilization. Next time a tropic isle for mine." Then he grimaced sourly at me. "Speaking of hair—look at me?"

"You're hitting close to forty."

"Yes, and I want to trail back and feel like Home and Mother and the Big Red Apples. I want it—just a half year of it—and then I'd be ready to buck the game again and not earn the mortal hatred of every man in our sales department. That's why I quit. I found they were all hating me. And it was making me old—at thirty-seven."

"I see," I mused.

Then we both stared truculently at each other and out the window at the dirty snow of the town and the dirtier sky of the North. There was a map of the New World on the wall, and sud-
The pirogue is a ticklish craft to balance even in the still waters
denly Hen made a flourish toward it with his napkin.
"Well, let's git!"
"Where?"
"Anywhere the sun is shining, and hair grows, and stomachs show some
form. Back to the Big Red Apples and the little green ones—back to something
to laugh about that isn't smart or clever—just simple, mere good humor, like
when we were kids——"
"Back to Youth! Say, old top, you're
talking ragtime—you——"

Hen got up and went to that map of
North America. He drew a wide circle
on it with a lead pencil. Then he made
a point somewhere a thousand miles
south of Chicago.
"Let's start in here."
"What!"
"Paddle around the Gulf of Mexico
and look for it."
"Hey?"
"The Fountain. Remember Old
Ponce? He got tired of table d'hôtes
and investigations and reforms and went
to Florida and pawed over that coast
looking for the Fountain of Youth. He
got in wrong. Why, that whole region
is jammed with hotels, and the hotels
with people who wouldn't know a de-
cent stomach when they saw one. And
their hair—why it comes from Paris, or
Roumania, or Kashgar—or some place.
Ponce de Leon was goldbricked when he
struck that coast. Now, you and I—
we'll get a canoe and paddle around the
Gulf and find it."

Now I had never seen Hen ten min-
utes before. And I had never seen a
 canoe in my life. Curious but true.
Life with me had been divided between
the dry Western country and the big
cities, and a canoe had just never fallen
under my eye. And I had never, since
grammar school, thought of the Gulf of
Mexico. But I eyed that map a minute
—and then the weather outside. Then
I answered carefully:
"Old boy, I'm with you. I don't see
any obstructions in the Gulf except Flor-
ida and a few islands, and I suppose if
a fellow paddles his canoe quite a ways
offshore he won't run into 'em."

Hen looked at me with more ap-
proval. "You go telegraph East for a
A BARATARIA MOSS PICKER IN THE DEEP SWAMP

A canoe and have it shipped to New Orleans. I got the rest of the stuff—guns and big fish-rods and tackle and a seven-by-seven silk tent, and duffle bags, and—"

"Piffle sacks——" I concluded. "All right. When can you start?"

He was looking at his watch. "We can catch that 7.30 train on the Lake Front. You arrange for a taxi. I'll grab my stuff and get an expressman."

We arose and clattered back our chairs. Then Hen stopped:
"Reg pardon—what did Smith say your name was?"

Then we both laughed—the first simple and heart-whole laugh we had had since the ready-made mince-pie season opened. "One really ought to know, old man, if one is going off to—to—to——"

"Find the Fountain of Youth? And more hair? And a stomach? Old top, you're right!"

Then we laughed again. The second since the musical comedy season was on. We were taking chances. One does when one agrees—ten minutes after meeting a man—to go roll in a blanket with him. And eat turtle eggs with him. And fight Barataria mosquitoes with him. And be capsized on top of a Mexican Gulf porpoise with him. And hunt pirate gold along with Old Man Captain—but I am ahead of things. We parted on the corner of State and Dearborn in the raw afternoon, and I murmured: "Duffle bags and piffle sacks—well, I'll go order that canoe and throw away my hair restorer."

I'll not rehearse all the croaking about that Club when Hen and I announced our voyage. We were reputed cynics. But I leave it to you. Cynics never go to find the fountain of youth in a sixteen-foot muslin ship. Cynics go in the Pullman with the buffet attached. Cynics were plenty about the Club when Hen and I calmly explained. Yellow fever, sharks, hurricanes, snake bite!

"Don't you listen to 'em," growled Hen. "Yellow fever is played out. And we'll carry a barrel of snake dope. And when the Gulf is rough we'll sit on the sand and eat turtle eggs. I read somewhere that Morgan's men sacked Panama on a diet of turtle eggs. When it rains we'll sit under a palm tree and read the sporting goods catalogues."

Hen overlooked one trifle. He failed to ask me if I had ever seen a canoe. And I didn't tell him. I hated to be rude to a stranger.

I had to break the news to him some weeks later. We were in a Cajun pirouge on Lake Salvador in south Louisiana, and a big sea charged straight up and warped us fore and aft, and Hen swore at my stroke. I turned and yelled: "Hen, I've knocked all over the short-grass country and the Sierras—teamster, rancher, game warden, pot hunter—God knows what else, but I never tackled a canoe. Which end of the blamed thing is which?"
I heard him stop steering, gaze at the swamp shore over the smoother of white-caps, and began to figure up his life insurance. Then he yelled back at me:

"Why didn't you tell me before?"
"If I had, you wouldn't have come!"
"Poor fool!" he mused. "You're right!"

Well, I'm ahead of this narrative again—turtle eggs, Old Pirate Folkses, piffle sacks, the Fountain, and everything.

Those last four hours we hustled—and made our train. Hen's outfit was snug in the baggage car ahead. The last thing he got was a hypodermic syringe and some stuff to pump into a fellow when he was snake-bitten. And some sporting goods catalogues, and a lot of Coast and Geodetic surveys back to '79. He made me read all that as we came south; departmental stuff that no tired business man who supports the Republic on his sugar, highballs, steel rails, ad valorem and otherwise, can make head or tail of. When we rolled into New Orleans the next day Hen was still catechizing me on the depth of water off the Chandeleur Islands, and I couldn't tell him. I didn't know any nautical lore. I didn't know a sea cow from a barred Holstein, a tarpon from a tarpaulin, a degree of longitude from a third mate's license.

But enough of this. Five days later two bald-headed men, wearing eyeglasses and crinkly new khaki suits, paddled away from a wharf in Harvey's Canal across from upper New Orleans. We didn't know where we were going. Only there was a brilliant March sun, and the world was as clean as a porcelain bathtub. And down that canal lay a mystic vista of green, sweet-smelling jungle. Someone on the levee said that way we would get to the Gulf.

"Fine!" said Hen. "Now for the Spanish Main!"

I hate to say that we were not in that brand new sea-going canoe we had ordered. We were in a leaky johnboat borrowed from a lean, lone fisherman. Now the johnboat is a peculiar institution. It consists of three cypress boards forming the sides and bottom and with the ends nailed up. They build them by the mile in Barataria and saw off as much as you want. We had not heard a word from our sea-canoe.
A LIVE OAK ON BAYOU BARATARIA

The Cajun fishermen along that canal had never seen or heard of a canvas boat. They haven't yet. Ours—well, that is another story.

Six miles down Harvey's Canal, the scant levee along the banks gave way to the sunken shores of Bayou Barataria. The moss-hung cypress was brilliant with clew and the latanier palms rustled beneath. Hen was sniffing the air. "Old boy, this will rejuvenate you! We're off! Hi, for the Main! The cut of rude winds, the sting of salt spray slapping us as it did Magellan, Balboa, Drake, and Jean La Fitte. Give me the slant of the rain, the good, rough earth, and a bed under the stars!"

Very good for a cynic. Only he forgot to mention that the good earth hereabouts was fine, soggy, bottomless ooze; and that a bed under the stars would be attended by all the mosquitoes, the thundering, big, deep-sea-going mosquitoes of Barataria, that would as soon bite a seeker after youth as they would a pirate. That night I counted six mosquitoes on a section of Hen, not as big as a dollar, and they had trouble crowding on.

We encountered a log raft in that twisting swamp bayou, and to avoid being crushed had to pull our johnboat up on it. And soon we were traveling backwards behind the tow-steamer, and it began to rain. It rained an hour, and all that time we were fighting to get our johnboat off the log raft and headed for the Spanish Main. And when we finally were free and the Louisiana downpour was done, we discovered it was dark. In its canvas case was that little balloon silk tent, and in a duffle was our patent collapsible aluminum cooking outfit, in another our grub, and in other cases our guns, rods, tackle, all snug and watertight. But not us!

We looked off at the gloomy cypress with their waving moss streamers, the snaky black water lashing the sharp spikes, and wondered where all that modish camp stuff was going to be put up. The sporting goods catalogue hadn't guaranteed to furnish dry land to put it on. But we paddled hopefully onward.

"Hi—oh!" said Hen at last, "there's a house."

I saw, on a ten-by-twelve platform over the swamp, a black and windowless shack. We jammed the johnboat through the bottomless ooze and landed. The rain started again and we hustled inside and lit our patent folding lantern. That tie-cutter's shack looked bad. It leaked and was filled with spiders and bad smells. Back home you wouldn't have housed a tramp cat in it. But we tumbled the damp moss in the bunks
over and over, laid our blankets on it, and started a fire in the clay oven. There was no chimney, the smoke finding its way out through the shake roof. Then we emptied a can of beans into our frying pan, stirred some sweetening in our tea, and beamed through the smoke at each other.

"How do you feel?" queried Hen.
"Eighteen months younger," I answered. "But what in the Billy Mischief is that trying to crawl through the wall?"

It was merely the advance guard of the most numerous array of chameleons, lizards, bugs, ad lib., that I ever listened to. They came on to take the strangers in. When we had crawled into the bunks, the noisy crew raced over our blankets and occasionally into a fellow's ear. And the owls hooted outside in the lashing gale the mournfullest sound two seekers after the Fountain ever listened to. The mosquitoes chimed in and sung and bit, and with this and the creaking of that shack and all the eerie swamp noises I got up and started a fire in the furnace. We sat there, each wondering to himself whose fool idea this was anyhow.

We recalled the hospitable deputy sheriff at Harvey who had waved us on when we told him we were going to the Gulf in that johnboat.

"Go right on, strangers. This yere's the Free State o' Barataria. The hull swamp is yours!"

We had asked him of pirate-haunted Barataria, with its legends of blood and gold, and he had told us to beware of stingarees, Congo snakes, and red bugs. We told him we were going to catch a tarpon, and he warned us that the grand ecaille, as the Barataria Bay fishers call it, had a most unsportsmanlike habit, when hooked, of jumping up in the air and sitting tail first down upon one's boat. Not on a bet would any native ever hook a tarpon. I concluded right there that Hen could catch the tarpon. I would stay ashore and peacefully hunt turtle eggs. Turtle eggs never attacked anybody.

Well, we didn't sleep much that first
night of the search for Ponce de Leon's fabled fountain. Every minute the yowling of the owls was nearer, the lash of the bayou tide stronger, and the mosquitoes hungrier. Near daylight we rolled in our blankets, and, with nothing to the air—and mosquitoes—but our noses, fell asleep. But the next morning—those noses! There was a regular department store bargain rush about the holes where our noses stuck out all night long.

"Heaven," mumbled Hen, "must be a place where nothing ever bites one."

But the next morning we crawled out of that black box to a scene of beauty. The bayou ran like a bright arrow through cypress which was moss-hung and all a-glitter with waterdrops in the sun, and the south wind was perfumed with magnolia, bay, and blackberry bloom and that indescribable heavy sweetness of the deep swamp. The mocking-birds and cardinals flitted about us; the gay chameleons scampered on our baggage.

"Fine!" said Hen. "And now for eggs and coffee."

We "made breakfast," as the Cajuns say, out on the wet and sunny platform, and I had a first experience with Hen's scientifically assembled kit. Now, I was no sportsman of his stripe. My roughing was all done back in the days when a Western boy counted his cartridges as gold, fished with a nickel line and a "bobber," and started on river trips with nothing but a hunk of salt meat and a shirtsleeve filled with corn meal. Duffle bags and piffle sacks! I had never heard of them.

Nothing will divert a man in camp as much as two duffle bags. He wants some sugar—not the tabloid stuff which Hen insisted on carrying for emergency, but real Sugar-trust sugar. So he unties a duffle bag. Inside the duffle bag are seventeen little waterproof bags, all alike and each tightly tied. The seeker after sugar unties each of the seventeen little bags and ties them up again and then concludes the sugar is in the other duffle. So he dives into that and unties and ties up seventeen more little bags, and then discovers that the sugar must be in the piffle sack, or else Hen is sitting on it.

It always was strange how the thing you wanted was in the very last bag of the other duffle, or else not in either. And when we loaded the johnboat we discovered that, despite all our careful elimination of superfluities in that scientific aluminum tabloid canoe kit, we had three hairbrushes aboard. Three hairbrushes for two baldheaded men down in the Barataria swamps!

"We'll keep 'em," said Hen. "You can't tell what this climate will do to a fellow. Shove off that misbegotten johnboat, there. We'll paddle on until we find our canoe is in New Orleans and then go back for it. Meantime we'll cruise in the johnboat."

So on in that beautiful, sprawling...
swamp we went. Once an alligator poked his snout inquiringly out of the reeds, and Hen began to assemble his automatic rifle, which would shoot I don't know how many times. I got out our copy of the Louisiana game laws to see if alligators were in season.

"Game laws, nothing!" said Hen. "Didn't the deputy tell us this was the free State of Barataria, and anything goes? Ain't we headed right down into the haunts of Jean La Fitte and the buccaneers? Can you imagine Captain Kidd reading up the game laws to see if it was the closed season for Spanish treasure? Me for that 'gator!"

Then we stood up in the johnboat and I waved the game laws and Hen his automatic.

"Steady her!" yelled Hen, and pulled the trigger, once, twice.

Nothing happened except that Barataria alligator winked an eye lazily as the johnboat floated past his starboard bow.

"Snap—snap!" went Hen's highly modern rifle again. I'm a son-of-a-gun," he murmured.

"Right on that seat by you," I said, "is quite a pile of screws and things which you took out of that rifle's inards and never put back."

"Couldn't find any place for 'em," retorted Hen. "And—Holy Banana! See, there's a string tied to that alligator!"

Up on the swamp edge now I saw a pickaninny staring at us with round, wide eyes. He was dressed in a meal sack with holes cut in the corners for his arms to stick through. And he held a rotten rope, the other end of which appeared to be attached to the submarine structure of that four-foot alligator.

"Hi, boy!" I yelled. "Look out for that 'gator!"

"He won't hurt nuffin, boss. Ah hung him out heah to see if he done won't catch hiself some breakfus'. Mammy says he done eat mo' eround de house dan fou' houn' dawgs, and Ah gotter make him work fo' his livin'."

"Can you beat it?" gasped Hen, turning to me perspiringly.

"If he don't wiggle hiself pretty soon Ah'll sho' haul him asho' and give him a beatin'. Dat lazy 'gator don't do nuf-

fin but hang eround de do' step waitin' fo' me to gin him a ham bone."

Hen laid down his automatic and picked up his paddle. "Get out of here," he muttered. "This is no place for a sportsman's son! 'Gator on a string sucking a ham bone! Oh, my degenerate wilderness! I reckon if we run onto a bear down below he'll be turning a hand-organ!"

We hurried on around a bend to get away from that ham-bone alligator. It was a peaceful spot, and we floated while Hen began to reassemble his automatic gun that would shoot I don't know how many times. We discovered a venerable colored citizen sitting on a log fishing for perch.

"Wha' you-all gemmen gwine?" he inquired reasonably.

"We don't know," responded Hen. "But how do we get there?"

"Yo' keep on a-gwine. Dat Tiger boat she come erlong dis evenin' and pick yo' up. Dey's gwine to be a ball down below. Dat Tiger boat she's a-comin' loaded with lumber an' ladies."

Lumber and ladies! "Hooray for the ball!" I said.

But Hen looked peeved. That ham-bone alligator had knocked all the romance out of Barataria, the beautiful, for him.

"If I hadn't left all those screws out of my gun," he growled, "I'd have soaked that nigger's 'gator so he'd never want ham bones any more. As for ladies and balls, I decline. I came here for sport—and more hair. For pirate treasure and a stomach that will start without cranking. And tarpon and anything else in season or out. I'll show these natives something. Why, a real live sportsman never hit this region!"

CHAPTER II

The Old Pirate Folkses.

EIGHTEEN miles of winding bayou Hen and I paddled that leaky johnboat. But one bit of real dry ground did we see, and that was a series of unkempt and abandoned fields hemmed about with the blue-gray wall of Barataria forests. Over the mangrove-hidden ditches and Spanish
bayonet we saw here and there a forlorn house; then on from this we went into the woods. The tide was setting down through the ninety miles of waterways stretching to the Gulf and bore us easily on. The sunken banks, with their cypress, tupelo gum, swamp maples, lantai-
ner palms, with now and then a yellow canebrake, grew lower, and as night drew on we wished we had put up at the last tie cutter's camp we had seen.

But at sunset we struck inhabitable land and turned out of Barataria Bayou into Bayou Villere just where it broad-

ened out into Lake Salvador, a thirty-
mile stretch of tidal water across which we saw dimly the oak-grown knolls among endless stretches of swamp cane. They were the ill-famed Chenesires of the pirate legends, and there is not one into whose white shell shores the natives, generation after generation, have not dug for La Fitte's lost treasure.

And just in the bend of the bayou was Berthoud's plantation, around which cluster vague traditions of thriftless gold and bloody romance. Here, a hundred years ago, as close to the city as they dared bring their shallow-draft privateers up from the great network of waterways bordering the Gulf, La Fitte and Beluche, the last of the line of buccaneers, were wont to lie while their prize goods were disposed of in New Orleans auctions, winked at by the thrifty burghers of the time. And through this winding channel the audac-
ious traffic so thrrove that the legitimate trade of New Orleans up the river fell to nothing before it; and all during the first decade of the last century neither the precarious provincial governments of France nor the United State's, during the cession of Louisiana could drive La Fitte from his strongholds of Barataria;

Ten privateersmen, and numberless smaller vessels and a lawless army of a thousand men, La Fitte, mustered at Grand Terre at the height of his power, and it was not until Colonel Patterson's final expedition in 1814 broke up the pirate forts on the coast islands that La Fitte relaxed his hold on the waterways. And the next year, after treating with the Federal government for pardon, he led his horde, with the cannon dragged from their abandoned ships, to New Or-
leans and fought with Jackson against the British, thereby gaining amnesty.

But ways of ease did not fit well with the buccaneers' tastes, and history records that, driven from Barataria, La Fitte seized the port of Galveston under pretext of aiding the Texans against Mexico, and tried again to revive the ancient and honorable trade of piracy. In 1821 a British sloop-of-war sent his last schooner to the bottom outside Gal-
veston harbor. Just what became of La Fitte is a mystery of romance that Louis-
ianians still love to speculate upon. It is supposed that he attached the rem-
nants of his buccaneers to the fortunes of some of the new-born South Ameri-
can republics and died, as he had lived, a free companion of the sea.

Hen and I landed on Old Spanish Man's point that night and eyed that stretch of lake and then our thirteen-
foot johnboat with much caution. It was a darkling night and the waves rolled in almost over the low bank of shells on which we put up our new crinkly silk tent. Back of us lay the dank prairie cane and beyond that, the flooded forest. We wished we had stayed at the abandoned plantation a mile back on Bayou Villere. But it had looked mournful enough with its two great brick chimneys of the ancient sugar-house rising from the mangrove-hidden ruins.

Time was, before the war, when Ber-
thoud's three thousand acres and canals and overshot water-wheels raised eighty thousand dollars' worth of sugar and rice a year and worked four hundred slaves in its fields. Now it was given over to trappers and turtle catchers and the last of the Berthouds lay under the tangle of vines on the shell mound that raised their graves above the crevasses and the hurricane tides. And across the bayou from the decaying slave quarters and the ruined foundations of the great house lay the straggling, century-old vil-
lage of Barataria. Trappers, hunters, crab fishers, moss pickers, the Cajuns pick up a living season in and out, and we had not been along its one-plank sidewalk fronting the water edge very long before we understood the genial
the deputy sheriff's reference to the "Free State of Barataria."

Game laws or any other laws went little when one got outside the fringe of river towns. Not that the people were lawless in the sense of disorder, for never did we meet anything but simple, kindly hospitality from them. But as to game or fish protection, they simply shrugged their shoulders. For a century their fathers had trapped and hunted through Barataria woods — _eb bien?_ Who was to stop them? Barataria was ruled by one autocratic family that filled all the important parish offices and controlled elections; and allowed the bayou folk to make their own regulations.

It was while we were there that the sheriff made his laconic reply to the New Orleans newspapers when they demanded why one of his henchmen was not arrested for killing another man: "Come and take him—if you can!"

Hen and I discovered a tiny little garden back of the shell reef with the tide-water mauling about the potato rows. And while we were gazing at this, along the bayou came a big, crazy skiff, leaky and cumbersome, the oar-blades nailed to saplings which were tied to the tholes with strings. And standing up, pushing these, was the quaintest little man we had ever seen.

"Ah saw you boys passin' this way," quoth he, "and I follered to see what you-all was headin' out in the lake fo' in this stawn. Man, you'll be blowed clean off this point into the swamp if the northwester comes! Look at the salt water runnin' into my gyarden? I sholy will have to put rubber boots on them taters!"

We thanked him for his interest; but the little tent was up and Hen was making coffee over a palmetto-leaf fire, so we concluded to stay. Old Man Captain Johnson seemed incredulous when we told him we were traveling for pleasure. He eyed that johnboat doubtfully. Then he rubbed his skinny elbows through a hickory shirt that he must have worn since the Surrender. His old hip boots were tied on with strings, and his hat was mended with black thorns, while at his heels were two mongrel hound pups—a hungry and picturesque outfit was this of the veteran of Lee's ragged host who had installed himself on Spanish Man's Point and was raising potatoes where the pirates had once raised Cain.

Did he know anything about pirates? Did he?

"You boys look right back yere."

He led us beyond a ruined oak overhanging his garden ditch. There was a neat grave of white shells and a board at the head!

"Right yere is the last one of them Old Pirate Folkses. Yes, seh, when I come down river seven year ago a-huntin' for treasure, I done heard about this old boy buried right yere, where he died forty years ago and the wild hawgs ate him. None of these Cajun around yere would take care of his grave, so I sorteh fixed it up... I reckon he wasn't such a bad pirate after all, only he pizened himself with liqueh!"

"Now, Captain," said Hen, "if the hog ate him, how could they bury him here?"

"I dunno," responded Old Man Captain, "less they buried the hawg. But they wouldn't do that—Cajuns su'tin' y loves hawg meat."

We asked further concerning this pirate-fed pork. It seems that one Armand Pelletier, one of La Fitte's old band, came back in his extreme old age to live on Spanish Man's Point. Many was the tale he could tell of marauding in the Caribbean and of how, here in Bayou Villere, in after years, he had helped scuttle a slave trader with all its human cargo batten ed under the hatches, to prevent its falling into the hands of the Government. And many was the tale the fearsome natives told of Armand's knowledge of buried gold.

Finally, two mysterious strangers arrived and lived with the ancient buccaneer in his shack. And the three of them dug, here and there, among the shell reefs, and finally, here on Spanish Man's Point, they found La Fitte's treasure. Then the two strangers got old Armand very drunk one night, and the next day were gone; and the discomfited pirate crawled out of his bunk to discover a large hole in the ground! He at once got drunk again and announced that the two generous strangers
that had befriended him had got away with twenty thousand dollars in gold; and thereafter he did nothing the few remaining years of his life but sit on Spanish Man’s Point with his demijohns and relate his tale of woe. Then he died alone and the "hawgs" did the rest.

And here, half a century or so later, Old Man Captain Johnson was gently apologizing for the ancient buccaneer’s failings.

"No, seh," repeated the Captain, patting the neat little grave; "wa’sn’t such a heap bad pirate, I reckon. Only bad fo’ liqueh!"

Then he cast his eye upon our sporting! goods catalogue outfit piled down there by the pirate’s mound. If ever such a thing as an aluminum frying-pan or a collapsible cup or a jointed rod and reel had been in Barataria he was unaware of it. He picked up Hen’s silver reel, much absorbed.

"I reckon you-all goin’ to hunt mo’ treasure with this little jigger-stick. Sho’ make that old pirate tu’n ov’eh in hisgrave."

We disclaimed being treasure hunters.

"Then I reckon you is fawchune tellsers."

"No."

"Then you is detectives?"

"Not a bit!"

"Then you is goin’ to give a show in that tent?"

"Show? Not unless it is Hen trying to flip a mule-colored flapjack in this forty-mile wind!" I answered. "No, Captain, we’re merely after more hair —and pleasure."

"Pleasure?" He shook his head. "Never done hear of anyone comin’ down yere fo’ pleasure!"

He stirred the coffee Hen gave him and smiled gently, and then set off in his battered skiff to his camp. He didn’t believe us. And the next morning, when we got out in the loveliness of a Louisiana spring, the gale all gone, and the scarlet tanagers flitting in the oaks against a lustrous sky, we discovered two lanky Cajun trappers sitting in their pirogues along our camp, also shaking their heads. Our fame had spread all down the settlement. Two more mysterious strangers had camped on Spanish Man’s Point! Thereafter we had visitors a-plenty.

Shy, gentle, brown-skinned fishers and muskrat trappers, who pulled their tiny swamp canoes up on the shells, sat down, drank coffee with us, and smiled. We made another pot of coffee and smiled. Then they made one and smiled. By way of conversation we waved the coffee pot and they waved muskrat skins, and everyone smiled. Then they examined Hen’s camera with all the hyphenated attachments, the automatic gun, the tent, and the reflector baker, and argued and commented in Cajun.

In the afternoon we visited the village. There were three "sto’s," each raised above the swampy margin of the bayou on stilts, as indeed were all the houses. Around their walls was the high-water mark of the last crevasse. When the river levees break the Baratarians live in their luggars or on higher platforms. No one cares much. They are a happy-go-lucky lot. They trap lazily in the great salt marshes, crab lazily in the bayous in the spring, run cat-lines and pick moss in the summer, find a turtle now and then or a 'gator to trade at the "sto,'" play "Beeg Dog" on their galleries, and watch the girls, of Sunday afternoons, walk by on the single-plank walk from house to house.

Back of the straggling row of houses rises the frowning wall of forest; in front is the slow-moving bayou; on the bank the old men mend baskets and the children play in the sun as the red-sailed luggars drift by from Grand Isle on their way to the great river to the north. The "Free State!" So it had been since their fathers fought and smuggled with Jean La Fitte. Yankees may come and go with their chatter about reclaiming the swamps. The Cajunshrug:

"Le Nom de Dieu!"

As for game wardens and fish commissioners—first catch your Cajun. He is a bold man who will follow into the deep swamp. And if an agent of the law is found floating face downward in the lilies—Tres bien? The shy swamp-
ers shrugged again: "Name of God—how strange!"

The following day along came the Temple Tiger, sure enough, loaded with lumber and ladies. Would M'sieu Captain take us down? Where to? Oh, anywhere! Certainly, M'sieurs!

Hen and I had found a moccasin in our bed the night before, and as Spanish Man's point was already pretty well crowded, what with Old Man Johnson's potatoes, the pirate's grave, and our camp, we decided to move.

Hen eyed the ladies with disfavor. Still he had washed his shirt in the Captain's mush kettle when he knew the Tiger boat was coming.

"No girls for me," muttered Hen, in his bemused shirt. "They're as unsatisfactory as turtle eggs. A fellow can't ever cook turtle eggs right—and I'm tired of them as a three days' diet. The swampers have brought us turtle eggs steady since we camped here."

Old Man Johnson was grieved to have us go. We were real "white folks," he said, and, besides, he wanted us to stay and dig treasure. There was great prospect.

"I come down river lookin' fo' pirate's hide-ups. Yes, seh, I got it straight from a widda woman up on Bay Natchez. She done tol' me to go find an old plantation with watch runnin' east past three live oaks on a point. Yere it be. Minute they told me the Old Pirate Folkses was around yere, I squatted right down. Raise taters and hunt treasure. Only thing I lack is that chart the widda woman had. Wanted to buy that chart, but how'd I get eight dollahs? She was a fine woman, that widda. I always did love spiritual business. She wanted me to stay and quit driftin'. She says: 'Rollin' stones git no moss.' 'Widda,' says I, 'and a settin' hen never gits fat.' So I ups and come down yere lookin' for the pirates' hide-up. When I see this point and three trees with watch runnin' past, I say: 'By Gravy, Widda, yo' sho' is spiritual!'"

Now I hated to leave. I looked at Hen, groused over those ladies and lumber on the Tiger boat. And I looked at Old Man Captain, with his ragged hat held together by thorns. There was romance. There was youth, shining right in his eyes! I almost wished that Hen and I did not know so much. I would like to have gone off with Old Man Captain in his leaky boat and dug up something or other. Every man ought to have a Widda Woman who would send him off to hunt treasure. But when a fellow's got to be thirty-five, with no Widda showing up, he's lost much interest—and hair. Hen rubbed the mush out of his shirt collar.

"Sling on that duffle and let's get off somewhere. Good-bye, Cap. When we come back we'll fry some more turtle eggs."

"And sure hunt pirates' hide-ups," I added, and Old Man Captain beamed all over his gentle face. He went back to his hound pups and dreams of the Widda Woman. And we went on to trail down Ponce de Leon's quest and tinker with Hen's digestion. The Baratarians waved shy and kindly adieu. We had had a fine week of it.

But never a word came in the bi-weekly mail of our missing canoe.

"By all the duffles and piffles," said Hen, "we'll paddle that fool johnboat from here to Yucatan!" He waved a hairbrush at me. "The Fountain of Youth, old top, has never yet run dry!"

The Temple Tiger, with a half-dozen furtive-eyed damsels of varying shades, tucked away on top of her lumber, wheezed out into Lake Salvador, which was a sheet of gold in the sunset. She was mightily loaded, and with the huge bales of black moss on her cabin top looked like an animated scrubbing-brush heaving along upside down. The gas engine made a fearful racket and the belts to her stern wheel pounded the guards. She turned south across that wondrous lake into Bayou Perot, past gray-green sunken woods and silent, "trembling prairie,"

The Cajun girls forward, their feet hanging to the water, began to sing presently as the full moon rose, while a dark-eyed boy, seated on the pilot-house top, played the guitar. The Tiger boat made no more than five miles an hour, and no one seemed to know just where we were going. The genial
Captain offered us whiskey and coffee, refused any passage money, and said he'd take us "somewhere," adding that we ought to go forward and "wiggle 'round among the ladies." He was glad to acquire us, it seemed, for he was taking them to a "ball" down below, if the boat got there. If not to-night, then to-morrow night—he'd stay over for it.

That seemed good. Going somewhere to a ball, if the boat got there, along with, a cargo of lumber and ladies. The Tiger boat turned down Baybou Perot between level fields of marsh grass and water shimmering in the moon. Now and then a hail would come off ahead, above the voices of the singing girls, Jack Hammond would bowl to the engine boy, the wheezing motor would stop, and a lean-faced muskrat trapper would shoot his pirogue alongside. There would be an animated search among the ladies, and lumber for some stuff he had ordered, someone would toss down a few loaves of bread out of the gunny sacks, and on we would go. Now and then one of the trappers would hang alongside for a mile and drink whiskey with the skipper; and at Point Legarde, we waited an hour while crew, Captain, guests, and natives argued the price of catfish. Indeed, so late was it by now that the girls began to clamor about the "ball."

"M'sieu Jack, we sho' never go down with this Tiger boat again. You-all ain't a-goin to get anywhere till mawnin'."

That was exactly what happened. It was long after midnight when the Tiger boat reached Clark Cheniere. By that time the fiddler and the guitar player had absorbed so much of the Tiger boat's liquid cargo that they were asleep on top of the lumber, and the girls climbed down in a skiff and were sent ashore with many a tart comment on Jack Hammond's dilatory schedule. They had cast many a curious glance at the two strangers sitting on the duffle sacks amidstships, but to Captain Jack's repeated invitations to "go mix with the girls" we had been reluctantly inclined. The Cajun girls were coy. The skiff load put off arid disappeared into the fringe of shadows above a white, gleaming shell bank, which was all we could see of the Cheniere. Then Hen and I rolled in our blankets and slept face up to the moon, with the pleasant voices of the island girls coming over the water. Very romantic, you say. But the Tiger boat had many softs of ants and bugs and all of these came for'ard to take the strangers in.

CHAPTER III

The Old Sto' Balls

T HE next morning we took in Clark Cheniere. We had to get out early, for the entire population came in skiffs and pirogues and climbed on board. We made coffee on top of the lumber with many comments from the spectators. Everybody knew us. The tale had spread. The soft-voiced Cajuns fingered our camp gear and discussed our khaki trousers. They plied the Tiger boat crew with questions about us. To us they were courteously shy, but curious; so much that finally we asked Jack Hammond if we could not be put ashore and find a camp in some spot more secluded than the village street which seemed to be all there was to Clark Cheniere. It was merely a dozen unpainted houses straggling along the white shells facing the open road-stead where a score of luggars and a few gasoline boats lay. Among these house yards a few great oak trees arose, and beyond, them stretched the illimitable salt prairie. Far above this, arid the seemingly shoreless open water to the south one saw other oak groves (chenieres). That was all except the blue water and the bluer sky.

A few silent groups of seine menders and crab fishers baiting their lines squatted under the clinaberry bushes and mangroves. From one of the watery lanes leading from the marsh to the back yards of the row of houses came a solitary rat trapper. We heard the harsh cry of a rail from the salt pools, and snipe were running on the beaches at each end of the habitable shore. We idled among the groups all morning long. A shy, curious people of indecipherable blood—Chino-Italian, Filipino, Spanish, Creole, Indian, renegade Irish,
or American. The sun had put the same swarthy touch to all, and years of contact had fused their speech to that droll dialect of the Cajun which is more like the tongue of the tough slums of the northern towns than anything else. "Dis," "dat," "fadder," "modder,"—that was what we heard from them all, regardless of blood-type.

In front of each house, drawn upon the shell beach, were their pirogues. Trapping in winter, shrimp hauling in summer, selling the catch to the little gasoline boats which chugged down from the river weekly—this was their round of life. The gray houses seemed forlorn and untenanted, the glassless windows barred. A barefooted, dark-skinned woman peered furtively at us as we passed, and children played among the rotted hulls of ancient luggars drawn on the beach. In each yard was a charcoal furnace on which the cooking was done, and this was usually shaded by a palm thatch or a grass plait. There was a water famine imminent, for the April skies had been cloudless for some weeks and the only fresh water within sixty miles of the Cheniere was that caught in the cisterns from the roofs.

Hen and I put up our little silk tent on the gleaming shells just around a point from the village. To eastward swept broad Bayou St. Denis, winding on through salt marshes to Barataria Bay and then the Gulf. Across were "Africa," "John-the-Fool," "Des Amoureux," "Old Cheniere," each a lonely camp of the hardy, mongrel people who, for a century, have defied the Gulf hurricanes and clung to their frail homes. There was not a bit of land within miles that rose more than twenty inches above the Gulf tides, and when the sou'easters blow the natives gather about their boats, for few there are who do not have tragic memories in their families of the storms that destroyed Cheniere Caminada with its twelve hundred souls, or the Last Island hurricane, which Lafcadio Hearn celebrated in his story of "Chita."

But this April the waters were very blue and still. Hen and I gathered a few twigs and grass stalks and built a fire for the evening meal. We were at it when we heard a soft clatter among the shells and two shy, brown-eyed boys came through the mangroves. They came to invite us to the "Ball," and, having delivered the message, retreated precipitately.

We wandered around the shell point to the village when the big, full moon was rising. Long before we reached the chinaberry grove we heard the tinkle of the guitars. It seemed that all the islanders had met at the "new sto'," kept by Juan Rojas, a Filipino-Italian, the village head-man, and were waiting for us, who were, after a fashion, the guests of honor. At least after our arrival the folk formed in an impromptu procession and down the street-beach we went, the guitar players and the fiddler, still tip-sily uncertain of his feet, leading the way. It was a wondrous night. The perfume of magnolias and of the fig and orange trees was in the soft air. The luggars, their red sails furled, hung at anchor off the beach, and here and there as we passed their laughing crews joined our parade. Men and women, girls with magnolia buds in their hair, boys in painful celluloid collars, babies hanging to mothers' skirts—on we went.

The ball was in the "old sto'," and five smoky lanterns lit the rough floor. A languid young fellow was peeling a candle over the boards, and at the far end two kegs of beer were on the counter. The fiddler and the guitar players were soon ensconced beside them, and without ceremony began a waltz. The floor manager was a son of old Rojas, a handsome, dark-faced youth who wore a baby-blue shirt, yellow pants with stripes of pink and purple—such pants as never yet you've seen—and as a badge of authority a huge red rose wrapped in tin foil about the stem. He informed me that his sweetheart had brought it for him from a Bayou Perot camp, and that she had tended it all spring.

The younger folks were whispering over the rude floor in no time. The elders and the round-eyed Malay and Filipino children sat about the old sto' counters, the door was jammed with an entranced crowd of music lovers, the beer keg had its adherents, and the ball was on. Little girls of nine with blackberry bloom about their necks danced with solemn,
swarthy-faced fishers, and between numbers wandered hand in hand out to the gallery where the live oaks threw their shadows athwart the shells. Along with the droning of the guitars and violin I heard the splashing of the giant gars in the roadstead and the soft lap of the waves under the luggars' bows. Every harsh, crude outline of the Cheniere was hidden in the magic of the moon—a night of quiet beauty, of adolescent mirth and faraway charm.

It was hard to believe one was still in America. Not even the midnight lunch of sto' bread, sausage, shrimp, and beer, with the bemused fiddler trying to make us a belated speech of welcome, could take away from the entrancement. The younger folk had become shyly acquainted with us; the girls out in the gallery giggled and commented in their Cajun hybrid tongue. Hen tried some of his college French on them with disastrous results; they and their brown-armed young men laughed. Then Sim, the fiddler, and his assistants fell to the music-making. How long the ball went on I do not know. Hen and I wandered quietly down the shell beach at two o'clock and crawled in our tent. But afar, through the wondrous night, I still heard the guitars.

We came "down town" late the next day. And, much to our surprise, we were told that there was another ball on that afternoon and night. In fact, as Captain Jack Hammond said, there would be one continual ball as long as the islanders could detain the fiddler and keep him sober enough to play. The unfortunate musicians were at it again at three P. M., and with two hours' intermission for supper the ball went on into another night of dreamy revelry. The Tiger boat stayed in port.

"These people, they don't hear music often," said Captain Jack genially, "and long as the beer holds out we'll stick around."

I now understood the Tiger boat's schedule. If you stayed by her long enough you would get "somewhere." However, Hen and I were so pleased with the Cheniere, and, besides, had no particular place to go, that we told Captain Jack we would remain. And the next morning, three "balls" having been crowded into her thirty-eight hours' stay in port, the Tiger boat got away for somewhere. They carried Sim and the two guitar men on board. Some of the ladies went out and perched again on the lumber. But some of them decided to stay. Perhaps they hoped to catch another orchestra before nightfall.

"We-all could just dance all week," said one fair damsel (not so fair, either, now I remember), "but dat Tiger boat, he take Sim down to Manila. If you-all stay 'round maybe We get a man to fiddle off dat Hazel boat when he come nex' week."

We-all assured the fair-dark one we-all would stay. Not that we were so mightily taken with sto' balls, but the Cheniere was interesting. We lounged with the fishers under the chinaberry trees and at the sto'. We learned that Juan Rojas, the Malay head-man, had been on the island for forty-five years; he had deserted from a Spanish merchantman in New Orleans and fled to the swamps, and this, we found, was the general vague history of the Chino-Malasian peoples of Barataria. Rojas had married an Italian woman and his handsome sons showed the breed had not been in vain. The young men wandered Sunday morning along the beach, giving oranges to their perfumed sweethearts. In the afternoon they got up another ball! That is, they Waltzed without music, but to a great clattering of feet on the sto' boards.

At the upper end of the beach was a typical colony of the Gulf coast lakes, a seine company headed by one Gyp Baily, whose luggars were shrimp catching in the lower waters. The six men of the seine company had been brought down from New Orleans under the promise of making from four to ten dollars a day by holding a share in the company. They were a forlorn lot, barefooted, ragged, in debt to the sto' and unable to get-away. We had heard many tales of peonage down in the "Free State." This was an instance. The men had been advanced a few dollars and plenty of whiskey and now, no matter how they toiled at the seine, they seemed unable to pay for it. No boat would take them
away. Two who tried to walk north through the illimitable marsh were lost, and when the boss went after them with a shotgun and a skiff they were glad to get back to the Cheniere.

In the evening we were approached by two bronzed young Germans who crept under the mangroves to our tent and told their troubles. They were educated young Teutons, but spoke little English. Otto had been to school eight years in Posen; Paul was a tanner of Darmstadt. They had shipped to come to America and deserted on the New Orleans levees. Wandering about the city, they had come on a man who told them of the money to be made in the Barataria shrimp camps. They wanted to get on to Kansas, where Paul's sister lived, but had only the vaguest idea where Kansas was. So they came down on a bayou boat to Clark's and entered the seine crew.

Each man had a share, the Captain a share, the boat, a share, the seine a share, and the Captain's wife a share for doing the cooking. All expenses were shared proportionally, but when it came to profits the fishers were at the Captain's mercy, for he alone took the catch to New Orleans each week, and, as Otto put it, "Mostly it's two dollars and forty cents in debt to him we are. Someway our accounts run all the wrong way, and we owe the boss eighty dollars, he says. And we no shoes, no money; and no boat will take us off the island if the boss says no. Aeh, is dis a free country, dis America we come to?"

The work was hard. The seine company was out at four in the morning, the men wading to their necks to draw the shrimp seines. Breakfast came at ten o'clock, although the usual coffee had been served on rising. Bean stew with chunks of pork fat, bread, and coffee was the breakfast. Otto said that dinner was the same, except that the beans were white instead of red! The crew complained that, though every man paid for it, the fare at the boss's camp was far better than the crew's. And a favored man or two ate at the boss's table—there was always a favored lieutenant who helped outvote the seine haulers.

"Here's Irish John, he never eats with us. And d'ye had ham and butter and cheese on the Captain's table, too. And last week the Captain's wife made a cake and all the island women came to eat it—and we pay for dat cake!" Paul's hopeless wrath was almost comical. "We pay for clothes and beds and oil and repairs to dat seine, and last week we send up a hundred hands of fish and sixty baskets of crabs. It ought to be worth a hundred dollars, but the boss he come back and say: 'Boys, we lose forty dollars' on dat catch!'"

The two German lads went on with their grievances. We made them sit at our campfire and have supper. "Every time dat Tiger boat come to the Cheniere we have a ball," went on the castaway, "dance and have some beer! Dat's to keep the men from getting ugly, but we never get out of debt."

We asked why they must work for Baily, and were told that the only other company on the island was one headed by Romaine Serviess, a sort of family affair. And anyhow, none would interfere with their boss's methods. And there was no law; no appeal—it was indeed the "Free State," with a corrupt Parish administration above them. The courts would not act against the bayou traders, boat captains, and important personages.

(Since our sojourn there, the Federal Government, let me add, has interfered in the Barataria peonage and has sent one of the "Big Chino" bosses and proprietor of a shrimp camp to the penitentiary.)

Paul and Otto spoke with contempt of their fellow-workmen. In all matters of company division the men were so ignorant that computations were made by counting beans. "So many beans, so many dollars," added Paul. "Aeh, and dose mongrels look down on us!"

I think that hurt them worst of all. The Chino-Italian, Malay-Cajun polyglot islander looked down on these two sturdy, clean-blooded lads of the North! I asked them why they did not appeal to their consul in New Orleans by letter, and Otto shrugged with a smile. They were deserters! And they had come to be Americans, but free men.

We condoled as best we might—and
gave them some of our provisions. Otto begged us not to appear too friendly to them when in the village. So we met the boys the next day, when all the younger men were kicking a rude football down the beach, the weather being too squally for the fishers to go out. Otto was the gayest of them all—he raced and yelled and outkicked them in sheer excess of youth. Despite their lot they were the merriest, carefree adventurers I ever met. Paul came up to me and whispered: "Anodder ball to-night! And more beans—red ones dis time!"

When we went down to their camp among the alligator pears and scraggly palms later, Otto was making the marooned men roar by mimicking the Captain's wife. He wore a sprig of chinaberry bloom in his hat and took it off to hold out to us, while Paul held aloft a cardboard smeared with red beans: "Help the Poor!"

The Cajun girls came—five of them—to our camp and invited us to the ball. They had got a fiddler from John-the-Fool Island. And another night of dancing. The next day they began again at ten in the morning. "Dat music he won't stay long," explained the fair one. Hen and I attended—and also a sixth ball the following night. The entire population was laid out after that.

The last ball was at Gyp Baily's, and the guests assisted at moving out the furniture to make room for the fete. The next day we heard the host lamenting that no one was around to help move it back. So it stayed outside a week, and the family ate in the shade of the chinaberry tree and looked at their dismantled domicile. I asked one of them if I could not assist in moving the stuff in.

"Oh, sho', Man!" said he. "Let dat furniture stay out. Dat Coquille boat, she come along nex' Saturday, and mebbe we catch some more music fo' a ball."

Happy island! Since we left there Clark Cheniere has been battered and riven by hurricane, its oaks twisted; and its houses lean crazily on their stilts along the white shell beach. But I doubt not that the simple, hardy lake folk are still watching to "catch more music."

(To be continued)