

A Cræsus of Gingerbread Cove

BY NORMAN DUNCAN

MY name's Race. I've traded these here Newfoundland north-coast outports for salt-fish for half a lifetime. Boy and youth afore that I served Pinch-a-Penny Peter in his shop at Gingerbread Cove. I was born in the Cove. I knowed all the tricks of Pinch-a-Penny's trade. And I tells you it was Pinch-a-Penny Peter's conscience that made Pinch-a-Penny rich. That's queer two ways: you wouldn't expect a north-coast trader to have a conscience; and you wouldn't expect a north-coast trader with a conscience to be rich. But conscience is much like the wind: it blows every which way; and if a man does but trim his sails to suit, he can bowl along in any direction without much wear and tear of the spirit. Pinch-a-Penny bowled along, paddle-punt fisherman to Gingerbread merchant. He went where he was bound for, wing-and-wing to the breeze behind, and got there with his peace of mind showing never a sign of the weather. In my day the old codger had an easy conscience and twenty thousand dollars.

Long Tom Lark, of Gingerbread Cove, vowed in his prime that he'd sure have to even scores with Pinch-a-Penny Peter afore he could pass to his last harbor with any satisfaction.

"With me, Tom?" says Pinch-a-Penny. "That's a saucy notion for a hook-an'-line man."

"Ten more years o' life," says Tom, "an' I'll square scores."

"Afore you evens scores with me, Tom," says Peter, "you'll have t' have what I wants an' can't get."

"There's times," says Tom, "when a man stands in sore need o' what he never thought he'd want."

"When you heaves what I needs," says Peter, "I'll pay what you asks."

"If 'tis for sale," says Tom.

"Money talks," says Peter.

"Ah, well," says Tom, "maybe it don't speak my language."

Pinch-a-Penny Peter's conscience was just as busy as any other man's conscience. And it liked its job. It troubled Pinch-a-Penny. It didn't trouble un to be honest; it troubled un to be rich. And it give un no rest. When trade was dull—no fish coming into Pinch-a-Penny's storehouses and no goods going out of Pinch-a-Penny's shop—Pinch-a-Penny's conscience made un grumble and groan like the damned. I never seed a man so tortured by conscience afore nor since. And to ease his conscience Pinch-a-Penny would go over his ledgers by night; and he'd jot down a gallon of molasses here, and a pound of tea there, until he had made a good day's trade of a bad one. 'Twas simple enough, too; for Pinch-a-Penny never gived out no accounts to amount to nothing, but just struck his balances to please his greed at the end of the season, and told his dealers how much they owed him or how little he owed them.

In dull times Pinch-a-Penny's conscience irked him into overhauling his ledgers. 'Twas otherwise in seasons of plenty. But Pinch-a-Penny's conscience kept pricking away just the same—aggravating him into getting richer and richer. No rest for Pinch-a-Penny! He had to have all the money he could take by hook and crook or suffer the tortures of an evil conscience. Just like any other man, Pinch-a-Penny must ease that conscience or lose sleep o' nights. And so in seasons of plenty up went the price of tea at Pinch-a-Penny's shop. And up went the price of pork. And up went the price of flour. All sky-high, ecod! Never was such harsh times, says Peter; why, my dear man, up St. John's way, says he, you couldn't touch tea nor pork nor flour with a ten-foot sealing-gaff; and no telling what the world was coming to, with prices soaring like a gull in a gale and all the St. John's merchants chary of credit!

"Damme!" said Pinch-a-Penny; "'tis

awful times for us poor traders. No tellin' who'll weather this here panic. I'd not be surprised if we got a war out of it."

Well, now, on the Newfoundland north-coast in them days 'twasn't much like the big world beyond. Folk didn't cruise about. They was too busy. And they wasn't used to it, anyhow. Gingerbread Cove folk wasn't born at Gingerbread Cove, raised at Rickity Tickle, married at Seldom-Come-By, aged at Skeleton Harbor, and buried at Run-by-Guess; they were born and buried at Gingerbread Cove. So what the fathers thought at Gingerbread Cove the sons thought; and what the sons knowed had been knowed by the old men for a good many years. Nobody was used to changes. They was shy of changes. New ways was fearsome. And so the price of flour was a mystery. It is, anyhow—wherever you finds it. It always has been. And why it should go up and down at Gingerbread Cove was beyond any man of Gingerbread Cove to fathom. When Pinch-a-Penny said the price of flour was up—well, then, she was up; and that's all there was about it. Nobody knowed no better. And Pinch-a-Penny had the flour.

Pinch-a-Penny had the pork, too. And he had the sweetness and the tea. And he had the shoes and the clothes and the patent medicines. And he had the twine and the salt. And he had all the cash there was at Gingerbread Cove. And he had the schooner that fetched in the supplies and carried away the fish to the St. John's markets. He was the only trader at Gingerbread Cove; his storehouses and shop was fair jammed with the things the folk of Gingerbread Cove couldn't do without and wasn't able to get nowhere else. So, all in all, Pinch-a-Penny Peter could make trouble for the folk that made trouble for he. And the folk grumbled. By times, ecod, they grumbled like the devil of a fine Sunday morning! But 'twas all they had the courage to do. And Pinch-a-Penny let un grumble away. The best cure for grumbling, says he, was to give it free course. If a man could speak out in meeting, says he, he'd work no mischief in secret.

"Sea-lawyers, eh?" says Peter. "Huh!

What you fellers want, anyhow? Huh? You got everything now that any man could expect. Isn't you housed? Isn't you fed? Isn't you clothed? Isn't you got a parson and a schoolmaster? Damme, I believes you wants a doctor settled in the harbor! A doctor! An' 'tisin't two years since I got you your schoolmaster! Queer times we're havin' in the outports these days, with every harbor on the coast wantin' a doctor within hail. You're well enough done by at Gingerbread Cove. None better nowhere. An' why? Does you ever think o' that? Why? Because I got my trade here. An' think o' *me!* Damme, if ar a one o' you had my brain-labor t' do, you'd soon find out what harsh labor was like. What with bad debts an' roguery an' failed seasons an' creditors t' St. John's I'm hard put to it t' keep my seven senses. An' small thanks I gets—me that keeps this harbor alive, in famine an' plenty. 'Tis the business I haves that keeps you. You make trouble for my business, ecod, an' you'll come t' starvation! Now, you mark me!"

There would be a scattered time when Pinch-a-Penny would yield an inch. Oh, aye! I've knowed Pinch-a-Penny to drop the price of stick-candy when he had put the price of flour too high for anybody's comfort.

Well, now, Long Tom Lark, of Gingerbread Cove, had a conscience, too. But 'twas a common conscience. Most men haves un. And they're irksome enough for some. 'Twas not like Pinch-a-Penny Peter's conscience. Nothing useful ever come of it. 'Twas like yours and mine. It troubled Tom Lark to be honest and it kept him poor. All Tom Lark's conscience ever aggravated him to do was just to live along in a religious sort of fashion and rear his family and be decently stowed away in the graveyard when his time was up if the sea didn't coteh un first. But 'twas a busy conscience for all that—and as sharp as a fish-prong. No rest for Tom Lark if he didn't fatten his wife and crew of little lads and maids! No peace of mind for Tom if he didn't labor! And so Tom labored and labored and labored. Dawn to dusk his punt was on the grounds off Lack-a-Day Head, taking fish from the

sea to be salted and dried and passed into Pinch-a-Penny's storehouses.

When Tom Lark was along about fourteen years old his father died. 'Twas of a Sunday afternoon that we stowed un away. I mind the time: spring weather and a fair day, with the sun low, and the birds twittering in the alders just afore turning in.

Pinch-a-Penny Peter cotched up with young Tom on the road home from the little graveyard on Sunset Hill.

"Well, lad," says he, "the old skipper's gone."

"Aye, sir, he's dead an' buried."

"A fine man," says Pinch-a-Penny. "None finer."

With that young Tom broke out crying. "He were a kind father t' we," says he. "An' now he's dead!"

"You lacked nothin' in your father's lifetime," says Peter.

"An' now he's dead!"

"Well, well, you've no call t' be afeared o' goin' hungry on that account," says Peter, laying an arm over the lad's shoulder. "No, nor none o' the little crew over t' your house. Take up the fishin' where your father left it off, lad," says he, "an' you'll find small difference. I'll cross out your father's name on the books an' put down your own in its stead."

"I'm fair obliged," says Tom. "That's kind, sir."

"Nothin' like kindness t' ease sorrow," says Pinch-a-Penny. "Your father died in debt, lad."

"Aye, sir?"

"Deep."

"How much, sir?"

"I'm not able t' tell offhand," says Peter. "'Twas deep enough. But never you care. You'll be able t' square it in course o' time. You're young an' hearty. An' I'll not be harsh. Damme, I'm no skinflint!"

"That's kind, sir."

"You—you—*will* square it?"

"I don't know, sir."

"What?" cries Peter. "What! You're not knowin', eh? That's saucy talk. You had them there supplies?"

"I 'low, sir."

"An' you guzzled your share, I'll be bound!"

"Yes, sir."

"An' your mother had her share?"

"Yes, sir."

"An' you're not knowin' whether you'll pay or not! Ecod! What is you? A scoundrel? A dead beat? A rascal? A thief? A jail-bird?"

"No, sir."

"'Tis for the likes o' you that jails was made."

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Doesn't you go t' church? Is that what they learns you there? I'm thinkin' the parson doesn't earn what I pays un. Isn't you got no conscience?"

'Twas too much for young Tom. You sees, Tom Lark *had* a conscience—a conscience as fresh and as young as his years. And Tom had loved his father well. And Tom honored his father's name. And so when he had brooded over Pinch-a-Penny's words for a spell—and when he had maybe laid awake in the night thinking of his father's goodness—he went over to Pinch-a-Penny's office and allowed he'd pay his father's debt. Pinch-a-Penny give un a clap on the back, and says: "You is an honest lad, Tom Lark! I knowed you was. I'm proud t' have your name on my books!"—and that heartened Tom to continue. And after that Tom kept hacking away on his father's debt. In good years Pinch-a-Penny would say: "She's comin' down, Tom. I'll just apply the surplus." And in bad he'd say: "You isn't quite cotched up with your own self this season, b'y. A little less pork this season, Tom, an' you'll square this here little balance afore next. I wisht this whole harbor was as honest as you. No trouble, then," says he, "t' do business in a business-like way."

When Tom got over the hill—fifty and more—his father's debt, with interest, according to Pinch-a-Penny's figures, which Tom had no learning to dispute, was more than it ever had been; and his own was as much as he ever could hope to pay. And by that time Pinch-a-Penny Peter was rich, and Long Tom Lark was gone sour.

In the fall of the year when Tom Lark was fifty-three he went up to St. John's in Pinch-a-Penny Peter's supply-schooner. Nobody knowed why. And Tom made a mystery of it. But go he

would. And when the schooner got back 'twas said that Tom Lark had vanished in the city for a day. Why? Nobody knowed. Where? Nobody could find out. Tom wouldn't tell, nor could the gossips gain a word from his wife. And, after that, Tom was a changed man; he mooned a deal, and he would talk no more of the future, but dwelt upon the shortness of a man's days and the quantity of his sin, and labored like mad, and read the Scriptures by candle-light, and sot more store by going to church and prayer-meeting than ever afore. Labor? Ecod, how that poor man labored through the winter! While there was light! And until he fair dropped in his tracks of sheer weariness! 'Twas back in the forest—hauling fire-wood with the dogs and storing it away back of his little cottage under Lend-a-Hand Hill.

"Dear man!" says Peter; "you've fire-wood for half a dozen winters."

"They'll need it," says Tom.

"Aye," says Peter; "but will you lie idle next winter?"

"Next winter?" says Tom. And he laughed. "Oh, next winter," says he, "I'll have another occupation."

"Movin' away, Tom?"

"Well," says Tom, "I is an' I isn't."

There come a day in March weather of that year when seals was thick on the floe off Gingerbread Cove. You could see un with the naked eye from Lack-a-Day Head. A hundred thousand black specks swarming over the ice three miles and more to sea! "Swiles! Swiles!" And Gingerbread Cove went mad for slaughter. 'Twas a fair time for off-shore sealing, too—a blue, still day, with the look and feel of settled weather. The ice had come in from the current with a northeasterly gale, a wonderful mixture of Arctic bergs and Labrador pans, all blinding white in the spring sun; and 'twas a field so vast, and jammed so tight against the coast, that there wasn't much more than a lane or two and a Dutchman's breeches of open water within sight from the heads. Nobody looked for a gale of off-shore wind to blow that ice to sea afore dawn of the next day.

"A fine, soft time, lads!" says Pinch-a-Penny. "I 'low I'll go out with the Gingerbread crew."

"Skipper Peter," says Tom Lark, "you're too old a man t' be on the ice."

"Aye," says Peter; "but I wants t' bludgeon another swile afore I dies."

"But you creaks, man!"

"Ah, well," says Peter, "I'll show the lads I'm able t' haul a swile ashore."

"Small hope for such as you on a movin' floe!"

"Last time, Tom," says Peter.

"Last time, true enough," says Tom, "if that ice starts t' sea with a breeze o' wind behind."

"Oh, well, Tom," says Peter, "I'll take my chances. If the wind comes up I'll be as spry as I'm able."

It come on to blow in the afternoon. But 'twas short warning of off-shore weather. A puff of gray wind come down; a saucier gust went by; and then a swirl of galish wind jumped off the heads and come scurrying over the pans. At the first sign of wind, Pinch-a-Penny Peter took for home, loping over the ice as fast as his lungs and old legs would take un when pushed, and nobody worried about he any more. He was in such mad haste that the lads laughed behind un as he passed. Most of the Gingerbread crew followed, dragging their swiles; and them that started early come safe to harbor with the fat. But there's nothing will master a man's caution like the lust of slaughter: give a Newfoundland a club, and show un a swile-pack, and he'll venture far from safety. 'Twas not until a flurry of snow come along of a sudden that the last of the crew dropped what they was at and begun to jump for shore like a pack of jack-rabbits.

With snow in the wind, 'twas every man for himself. And that means no mercy and less help.

By this time the ice had begun to feel the wind. 'Twas restless. And a bad promise: the pans crunched and creaked as they settled more at ease. The ice was going abroad. As the farther fields drifted off to sea, the floe fell loose in-shore. Lanes and pools opened up. The cake-ice tipped and went awash under the weight of a man. Rough going, ecod! There was no telling when open water would cut a man off where he stood. And the wind was whipping off-shore, and the snow was like dust in a

man's eyes and mouth, and the landmarks of Gingerbread Cove was nothing but shadows in a mist of snow to windward. Nobody knowed where Pinch-a-Penny Peter was. Nobody thought about him. And wherever poor old Pinch-a-Penny was—whether safe ashore or creaking shoreward against the wind on his last legs—he must do for himself. 'Twas no time to succor rich or poor. Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost.

Bound out, in the morning, Long Tom Lark had fetched his rodney through the lanes. By luck and good conduct he had managed to get the wee boat a fairish way out. He had beached her, there on the floe—a big pan, close by a hummock which he marked with care. And 'twas for Tom Lark's little rodney that the seven last men of Gingerbread Cove was jumping. With her afloat—and the pack loosening in-shore under the wind—they could make harbor well enough afore the gale worked up the water in the lee of the Gingerbread hills. But she was a mean, small boat. There was room for six, with safety—but room for no more; no room for seven. 'Twas a nasty mess, to be sure. You couldn't expect nothing else. But there wasn't no panic. Gingerbread men was accustomed to tight places. And they took this one easy. Them that got there first launched the boat and stepped in. No fight; no fuss.

It just happened to be Eleazer Butt that was left. 'Twas Eleazer's ill-luck. And Eleazer was up in years, and had fell behind coming over the ice.

"No room for me?" says he.

'Twas sure death to be left on the ice. The wind begun to taste of frost. And 'twas jumping up. 'Twould carry the floe far and scatter it broadcast.

"See for yourself, lad," says Tom.

"Pshaw!" says Eleazer. "That's too bad!"

"You isn't no sorrier than me, b'y."

Eleazer tweaked his beard. "Dang it!" says he. "I wisht there *was* room. I'm hungry for my supper."

"Let un in," says one of the lads. "'Tis even chances she'll float it out."

"Well," says Eleazer, "I doesn't want t' make no trouble—"

"Come aboard," says Tom. "An' make haste."

"If she makes bad weather," says Eleazer, "I'll get out."

They pushed off from the pan. 'Twas falling dusk, by this time. The wind blowed black. The frost begun to bite. Snow come thick—just as if, ecod, somebody up aloft was shaking the clouds, like bags, in the gale! And the rodney was deep and ticklish; had the ice not kept the water flat in the lanes and pools, either Eleazer would have had to get out, as he promised, or she would have swamped like a cup. As it was, handled like dynamite, she done well enough; and she might have made harbor within the hour had she not been hailed by Pinch-a-Penny Peter from a small pan of ice midway between.

And there the old codger was squatting, his old face pinched and woebegone, his bag o' bones wrapped up in his coonskin coat, his pan near flush with the sea, with little black waves already beginning to wash over it.

A sad sight, believe me! Poor old Pinch-a-Penny, bound out to sea without hope on a wee pan of ice!

"Got any room for me?" says he.

They ranged alongside. "Mercy o' God!" says Tom; "she's too deep as it is."

"Aye," says Peter; "you isn't got room for no more. She'd sink if I put foot in her."

"Us 'll come back," says Tom.

"No use, Tom," says Peter. "You knows that well enough. 'Tis no place out here for a Gingerbread punt. Afore you could get t' shore an' back night will be down an' this here gale will be a blizzard. You'd never be able t' find me."

"I 'low not," says Tom.

"Oh, no," says Peter. "No use, b'y."

"Damme, Skipper Peter," says Tom, "I'm sorry!"

"Aye," says Peter; "'tis a sad death for an ol' man—squattin' out here all alone on the ice an' shiverin' with the cold until he shakes his poor damned soul out."

"Not damned!" cries Tom. "Oh, don't say it!"

"Ah, well!" says Peter; "sittin' here all alone, I been thinkin'."

"'Tisn't by any man's wish that you're here, poor man!" says Tom.

"Oh no," says Peter. "No blame t' nobody. My time's come. That's all. But I wisht I had a seat in your rodney, Tom."

And then Tom chuckled.

"What you laughin' at?" says Peter.

"I got a comical idea," says Tom.

"Laughin' at me, Tom?"

"Oh, I'm jus' laughin'."

"'Tis neither time nor place, Tom," says Peter, "t' laugh at an old man."

Tom roared. Aye, he slapped his knee, and he threwed back his head, and he roared. 'Twas enough almost to swamp the boat.

"For shame!" says Peter. And more than Pinch-a-Penny thought so.

"Skipper Peter," says Tom, "you're rich, isn't you?"

"I got money," says Peter.

"Sittin' out here all alone," says Tom, "you been thinkin' a deal, you says?"

"Well," says Peter, "I'll not deny that I been havin' a little spurt o' sober thought."

"You been thinkin' that money wasn't much, after all?"

"Aye."

"An' that all your money in a lump wouldn't buy you passage ashore?"

"Oh, some few small thoughts on that order," says Peter. "'Tis perfectly natural."

"Money talks," says Tom.

"Tauntin' me again, Tom?"

"No, I isn't," says Tom. "I means it. Money talks. What 'll you give for my seat in the boat?"

"'Tis not for sale, Tom."

The lads begun to grumble. It seemed just as if Long Tom Lark was making game of an old man in trouble. 'Twas either that or lunacy. And there was no time for nonsense off the Gingerbread coast in a spring gale of wind.

"Hist!" Tom whispered to the lads. "I knows what I'm doin'."

"A mad thing, Tom!"

"Oh, no!" says Tom. "'Tis the cleverest thing ever I thought of. Well," says he to Peter, "how much?"

"No man sells his life."

"Life or no life, my place in this boat is for sale," says Tom. "Money talks. Come, now. Speak up. Us can't linger here with night comin' down."

"What's the price, Tom?"

"How much you got, Peter?"

"Ah, well, I can afford a stiffish price, Tom. Anything you say in reason will suit me. You name the price, Tom. I'll pay."

"Aye, ye crab!" says Tom. "I'm namin' prices now. Look out, Peter! You're seventy-three. I'm fifty-three. Will you grant that I'd live t' be as old as you?"

"I'll grant it, Tom."

"I'm not sayin' I would," says Tom. "You mark that."

"Ah, well, I'll grant it, anyhow."

"I been an industrious man all my life, Skipper Peter. None knows it better than you. Will you grant that I'd earn a hundred and fifty dollars a year if I lived?"

"Aye, Tom."

Down come a gust of wind. "Have done!" says one of the lads. "Here's the gale come down with the dark. Us 'll all be cast away."

"Rodney's mine, isn't she?" says Tom.

Well, she was. Nobody could say nothing to that. And nobody did.

"That's three thousand dollars, Peter," says Tom. "Three—thousand—dollars!"

"Aye," says Peter, "she calculates that way. But you've forgot t' deduct your livin' from the total. Not that I minds," says he. "'Tis just a business detail."

"Damme," says Tom. "I'll not be harsh!"

"Another thing, Tom," says Peter. "You're askin' me t' pay for twenty years o' life when I can use but a few. God knows how many!"

"I got you where I wants you," says Tom, "but I isn't got the heart t' grind you. Will you pay two thousand dollars for my seat in the boat?"

"If you is fool enough t' take it, Tom."

"There's something t' boot," says Tom. "I wants t' die out o' debt."

"You does, Tom."

"An' my father's bill is squared?"

"Aye."

"'Tis a bargain!" says Tom. "God witness!"

"Lads," says Pinch-a-Penny to the others in the rodney, "I calls you t' witness that I didn't ask Tom Lark for his seat in the boat. I isn't no coward. I've asked no man t' give up his life for

me. This here bargain is a straight business deal. Business is business. 'Tis not my proposition. An' I calls you t' witness that I'm willin' t' pay what he asks. He've something for sale. I wants it. I've the money t' buy it. The price is his. I'll pay it." Then he turned to Tom. "You wants this money paid t' your wife, Tom?"

"Aye," says Tom, "t' Mary. She'll know why."

"Very good," says Pinch-a-Penny. "You've my word that I'll do it. . . . Wind's jumpin' up, Tom."

"I wants your oath. The wind will bide for that. Hold up your right hand."

Pinch-a-Penny shivered in a blast of the gale. "I swears," says he.

"Lads," says Tom, "you'll shame this man to his grave if he fails t' pay!"

"Gettin' dark, Tom," says Peter.

"Aye," says Tom; "'tis growin' wonderful cold an' dark out here. I knows it well. Put me ashore on the ice, lads."

They landed Tom, then, on a near-by pan. He would have it so.

"Leave me have my way!" says he. "I've done a good stroke o' business."

Presently they took old Pinch-a-Penny aboard in Tom's stead; and just for a minute they hung off Tom's pan to say good-by.

"I sends my love t' Mary an' the children," says he. "You'll not fail t' remember. She'll know why I done this thing. Tell her 'twas a grand chance an' I took it."

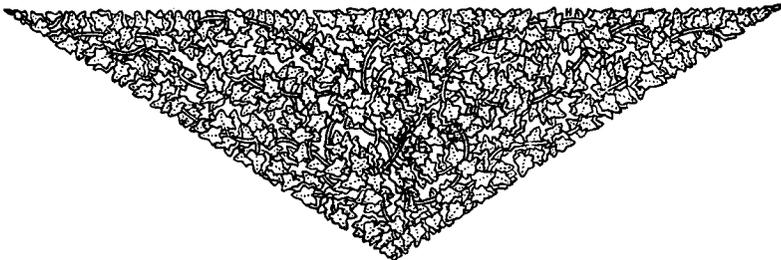
"Aye, Tom."

"Fetch in here close," says Tom. "I wants t' talk t' the ol' skinflint you got aboard there. I'll have my say, ecod, at last! Ye crab!" says he, shaking his fist in Pinch-a-Penny's face, when the rodney got alongside. "Ye robber! Ye pinch-a-penny! Ye liar! Ye thief! I done ye! Hear me? I done ye! I vowed I'd even scores with ye afore I died. An' I've done it—I've done it! What did ye buy? Twenty years o' my life! What will ye pay for? Twenty years o' my life!" And he laughed. And then he cut a caper, and come close to the edge of the pan, and shook his fist in Pinch-a-Penny's face again. "Know what I done in St. John's last fall?" says he. "I seen a doctor, ye crab! Know what he told me? No, ye don't! Twenty years o' my life this here ol' skinflint will pay for!" he crowed. "Two thousand dollars he'll put in the hands o' my poor wife!"

Well, well! The rodney was moving away. And a swirl of snow shrouded poor Tom Lark. But they heard un laugh once more.

"My heart is givin' 'way, anyhow!" he yelled. "I didn't have three months t' live!"

Old Pinch-a-Penny Peter done what he said he would do. He laid the money in poor Mary Lark's hands. But a queer thing happened next day. Up went the price of pork at Pinch-a-Penny's shop! And up went the price of tea and molasses! And up went the price of flour!



The Judgment House

A NOVEL

BY GILBERT PARKER

CHAPTER XIII

"I WILL NOT SING"

"I WILL not sing—it's no use, I will not." Al'mah's eyes were vivid with anger, and her lips, so much the resort of humor, were set in determination. Her words came with low vehemence.

Adrian Fellowes' hand nervously appealed to her. His voice was coaxing and gentle.

"Al'mah, must I tell Mrs. Byng that?" he asked. "There are two hundred people in the ball-room. Some of them have driven twenty miles to hear you. Besides, you are bound in honor to keep your engagement."

"I am bound to keep nothing that I don't wish to keep—you understand!" she replied, with a passionate gesture. "I am free to do what I please with my voice and with myself. I will leave here in the morning. I sang before dinner. That pays my board and a little over," she added, with bitterness. "I prefer to be a paying guest. Mrs. Byng shall not be my paying hostess."

Fellowes shrugged his shoulders, but his lips twitched with excitement. "I don't know what has come over you, Al'mah," he said helplessly and with an anxiety he could not disguise. "You can't do that kind of thing. It isn't fair, it isn't straight business; from a social standpoint, it isn't well-bred."

"Well-bred!" she retorted with a scornful laugh and a look of angry disdain. "You once said I had the manners of Madame Sans Gene, the washer-woman—a sickly joke, it was. Are you going to be my guide in manners? Does breeding only consist in having clothes made in Savile Row and eating strawberries out of season at a pound a basket?"

"I get my clothes from the Stores now, as you can see," he said, in a desperate attempt to be humorous, for she was in a dangerous mood. Only once before had he seen her so, and he could feel the air

charged with catastrophe. "And I'm eating humble pie in season now at nothing a dish," he added. "I really am; and it gives me shocking indigestion."

Her face relaxed a little, for she could seldom resist any touch of humor, but the stubborn and wilful light in her eyes remained.

"That sounds like last year's pantomime," she said, sharply, and, with a jerk of her shoulders, turned away.

"Wait a minute, for God's sake, Al'mah!" he urged, desperately. "What has upset you? What has happened? Before dinner you were yourself; now—" he threw up his hands in despair—"Ah, my dearest, my star—!"

She turned upon him savagely, and it seemed as though a storm of passion would break upon him; but all at once she changed, came up close to him, and looked him steadily in the eyes.

"I do not think I trust you," she said, quite quietly.

His eyes could not meet hers fairly. He felt them shrinking from her inquisition. "You have always trusted me till now. What has happened?" he asked, apprehensively and with husky voice.

"Nothing has *happened*," she replied in a low, steady voice. "Nothing! But I seem to realize you to-night. It came to me suddenly, at dinner, as I listened to you, as I saw you talk—I had never before seen you in surroundings like these. But I realized you then. I had a revelation. You need not ask me what it was. I do not know quite. I cannot tell. It is all vague, but it is startling, and it has gone through my heart like a knife. I tell you this, and I tell you quite calmly, that if you prove to be what, for the first time, I have a vision you are, I shall never look upon your face again if I can help it. If I come to know that you are false in nature and in act, that all you have said to me is not true, that you have degraded me— Oh," she fiercely added