Two Can Sing

By JAMES M. CAIN

CHAPTER XI

I quit kidding myself then. I knew I'd give anything to have it back, what I had pulled at the party that afternoon. It wasn't brave, it wasn't big; it was just plain silly. I had made a jackass of myself and put something terrible between me and Doris. I began thinking of her, then, and knew that it didn't make any difference what she had done to me, or anything else. I wanted her so bad it was just a terrible ache, wanted her worse than ever. And here I was; I had no wife, I had no home, I had no kids, I had no work, I didn't even have Cecil. I had just made a mess of my life. I think I hit an all-time low that night. I never felt worse. I couldn't.

The next day I took a suite at a hotel in the fifties. I took it by the month. I didn't hear anything from Doris. I began reading the society pages after a couple of days, and she was in. Every time I saw her name I saw Leighton's. On the singing, I never opened my trap. One day a guy showed up at the office by the name of Horn. He kept looking around kind of puzzled at the drafting room, and in a minute I asked him pretty sharp what he wanted.

"You're Mr. Borland? Mr. Leonard Borland?"

"Yes, I'm Leonard Borland."

"I'm looking for the Leonard Borland who sang with the American Scala Opera Company under the name of Logan Bennett. Anyway, I hear he did."

"Where did you hear that?"

"I was in Pittsburgh last week. I heard it from a friend of mine. Giuseppe Rossi."

"Well? What of it?"

He knew then he had the right guy, and kept looking me over. "I'll tell you what of it. I'm connected with this new outfit that's giving opera over at the Maxwin Theater, and—"

"Not interested."

"I need a baritone."

"Still not interested."

"If you're as good as he says you are, I could make you a pretty nice proposition. I could offer you $125 a night say with three appearances a week guaranteed. That's a little more than Rossi was paying you, isn't it?"

"Yeah, quite a little."

"Well—will you think it over?"

"No."

"I got a couple of good tenors and another one coming. I got a couple of sopranos I think are comers. But in opera you've got to have one good baritone before you've got a show."

"You certainly have."

"All right, then, I'll come up a little. How about $150?"

"Maybe you didn't understand what I said when you came in here. I appreciate what you say. I'm grateful to Rossi, but I'm just not interested."

The idea of singing made me sick. He went, and I put on my hat and engaged in my favorite outdoor sport, about that time. That was walking around the opera house hoping I'd see Cecil. A couple of days after that I did see her. I raced back to the office as fast as I could get there and put in a call for her at her hotel. They said she wasn't in. I knew she wouldn't be. That was why I had been watching. I left word that Mr. Borland called. Then for a week I stuck at my desk, hoping she would call back. She never did.

All that, what I've just been telling you, was in the last part of November. When the first of December came it crossed my mind it was funny no bills had been forwarded to me. On the third I found out why. When I came downstairs in the morning and crossed the lobby the clerk called me, and he had my check in his hand, the one I had given him for my next month's room rent. It had bounced back. I blinked at it, and I knew then why there hadn't been any bills. Doris was paying her own bills. The money was in a joint account, in her name and mine, and she had drawn every cent of it out, started an account somewhere else, and there I was.

I said there must be some mistake and I would see him that afternoon. I went out, and hustled over to Newark and borrowed $300 from a manufacturer of power shovels we had done some business with. I got back just in time to get in the bank, so I could cover that check before they closed; then went back and told the clerk it was all right, I had drawn on the wrong account and he could put it through.

I went up to my suite and counted my money. I had $75 over what I had deposited in the bank. My expenses, over the $170 a month I was paying for the suite, were about $50 a week, not counting club dues and other things. I couldn't stave off very long. I was just about a week and a half from the bone yard, and I began to feel it again, that thick rage against Doris and the way she treated me. It would suit her fine, I knew, to have me coming on my knees to her begging for money, I walked around the suite, and after a while something in me clicked. I began to think about Horn and the Hippodrome and his $150 a night.

Next day he called up: "Mr. Borland?"

"Yes?"

"This is Bert Horn again. Remember?"

"Oh, yeah. How are you?"

"All right. Listen; my other tenor got to town last night. Fact of the matter, I stole him off Rossi. Guy by the name of Parma. You know him?"

"Yeah. I sang with him."

"Listen; if you're as good as he says you are, I might raise the offer. I might up the ante to $200."

"Now you're talking. Come on over."

He came, and looked me over again and the place over again, and then he laughed and shook his head.

"You play?" I asked.

"Some kind of way, yes."

"Come on up."

I took him up on the third floor, where the piano was, and opened the windows and shoved the "Traviata" area in front of him. He played it and I sang it. When I got through he nodded. "Guess they weren't kidding me."

We went down again, and he got down to cases. "How many roles do you know?"

"Three."

"Just three?"

"Marcel, Germont, and Rigoletto. I sang one other role, but it was a pinch-hitting job and I wouldn't know it now if I heard it."

"What role was it?"

"Wagner in 'Faust' I don't sing French, but they let me do it in Italian. They shoved it at me in the morning, I sang it that afternoon, and I had forgotten it by night."

That made the same impression on him it had on the other. An opera impressario, he's a little like a baseball manager. He knows all about smoke. He gets that every day. But a guy that can come out of the bull pen and finish a ball game, that's different. When he heard that he quit worrying, and began to lay it out what I'd have to do. The hitch came over the guarantee. With just those three operas, he couldn't make it three times a week, because they weren't giving "Traviata" on a weekly schedule. He wanted me to get up "Trovatore," "Lucia," and "Aida," and then later "Don Giovanni," and they would revive it if they thought I was right for it.

I said I couldn't get up that many roles by the end of the winter if I had to sing three times a week, too.

So then he had a different idea "All right; we'll say 'Lucia and 'Trovatore,' but get 'Pagliacci' up by next week, and we can put you on three times. You see, ham and eggs is once a week, too and—"

"What is?"

"Ham and eggs. 'Cavalleria Rusticana' and 'Pagliacci,' the double bill. 'Pagliacci' you can get up quick. After the 'Prologue,' which I suppose you know, you have almost nothing to do, just two real scenes, not over 10 minutes of actual singing altogether. Then we can—"

"Oh. All right, then."

"You'll need a coach. I recommend Siegal. He's a good man, works with us."

"Fine, I'll take him. When do we start?"

"Next week. Get 'Pagliacci' up by then, and then later we can work you in on the others. But we want to bring you out in 'Rigoletto.' That makes you important."

So by that afternoon, I had connected with Siegal, and was back in the same old groove. I found out then how much Cecil had been giving me for nothing. Do you know what that bird took? He charged me $25 an hour, and I had to have him every day. I had to borrow $200 more in Newark, and it was an awful crimp in my $600 a week. But, at that $450 was nothing to be sneezed at.

I asked for a rehearsal on "Rigoletto," with three or four of the choristers. In the scene before the courtiers there was some stuff I wanted to do, and I had to make them slam me down so I really hit the deck, so when I came crawling back to them I would really be on my knees. They told me to come over to the theater.

When I got there, I walked out to the middle of the stage, let out a couple of big ones, and it felt pretty good. I stuck out my chest. I thought how I was putting it over on Doris and how I wouldn't come begging her for anything.

The conductor, Gustav Schultz was at the piano, and we went through it. I think he wanted to look me over. I showed them how I wanted them to heave me, and after a while they got it so it suited me. When we quit, I saw Parma in the wings, and went over and shook hands.

"Hello, boy, hello. How'sa old kid?" he said.

"Fine. How's yourself?"

"O. K. Say, it's swell, how you do this scene. Alla baritones run for bedroom, make little try, audience alla time wonder why he don't get in. Look like he must be weak. Ought to fight, just like you do 'em now, and then, pow! — down he go, just like this!"

He threw his shoulder at me, and I went head over heels onto the floor. It was one stage fall I didn't expect. Then he laughed. Singers, they're a funny breed. They've got what you might call a rudimentary sense of humor, in the first place, and they're awful proud of their muscles, in the second place. People think they're soft. Well, singing doesn't come from the spirit. It comes from the belt, and it takes plenty of chest to do it right.

I got up, and laughed, and he and Schultz and I went out and had a drink . . .

The afternoon of the performance I put off lunch till three o'clock, and then went out and had a good one. I came back to the office and vocalized my voice. I came up quick, and felt good. I was beginning to get nervous. They all get nervous, but this was different from what I had felt before. It had a little tingle to it. I felt I was good. I walked up to the hotel and it was about half past four. I lay down and got a little sleep.

It seemed funny to be putting the make-up on without Cecil bobbing in to give me the double C, but I got it in place, and put on the funny clothes, and tried my voice. It was still up, and was all right. Horn came in, looked me over, and nodded. "The contracts are ready."

"You got them with you?"

"My secretary's bringing them over. I'll be in with them after the show. How do you feel?"

"I feel all right."

(To Be Continued)

A MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY
WASHINGTON

May 1, 1942

TO THE PEOPLE OF MARYLAND:

This week a new campaign for the sale of War Bonds and Savings Stamps is under way throughout the Nation. It is the War Bond Quota Campaign.

It is urgently necessary that you double the rate at which you are now buying War Bonds and Stamps. This will mean the sale direct to individual Americans of War Bonds and Stamps to the amount of not less than one billion dollars every month.

One billion dollars a month is the National quota. It is equal to one-tenth the combined income of all Americans.

This money is needed to buy the tools of war for your fighting forces. It will not pay for all of them. Our war expenditures now are at the rate of about FOUR BILLIONS a month, and they are growing daily. But a billion dollars a month direct from the people will make all-out production possible. Without it we cannot do our best; without it we cannot put forth our full effort.

It is desperately needed for another reason. We can't fight a war and at the same time live and spend as usual. There are not enough goods to go around — the things we buy with money. If we go on spending at the 1941 scale, we'll be robbing the fighting man to add to our own comfort or pleasure. We'll be driving up the cost of living for all of us. We'll be imposing dire hardships on our neighbors.

What is asked of you is ten per cent of your earnings — a tithe for Liberty. It is not a tax; it is not even a contribution; it is a loan at interest, for your use and protection later.

Your Government asks you to cut down your expenditures, TO SAVE — your boys on the firing line and in the training camps, through your Government, ask you to save so that they may have what they need to win YOUR WAR for you — America asks you to save; to SAVE TO WIN THE WAR; to buy War Bonds and Stamps up to not less than ten per cent of your income.

Is Liberty worth it? Is Democracy worth it? Is America worth it? I think I know your answer.

Sincerely,

H Morgenthau Jr.

FOR VICTORY BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

The above letter was sent to this newspaper by Secretary Morgenthau in Washington. We publish it in the interest of the War Bond Quota Campaign and earnestly recommend that all our readers do their share in the tremendous job ahead of financing the War effort.

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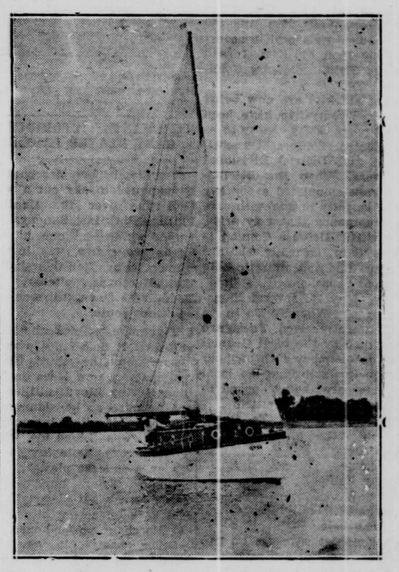
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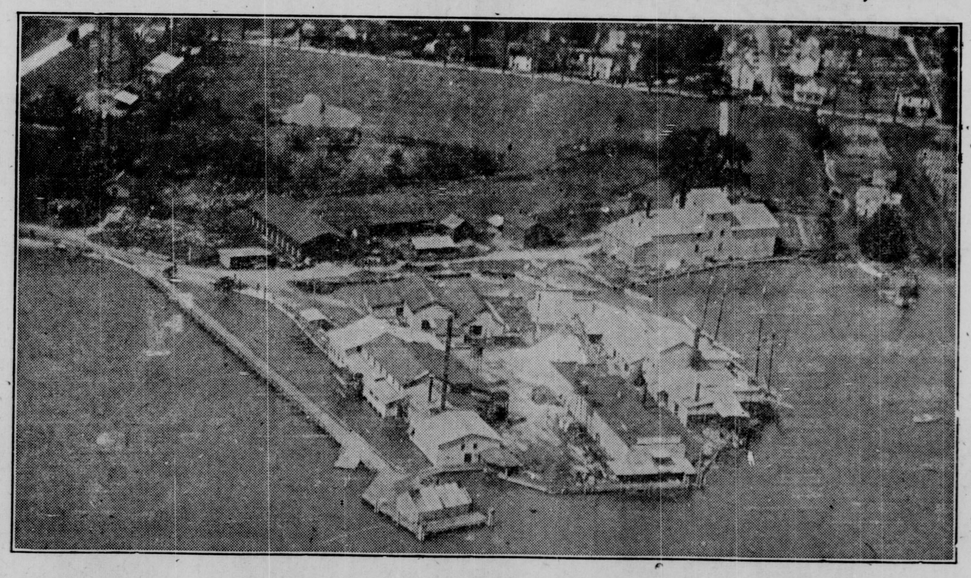
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