**The Day We Celebrate**

O. Henry

“In the tropics” (“Hop-along” Bibb, the bird fancier, was saying to me) “the seasons, months, fortnights, week-ends, holidays, dog-days, Sundays, and yesterdays get so jumbled together in the shuffle that you never know when a year has gone by until you’re in the middle of the next one.”

“Hop-along” Bibb kept his bird store on lower Fourth Avenue. He was an ex-seaman and beachcomber who made regular voyages to southern ports and imported personally conducted invoices of talking parrots and dialectic paroquets. He had a stiff knee, neck, and nerve. I had gone to him to buy a parrot to present, at Christmas, to my Aunt Joanna.

“This one,” said I, disregarding his homily on the subdivisions of time—“this one that seems all red, white, and blue—to what genus of beasts does he belong? He appeals at once to my patriotism and to my love of discord in colour schemes.”

“That’s a cockatoo from Ecuador,” said Bibb. “All he has been taught to say is ‘Merry Christmas.’ A seasonable bird. He’s only seven dollars; and I’ll bet many a human has stuck you for more money by making the same speech to you.”

And then Bibb laughed suddenly and loudly.

“That bird,” he explained, “reminds me. He’s got his dates mixed. He ought to be saying ‘*E plu* *ri* *bus unum* ,’ to match his feathers, instead of trying to work the Santa Claus graft. It reminds me of the time me and Liverpool Sam got our ideas of things tangled up on the coast of Costa Rica on account of the weather and other phenomena to be met with in the tropics.

“We were, as it were, stranded on that section of the Spanish main with no money to speak of and no friends that should be talked about either. We had stoked and second-cooked ourselves down there on a fruit steamer from New Orleans to try our luck, which was discharged, after we got there, for lack of evidence. There was no work suitable to our instincts; so me and Liverpool began to subsist on the red rum of the country and such fruit as we could reap where we had not sown. It was an alluvial town, called Soledad, where there was no harbour or future or recourse. Between steamers the town slept and drank rum. It only woke up when there were bananas to ship. It was like a man sleeping through dinner until the dessert.

“When me and Liverpool got so low down that the American consul wouldn’t speak to us we knew we’d struck bed rock.

“We boarded with a snuff-brown lady named Chica, who kept a rum-shop and a ladies’ and gents’ restaurant in a street called the *cal* *le de los* Forty-seven Inconsolable Saints. When our credit played out there, Liverpool, whose stomach overshadowed his sensations of *nob* *les* *se ob* *li* *ge*, married Chica. This kept us in rice and fried plantain for a month; and then Chica pounded Liverpool one morning sadly and earnestly for fifteen minutes with a casserole handed down from the stone age, and we knew that we had out-welcomed our liver. That night we signed an engagement with Don Jaime McSpinosa, a hybrid banana fancier of the place, to work on his fruit preserves nine miles out of town. We had to do it or be reduced to sea water and broken doses of feed and slumber.

“Now, speaking of Liverpool Sam, I don’t malign or inexculpate him to you any more than I would to his face. But in my opinion, when an Englishman gets as low as he can he’s got to dodge so that the dregs of other nations don’t drop ballast on him out of their balloons. And if he’s a Liverpool Englishman, why, fire-damp is what he’s got to look out for. Being a natural American, that’s my personal view. But Liverpool and me had much in common. We were without decorous clothes or ways and means of existence; and, as the saying goes, misery certainly does enjoy the society of accomplices.

“Our job on old McSpinosa’s plantation was chopping down banana stalks and loading the bunches of fruit on the backs of horses. Then a native dressed up in an alligator hide belt, a machete, and a pair of AA sheeting pajamas, drives ’em over to the coast and piles ’em up on the beach.

“You ever been in a banana grove? It’s as solemn as a rathskeller at seven a. m. It’s like being lost behind the scenes at one of these mushroom musical shows. You can’t see the sky for the foliage above you; and the ground is knee deep in rotten leaves; and it’s so still that you can hear the stalks growing again after you chop ’em down.

“At night me and Liverpool herded in a lot of grass huts on the edge of a lagoon with the red, yellow, and black employés of Don Jaime. There we lay fighting mosquitoes and listening to the monkeys squalling and the alligators grunting and splashing in the lagoon until daylight with only snatches of sleep between times.

“We soon lost all idea of what time of the year it was. It’s just about eighty degrees there in December and June and on Fridays and at midnight and election day and any other old time. Sometimes it rains more than at others, and that’s all the difference you notice. A man is liable to live along there without noticing any fugiting of tempus until some day the undertaker calls in for him just when he’s beginning to think about cutting out the gang and saving up a little to invest in real estate.

“I don’t know how long we worked for Don Jaime; but it was through two or three rainy spells, eight or ten hair cuts, and the life of three pairs of sail-cloth trousers. All the money we earned went for rum and tobacco; but we ate, and that was something.

“All of a sudden one day me and Liverpool find the trade of committing surgical operations on banana stalks turning to aloes and quinine in our mouths. It’s a seizure that often comes upon white men in Latin and geographical countries. We wanted to be addressed again in language and see the smoke of a steamer and read the real estate transfers and gents’ outfitting ads in an old newspaper. Even Soledad seemed like a centre of civilization to us, so that evening we put our thumbs on our nose at Don Jaime’s fruit stand and shook his grass burrs off our feet.

“It was only twelve miles to Soledad, but it took me and Liverpool two days to get there. It was banana grove nearly all the way; and we got twisted time and again. It was like paging the palm room of a New York hotel for a man named Smith.

“When we saw the houses of Soledad between the trees all my disinclination toward this Liverpool Sam rose up in me. I stood him while we were two white men against the banana brindles; but now, when there were prospects of my exchanging even cuss words with an American citizen, I put him back in his proper place. And he was a sight, too, with his rum-painted nose and his red whiskers and elephant feet with leather sandals strapped to them. I suppose I looked about the same.

“‘It looks to me,’ says I, ‘like Great Britain ought to be made to keep such gin-swilling, scurvy, unbecoming mud larks as you at home instead of sending ’em over here to degrade and taint foreign lands. We kicked you out of America once and we ought to put on rubber boots and do it again.’

“‘Oh, you go to ‘ell,’ says Liverpool, which was about all the repartee he ever had.

“Well, Soledad, looked fine to me after Don Jaime ’s plantation. Liverpool and me walked into it side by side, from force of habit, past the calabosa and the Hotel Grande, down across the plaza toward Chica’s hut, where we hoped that Liverpool, being a husband of hers, might work his luck for a meal.

“As we passed the two-story little frame house occupied by the American Club, we noticed that the balcony had been decorated all around with wreaths of evergreens and flowers, and the flag was flying from the pole on the roof. Stanzey, the consul, and Arkright, a gold-mine owner, were smoking on the balcony. Me and Liverpool waved our dirty hands toward ’em and smiled real society smiles; but they turned their backs to us and went on talking. And we had played whist once with the two of ’em up to the time when Liverpool held all thirteen trumps for four hands in succession. It was some holiday, we knew; but we didn’t know the day nor the year.

“A little further along we saw a reverend man named Pendergast, who had come to Soledad to build a church, standing under a cocoanut palm with his little black alpaca coat and green umbrella.

“‘Boys, boys!’ says he, through his blue spectacles, ‘is it as bad as this? Are you so far reduced?’

“‘We’re reduced,’ says I, ‘to very vulgar fractions.’

“‘It is indeed sad,’ says Pendergast, ‘to see my countrymen in such circumstances.’

“‘Cut ‘arf of that out, old party,’ says Liverpool. ‘Cawn’t you tell a member of the British upper classes when you see one?’

“‘Shut up,’ I told Liverpool. ‘You’re on foreign soil now, or that portion of it that’s not on you.’

“‘And on this day, too!’ goes on Pendergast, grievous—‘on this most glorious day of the year when we should all be celebrating the dawn of Christian civilization and the downfall of the wicked.’

“‘I did notice bunting and bouquets decorating the town, reverend,’ says I, ‘but I didn’t know what it was for. We’ve been so long out of touch with calendars that we didn’t know whether it was summer time or Saturday afternoon.’

“‘Here is two dollars,’ says Pendergast digging up two Chili silver wheels and handing ’em to me. ‘Go, my men, and observe the rest of the day in a befitting manner.’

“Me and Liverpool thanked him kindly, and walked away.

“‘Shall we eat?’ I asks.

“‘Oh, ‘ell!’ says Liverpool. ‘What’s money for?’

“‘Very well, then,’ I says, ’since you insist upon it, we’ll drink.’

“So we pull up in a rum shop and get a quart of it and go down on the beach under a cocoanut tree and celebrate.

“Not having eaten anything but oranges in two days, the rum has immediate effect; and once more I conjure up great repugnance toward the British nation.

“‘Stand up here,’ I says to Liverpool, ‘you scum of a despot limited monarchy, and have another dose of Bunker Hill. That good man, Mr. Pendergast,’ says I, ’said we were to observe the day in a befitting manner, and I’m not going to see his money misapplied.’

“‘Oh, you go to ‘ell!’ says Liverpool, and I started in with a fine left-hander on his right eye.

“Liverpool had been a fighter once, but dissipation and bad company had taken the nerve out of him. In ten minutes I had him lying on the sand waving the white flag.

“‘Get up,’ says I, kicking him in the ribs, ‘and come along with me.’

“Liverpool got up and followed behind me because it was his habit, wiping the red off his face and nose. I led him to Reverend Pendergast’s shack and called him out.

“‘Look at this, sir,’ says I—‘look at this thing that was once a proud Britisher. You gave us two dollars and told us to celebrate the day. The star-spangled banner still waves. Hurrah for the stars and eagles!’

“’dear me,’ says Pendergast, holding up his hands. ‘Fighting on this day of all days! On Christmas day, when peace on—’

“‘Christmas, hell!’ says I. ‘I thought it was the Fourth of July.’”

“Merry Christmas!” said the red, white, and blue cockatoo.

“Take him for six dollars,” said Hop-along Bibb. “He’s got his dates and colours mixed.”