# Two Can Sing

By JAMES M. CAIN

**CHAPTER VII**

"Make 'em dolce. Make 'em nice sweet, no loud at all. No big dramatiu. Nice, a sweet, a sad. Yeah?" Parma begged.

"I'll do my best," Leonard said.

"You do like I say, we knock 'em over."

So we went out there and got through the gingerbread, and he threw down his pen and I threw down my paintbrush, and we got out the props, and the orchestra played the introduction to the duet. Then he started to sing, and I woke up. I mean I got it through my head that when that bird said dolce he meant dolce. He sang as though that bonnet of Mimi's were some little bird he had in his hand, so it made a catch come in your throat to listen to him. When he hit the A, he lifted his eyes, with the side of his face to the audience, and held it a little, and then melted off it almost with a sigh. When he did that he looked at me and winked.

It was that wink that told me what I had to do. I had to put dolce in it. I came in on my beat and tried to do it as he did it. When it came to my little solo, I put tears in it. Maybe they were just imitation tears, but they were tears.

We went into the finish and laid it right on the end of Mario's stick, and slopped out the tears in buckets. Buckets? We turned the fire hose on them. It stopped the show. They didn't only clap—they cheered; so we had to repeat it. That's dead against the rules, and Mario tried to go on, but they wouldn't let him. We got through the act and Parma flopped on the bed for the last two "Mimi's" and the curtain came down to a terrific hand. We took our first two bows, the whole gang that were in the act, and when we came back from the second one Mario was back there. Cecil yelled in my ear, "Take him out, take him out!" So I took him out. I grabbed him by one hand, she by the other, and we led him out, and they gave him a big hand, too. That seemed to fix it up about that missed cue. . .

It was a half-hour before I could start to dress. I went to my dressing room and had just about got my whiskers pulled off when about fifty people shoved in from outside, wanting me to autograph their programs. I obliged, and signed "Logan Bennett." Then I washed up and met Cecil, and we got a cab and went off to eat.

We went to a night club. It had a dance floor, and tables around that and booths around the wall. We took a booth. We ordered a steak for two, and then she ordered some red burgundy to go with it and sherry to start. That was unusual with her. She's like most singers. She'll give you a drink, but she doesn't take much herself. She saw me look at her. "I want something. I — want to celebrate."

"O. K. with me. Plenty all right."

"Did you enjoy yourself?"

"I enjoyed the final curtain."

"Didn't you enjoy the applause after the O Mimi duet? It brought down the house."

"It was all right."

"Is that all you have to say about it?"

"I liked it fine."

"You mean you really liked it?"

"Yeah, but I hate to admit it, but I really liked it. That was the prettiest music I heard all night."

The sherry came and we raised our glasses, clinked, and had a sip. Leonard, I love it."

"You're better at it than in concert."

"You're telling me? I hate concerts. But opera—I just love it, and if you ever hear me saying again that I don't want to be a singer you'll know I'm temporarily insane. I love it; I love everything about it, the smell, the flights, the high notes, the low notes, the applause, the curtain calls—everything."

"You must feel good tonight."

"I do. Do you?"

"I feel all right."

"Is it—the way you thought it would be?"

"I never thought."

"Not even—just a little bit?"

"You mean, that it's nice, and silly and cockeyed, that I should be an opera singer, when all God intended me for was a dumb contractor, and that it's a big joke that came off just the way you hoped it would, and I never believed it would, and—something like that?"

"Yes, that's what I mean."

"Then, yes."

"Let's dance."

We danced, and I held her close, and smelled her hair, and she nestled it up against my face. "It's gay, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I'm almost happy, Leonard."

"Me, too."

"Let's go back to our little booth. I want to be kissed."

So we went back to the booth and she got kissed, and we laughed about the way I had hid from Mario, and drank the wine and ate steak. I had to cut the steak left-handed, so I woundn't joggle her head, where it seemed to be parked on my right shoulder . . .

We stayed a second week in Chicago and I did my three operas over again, and then we played a week in Cleveland and another in Indianapolis. Then Cecil's contract was up, and it was time for her to go back and get ready for the New York season.

The Saturday matinee in Indianapolis was "Faust." I met Cecil in the main dining-room that morning, around ten o'clock for breakfast, and, while we were eating, Rossi came over and sat down. He didn't have much to say. He kept asking the waiter if any call had come for him and bit his finger-nails, and pretty soon it came out that the guy who was to sing Wagner that afternoon wouldn't come to the theater, on account of a writ his wife would serve on him if he showed up there, and that Rossi was waiting to find out if some singer in Chicago could come down and do it. His call came through, and when he came back he said his man was tied up. That meant somebody from the chorus would have to do it, and that wasn't so good.

And then Cecil popped out: "Well, what are we talking about, with him sitting here. Here, baby; here's my key. There's a score up in my room. You can just hike yourself up there and learn it."

"What? Learn it in one morning and then sing it?"

"There are only a few pages of it," Cecil said.

"Faust is in French, isn't it?" I said, hopelessly.

"Oh, dear. He doesn't sing French."

But Rossi fixed that part up. He had a score in Italian and I was to learn it in that and sing it in that, with the rest of them singing French. So the next thing I knew I was up there in my room with a score, and by one o'clock I had it learned; and by two o'clock Rossi had given me the business, and by three o'clock I was in a costume they dug up, out there doing it.

That made more impression on them than anything I had done yet. You see, they don't pay much attention to a guy who knows three roles, all coached up by heart. They know all about them. But a guy who can get a role up quick and go out there and do it, even if he makes a few mistakes, that guy can really be some use around an opera company.

Rossi came to my dressing-room after I finished in "Traviata" that night and offered me a contract for the rest of the season. He said Mr. Mario was very much pleased with me, especially the way I had gone in on Wagner. He offered me $150 a week. I thanked him, and said no. He came up to $175. I still said no. He came up to $200. I still said no, and asked him not to bid any higher, as it wasn't a question of money. He couldn't figure it out, but after a while we shook hands and that was that.

That night Cecil and I ate in a quiet little place we had found where we were practically the only customers. After we ordered she said, "Did Rossi speak to you?"

"Yes, he did."

"Did he offer $150? He said he would."

"He came up to $200."

"What did you say?"

"I said no."

"Why?"

"I'm no singer. What would I be doing trailing around with this outfit after you're gone?"

"They play Baltimore, Philadelphia, Boston, and Pittsburgh before they swing west. I could visit you week-ends, maybe oftener than that. I—I might even make a flying trip out to the coast."

"I'm not the type."

"Who is the type? . . . Leonard, let me ask you something. Is it just because his $200 a week looks like chicken-feed to you? Is it because a big contractor makes a lot more than that?"

"Sometimes he does. Right now he doesn't make a dime."

"If that's what it is, you're making a mistake. Leonard, everything has come out the way I said it would, hasn't it? Now, listen to me. With that voice, you can make money that a big contractor never even heard of. After just one season with the American Scala Opera Company, the Metropolitan will grab you sure. It isn't everybody who can sing with the American Scala. Their standards are terribly high, and very well the Metropolitan knows it. Once you're in the Metropolitan, there's the radio, the phonograph, concert, moving pictures. Leonard, you can be rich. You—you can't help it."

"Contracting's my trade."

"All this—doesn't it mean anything to you?"

"Yeah, for a gag. But not what you mean."

"And, in addition to the money there's fame—"

"Don't want it."

She sat there, and I saw her eyes begin to look wet. Then she said, "Oh, why don't we both tell the truth? You want to get back to New York—for what's waiting for you in New York. And I—I don't want you ever to go there again."

"No, that's not it."

"Yes, it is . . . I'm doing just exactly the opposite of what I thought I was doing when we started all this. I thought I would be the good fairy and bring you and her together again. And now, what am I doing? I'm trying to take you away from her. I'm just a—home-wrecker."

She looked comic as she said it, and I laughed and she laughed. Then she started to cry. I hadn't heard one word from Doris since I left New York. I had wired her from every hotel I had stopped at, and you would think she might have sent me a post card. There wasn't even that. I sat there, watching Cecil and trying to let her be a home-wrecker, as she called it. I knew she was swell; I respected everything about her; I didn't have to be told she'd do anything for me. I tried to feel I was in love with her, so I could say let's both stay with this outfit and let the rest go hang. I couldn't. And then the next thing I knew I was crying, too. . .

We hit New York Monday morning. I put Cecil in a cab and went on home. On the way, I kept thinking what I was going to say. I had been away six weeks, and what had kept me that long? The best I could think of was that I had taken a swing around to look at "conditions."

When I got home I let myself in, carried in my grip, and called to Doris. There was no answer. I went out in the kitchen, and it was empty. There wasn't a soul in the home.

(TO BE CONTINUED

**CHRISTIAN SCIENCE SERVICES**

"Everlasting Punishment" will be the subject of the Lesson-Sermon in all Churches of Christ, Scientist, on Sunday, May 3.

The Golden Text will be from Psalms 9:16 — "The Lord is known by the judgement which he executeth; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands."

Among the citations comprising the Lesson-Sermon will be the following from the Bible—James 1:13—"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempted he any man."

The Lesson-Sermon also will include passages from the Christian Science texbook, "Science and Health with Key to the Scripture," by Mary Baker Eddy, among which is the following, page 536—The way of error is awful to contemplate. The illusion is without hope or God."

Services are held every Sunday at 11 A. M. Sunday School at 9:45 A. M. Wednesday evening meetings at 8 P. M., in the Church Rooms, 111 Dover Street.

**633,665 TIRES QUOTA FOR MAY**

The Office of Price Administration announced this week that a total of 633,665 new and recapped tires would be made available for rationing next month to passenger car owners.

The allotment compared with an April quota of about 572,000 tires.

The May quota, for the first time since rationing began, makes recapping certificates available to "List A" passenger cars and motorcycles. This is in line with provisions of a pending amendment to tire rationing regulations which will require that, after May 1, passenger car eligibles on "List A" must have their tires repaired if possible before being allowed to purchase new ones.

"List A" includes vehicles used in services deemed most essential in the nation's economy. A secondary list of eligibles known as "List B" includes all persons eligible to receive recapped tires but not new ones.

Only 55,573 new tires are alloted next month to "List A" passenger cars. There eligible, however, will have first call on the 578,092 recapped tires offered during the month, with the remainder of the recaps going to "List B" eligibles.

The May quota provides 238,259 new tires and 379,060 recapped tires for trucks, busses and other farm and commercial vehicles eligible under the rationing plan.

Maryland is alloted 738 new tires, 9,848 recapped tires and 5,263 new tubes for passenger cars and motorcycles. Three thousand one hundred and twenty-six new tires, 4,985 recaps and 4,320 new tubes will be available for eligible commercial and farm vehicles next month.


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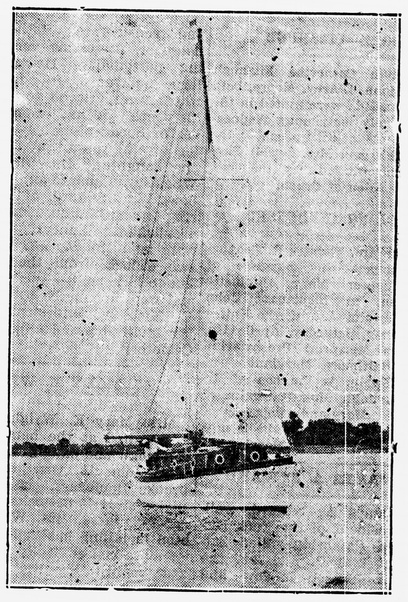

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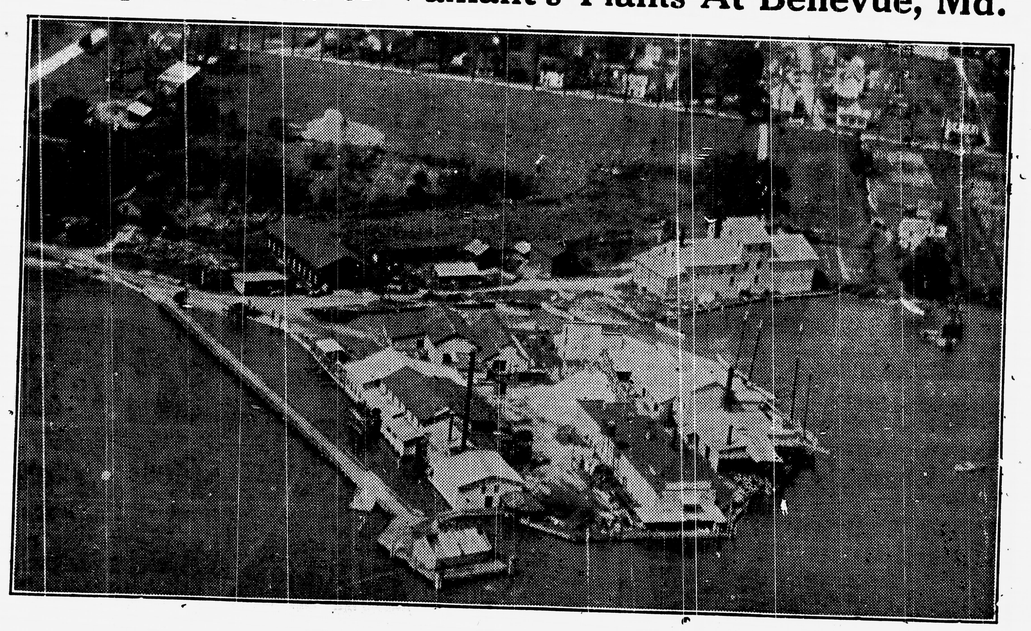

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