



Madman's Luck

By NORMAN DUNCAN

Illustrations by Harvey Dunn

IT was one thing or the other. Yet it might be neither. There was a disquieting alternative. No doubt the message disposed of the delicate affair for good and all in ten terse words. The maid had made up her mind; she had disclosed it in haste: that was all. It might be, however, that the despatch conveyed news of a more urgent content. It might be that the maid lay ill—that she called for help and comfort. In that event, nothing could excuse the reluctance of the man who should decline an instant passage of Scalawag Run with the pitiful appeal. True, it was not inviting—a passage of Scalawag Run in the wet, gray wind, with night flowing in from the sea.

No matter about that. Elizabeth Lute had departed from Scalawag Harbor in confusion, leaving no definite answer to the two grave suggestions, but only a melting appeal for delay, as maids will—for a space of absence, an interval for reflection, an opportunity to search her heart and be sure of its decision. If, then, she had communicated that decision to her mother, according to her promise to communicate it to somebody, and if the telegram contained news of no more consequence, a good man might command his patience, might indulge a reasonable caution, might hesitate on the brink of Black Cliff with the sanction of his self-respect. But if Elizabeth Lute lay ill and in need, a passage of Scalawag Run must be challenged, whatever came of it. And both Tommy Lark and Sandy Rowl knew it.

Tommy Lark and Sandy Rowl, on the return from Bottom Harbor to Scalawag Run, had come to Point-o'-Bay Cove, where they were to lie the night. They were accosted by the telegraph operator: "Are you men from Scalawag?"

She was a brisk, trim young woman from St. John's, new to the occupation.

"We is, ma'am," Sandy Rowl replied.

"It's fortunate I caught you," said the young woman, glowing with satisfaction.

"Indeed it is! Are you crossing at once?"

Sandy Rowl smiled. "We hadn't thought of it, ma'am," said he. "I 'low you don't know much about Scalawag Run," he added.

The young woman tossed her red head. "When you *have* thought of it, and made up both your minds," she replied tartly, "you might let me know. It is a matter of some importance."

"Ay, ma'am."

By this time Tommy Lark had connected the telegraph operator's concern with the rare emergency of a message.

"What you so eager t' know for?" he inquired.

"I've a despatch to send across."

"Not a telegram!"

"It is."

"Somebody in trouble?"

"As to that," the young woman replied, "I'm not permitted to say."

"Is you permitted t' tell who the telegram is from?"

The young woman opened her eyes. "I should think not!" she declared.

"Is you permitted t' tell who 'tis for?"

Obviously the young woman could not send the message without announcing its destination. "Are you acquainted with Mrs. Jacob Lute?" said she.

Tommy Lark turned to Sandy Rowl. Sandy Rowl turned to Tommy Lark. It was Tommy Lark that replied.

"We is," said he. "Is the telegram for she?"

"It is."

"From Grace Harbor?"

"I'm not permitted to tell you that."

"Well, then, if the telegram is for Mrs. Jacob Lute," said Tommy Lark gravely,

"Sandy Rowl an' me will take a look at the ice in Scalawag Run an' see what we makes of it. I 'low we'll jus' *have* to. Eh, Sandy?"

Sandy Rowl's face was twisted with doubt. For a moment he deliberated. In the end he spoke positively.

"We'll take a look at it," said he.

They went then to the crest of Black Cliff to survey the ice in the run. Not a word was spoken on the way. A momentous situation, by the dramatic quality of which both young men were moved, had been precipitated by the untimely receipt of the telegram for Elizabeth Lute's mother.

POINT-O'-BAY, in the lee of which the cottages of Point-o'-Bay Cove were gathered as in the crook of a finger, thrust itself into the open sea. Between Point-o'-Bay and Scalawag Island was the run called Scalawag, of the width of two miles. There had been wind at sea—a far-off gale, perhaps then exhausted, or plunging away into the southern seas, leaving a turmoil of water behind it.

Directly into the run, rolling from the open, the sea was swelling in gigantic billows. There would have been no crossing at all had there not been ice in the run; but there was ice in the run—plenty of ice, blown in by a breeze of the day before, and wallowing there.

It seemed, from the crest of Black Cliff, where Tommy Lark and Sandy Rowl stood gazing, each debating with his own courage, that the ice was heavy enough

for the passage—thick ice, of varying extent, from fragments like cracked ice, to wide pans; and the whole, it seemed, floated in contact.

"Well?" said Tommy Lark.

"I don't know. What do you think?"

"It might be done. I don't know."

"Ay; it might be. No tellin' for sure, though. The ice is in a wonderful tumble out there."

"Seems t' be heavy ice on the edge o' the sea."

"'Tis in a terrible commotion. I'd not chance it out there. I've never seed the ice so tossed about in the sea afore."

TOMMY LARK reflected.

"Ay," he determined at last; "the best course across is by way o' the heavy ice on the edge o' the sea. There mus' be a wonderful steep slant t' some o' them pans when the big seas slips beneath them. Yet a man could go warily an' maybe keep from slidin' off. If the worse come t' the worst, he could dig his toes an' nails in an' crawl. If there's evil news in that telegram, I 'low a man could find excuse enough t' try his luck."

"There's news both good an' evil in it."

Tommy Lark turned from a listless contemplation of the gray reaches of the open sea.

"News both good an' evil!" he mused.

"The one for me an' the other for you. An' God knows the issue! I can't fathom it."

"I wish 'twas over with."

"Me too. I'm eager t' make an end o' the matter. 'Twill be a sad conclusion for me."

"I can't think it, Sandy. I think the sadness will be mine."

"You rouse my hope, Tommy."

"If 'tis not I, 'twill be you."

"'Twill be you."

Tommy Lark shook his head dolefully. He sighed.

"Ah, no!" said he. "I'm not that deservin' an' fortunate."

"Anyhow, there's good news in that telegram for one of us," Sandy declared, "an' bad news for the other. An' whatever the news,—whether good for me an' bad for you, or good for you an' bad for me,—'tis of a sort that should keep for a safer time than this. If 'tis good news for you, you've no right t' risk a foot on the floe this night; if 'tis bad news for you, you might risk what you liked, an' no

matter about it. 'Tis the same with me. Until we knows what's in that telegram, or until the fall of a better time than this for crossin' Scalawag Run, we've neither of us no right t' venture a yard from shore."

"You've the right of it, so far as you goes," Tommy Lark replied; "but the telegram may contain other news than the news you speaks of."

"No, Tommy."

"She said nothin' t' me about a telegram. She said she'd send a letter."

"She've telegraphed t' ease her mind."

"Why to her mother?"

"'Tis jus' a maid's way."

"Think so, Sandy? It makes me wonderful nervous. Isn't you wonderful nervous, Sandy?"

"I am that."

"I'm wonderful curious, too. Isn't you?"

"I is. I'm impatient as well. Isn't you?"

"I'm havin' a tough struggle t' command my patience. What you think she telegraphed for?"

"Havin' made up her mind, she jus' couldn't wait t' speak it."

"I wonder what—"

"Me too, Sandy. God knows it! Still an' all, impatient as I is, I can wait for the answer. 'Twould be sin an' folly for a man t' take his life out on Scalawag Run this night for no better reason than t' satisfy his curiosity. I'm in favor o' waitin' with patience for a better time across."

"The maid might be ill," Tommy Lark objected.

"She's not ill. She's jus' positive an' restless. I knows her ways well enough t' know that much."

"She *might* be ill."

"True, she might; but she—"

"An' if—"

Sandy Rowl, who had been staring absently up the coast toward the sea, started.

"Ecod!" said he. "A bank o' fog's comin' round Point-o'-Bay!"

"Man!"

"That ends it."

"'Tis a pity!"

"'Twill be thick as mud on the floe in half an hour. We must lie the night here."

"I don't know, Sandy."

Sandy laughed.

"Tommy," said he, "'tis a wicked folly t' cling t' your notion any longer."

"I wants t' know what's in that telegram."

"So does I."

"I'm fair shiverin' with eagerness t' know. Isn't you?"

"I'm none too steady."

"Sandy, I jus' *got* t' know!"

"Well, then," Sandy Rowl proposed, "we'll go an' bait the telegraph lady into tellin' us."

It was an empty pursuit. The young