

# The Cruise of the Cadis

by Raymond S. Spears

MR. ALVIN EATON walked with a lonely and dejected air along that wide thoroughfare of New Orleans where one meets so large a proportion of beautiful young ladies and handsome old men. Suddenly his face brightened. It was not the smile of a friend that banished the ache from his heart, nor was it a congenial "howdy." It was a shrill cry from a side street toward the levee, a voice with a strident note in it, such as might proceed from a throat of brass. Mr. Eaton's face lighted up as he listened; his step quickened; and he eagerly traced the sound to its source—a parrot of dull-gray plumage and one solemn eye; for a drooping lid veiled the cavity which had been designed for the companion orb.

As Mr. Eaton approached, the parrot, having scanned him critically from between two bars of the battered brass cage, called at him in a low, derisive voice:

"Old maid! Old maid! Always been an old maid! Heigh-ho! Heigh-ho! Scat!"

Mr. Eaton grinned ecstatically. Without more ado, he entered the doorway under the cage, passed on between tiers of cages full of evil-smelling, shrieking creatures with worn pelts and bedraggled plumage, till, far in the rear, before a dusty window, he found a lean little man trying to pull a monkey's tooth. The monkey was tied to the back of a chair, hand and foot, waist, neck, and even jaws. Nevertheless, it could wiggle and protest, and it did.

The owner of the shop burst into a series of maledictions in a mixture of French, Cuban, Spanish and English as the visitor, unnoticed,

approached him from behind. Prancing up and down, the old fellow shook his hand violently. The monkey had nipped his thumb. The wild-eyed little beast looked appealingly past its tormentor to Mr. Eaton. Noticing the animal's gaze, the man turned, and cut short his objurgations.

"Ah, *mossierf!*" he cried apologetically, "ze little pet of me, et ees so confus' mit *les dents*. I fix um! *Mon dieu!* Le monk, he ver' savage. Have me ze honor—eh, what?"

Mr. Eaton had moved his hand impatiently. He could not bear monkeys, much less the sleepy guinea-pigs and white mice with which the rear of the store was chiefly populated. He drew his coat close around him, and hastily retreated toward the door. Among the birds there he was more comfortable.

"You have parrots?" he asked casually, as one who knew animal-dealers to the bottom of their hearts, and how best to deal with them.

"Yeh! Yeh, *mossieu!* Parrots galoriously! See! A lit' Brazilian parrot. He talk like—like"—he hesitated a moment as he scanned Mr. Eaton—"he talk like a lit' angel. He converse ver' lady-like."

Seeing that Mr. Eaton's eyes wandered among the other birds, the dealer enlarged on the charms and attainments of the various members of his stock. Some sang, some were beautiful, some did stunts on ladders, and some played ball with wads of paper. But not one word did he say about the gray bird with one eye that hung in front of the store. At last, apparently slightly disgusted, Mr. Eaton nodded toward One-Eye—for so he had already dubbed the bird.

"Where'd you get that thing?" he asked.

The dealer shrugged his shoulders.

"One darn sailor-man. A year, two year now, I feed dat bird. He don't talk. I tell de trut', he jes' holler. My golly! I put him in here—parbleu! He scare de canary, he screech. De monk', dey can't sleep. I sell him ver' quick—cheap—twenty-fife dollar, eh? I let him go fo' feefteen dollar, yeh?"

"Done!" said Mr. Eaton.

The money was passed over quickly. The large brass cage came down. A small one was opened, and the gray parrot walked into it with an alacrity that should have told the dealer much. Mr. Eaton was going out of the door, and the dealer was bowing low, to conceal his joy over the transaction, when the parrot said very distinctly:

"Blamed liar! Blamed liar! Fool! Fool!"

"Eh, what?" screamed the dealer. "You talk? Fifteen dollars for a parrot talk like dat? Mister! Mister!"

But Mr. Eaton seemed not to hear, and the dealer danced grimacing in the doorway of the shop.

"He swear! *Mon dieu!* He talk like a pirate—he wort' a hundert toller—two hundert!"

The little man turned back among his pets, and soon the pained shrieks of the unfortunate monkey told of vengeance being wreaked.

The purchaser of One-Eye, on leaving the shop, hastened to the river front. He went over the levee, and, just below the big Morgan liner, he boarded a somewhat smaller but far more sumptuous boat—to wit, his yacht, a long, broad, deep craft, shining white, and bright with varnish and polished brass.

Here and there along the deck of the yacht were cages and stands for birds, and all the birds were parrots. Nor were these the only creatures in evidence. Numbers of cats were prowling, ambling, or galloping about the deck,

or reposing in broad low chairs and cozy corners. Far astern a cat fight was going on in the after cabin, toward which the steward made haste when the sounds of conflict reached his ears.

The parrots, on seeing Mr. Eaton, began to walk sideways toward him, to fluff up their feathers, and to hail him with strangely incongruous greetings.

"Come 'ere! Come 'ere! Come'ere!" shrieked a score of voices, and then from the cabins came other calls till the yacht echoed with a babel of shrill salutations.

A moment after the steward entered the cabin whence issued the sounds of cats in anger, a large Tom leaped through an open port and landed on the deck with a thump of four paws. After waiting a moment to regain his equanimity, he trotted forward to meet Mr. Eaton. One of the animal's ears was split, and the left side of his face was bleeding, but Tom's step was jaunty and his tail pointed straight up, save for a fern-like curl at the tip.

"You naughty Tom!" exclaimed Mr. Eaton as the cat walked around, rubbing the top of his head on the lace-hooks of the man's shoes. "Is Jack hurt?"

"Nosseh!" replied the steward. "A bit scratched is all, seh."

"All right, but you'd better rub a little carbolized vaseline——"

"All right, seh!"

Soon afterward, as Mr. Eaton was admiring his new parrot, Jack entered the forward cabin, or bird pen, with his mouth wide open and his nose crinkling. Time was when people greased cats with tallow, which was good to a cat's taste; but carbolized vaseline!

"P-s-s-s!" said Jack disgustedly.

"Scat, you horrid things!" screamed the one-eyed parrot, as the cats, following Mr. Eaton, approached. "Bow-wow-wow! Yep-yep-waugh!"

Eleven cats, Jack and Tom foremost,

leaped for the open ports, and climbed for the rigging. As their distended tails disappeared, One-Eye imitated a dog fight.

“Oh, you treasure!” exclaimed Mr. Eaton, stepping forward as if to embrace his pet.

“You’re an old maid. Scat!” exclaimed the bird soberly.

Mr. Eaton frowned through his smiles, and then, responding to the notice that lunch was ready, started to put the bird in the cage.

“Go to Halifax!” the bird yelled, flying to a perch already occupied by a yellow Brazilian parrot.

“Kek! Kek! Kek!” Saffron snapped, ruffling up, whereupon One-Eye whacked him on the head with his wing, and Saffron subsided with a shriek.

“Watch that pair—don’t let them fight,” directed Mr. Eaton as he started for the dining saloon.

“Old maid! Scat!” retorted the stranger parrot, and the steward was glad he had a face of wax.

Mr. Eaton did not linger long over his lunch. He ate rapidly of his salad, tea, light biscuit, and fruit, thinking the while of the treasure he had found in his new pet.

## II

THE owner of One-Eye had two hobbies—parrots and cats. He himself could not tell which he loved best.

“I can come within one of it, anyhow,” he would say to himself whimsically, as he tried to decide which he preferred. To reach at least a partial decision was necessary frequently, for cats are liveliest north of the parallel of New Orleans, while parrots are liveliest south of it. This accounted for Mr. Eaton’s presence at New Orleans. He was undecided whether to go north to St. Louis on the Mississippi, so favoring the felines, or to go southward into the blue Gulf, along the coasts, and among the islands, a

course more conducive to the health and happiness of his parrots.

Recently a jewel of a cat had wandered aboard the yacht. Mr. Eaton had recognized it as a rare animal, in spite of soft-coal smudge. It was a Manx, and such a Manx! No soft and downy, purring kitten was this, but a creature broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped, wide-faced, and heavy-clawed. Mr. Eaton could appreciate a purring, velvety kitten, but his love was for cats that could fight and parrots that swore. Hence his joy in the Manx that swaggered up the middle of the deck one day, scaring less obtrusive cats into a state of slit-eyed fear.

“A genuine, scrappy Manx!” Mr. Eaton thought; and for three days he cherished the happy illusion. But at the end of that time he learned that the cat was a Manx by accident, having lost its tail in kittenhood, and not through the right of heredity. Hence the melancholy mood in which Mr. Eaton had paced the streets of New Orleans until the strident cry of One-Eye dispelled his gloom. Unquestionably, at the time of the acquisition of One-Eye, parrots were first in his affections. The bobtailed cat wandered at will over the yacht, bully of all the cats he met, but ignored by Mr. Eaton. The crew, less fastidious as to the animal’s ancestry, loved Bob as a friend and a playmate, and as a fighter capable of routing half a dozen aristocratic felines whose pedigrees alone might have daunted him. While the steward and the doctor cared for the cats, the owner of the yacht devoted himself to his birds, feeding them from his own hands with tidbits suitable for parrot crops. At meal times Mr. Eaton was always cheered vociferously by his feathered dependents, the while they crawled over him from head to foot, clinging right-side-up and upside-down to the resplendent dressing-gown of flowered design which that gentleman affected.

But the yacht was not to remain long at New Orleans. The attention Mr. Eaton and his

pets received from steamer roustabouts and longshoremen who lined the levee was annoying rather than flattering. The word to sail was soon given. The steward laid in a huge supply of crackers and cold storage meats, and the captain cleared the yacht for foreign ports.

On a splendid golden morning, the yacht *Cadis* swung out into the great Mississippi torrent, the bow caught in the current, and the craft, turning gracefully southward, sped away for the tropics, come what might to the tribes of furry creatures born in cooler climes.

Bob, the Manx, showed signs of anxiety as soon as the tremble of the screw passed through the yacht. He licked his chops uneasily, and when, seven hours later, the *Cadis* ran down Ead's Pass and dipped to the great Gulf swell, he looked pained. At the sixth dip, Bob sprawled down on the deck, his fore claws reaching to right and left, his hind legs drawn up, and his left ear to the varnished wood.

"Steward! Oh, George!" called Mr. Eaton. "Come take this cat to the hospital—he's sick!"

One-Eye gazed down on the cat.

"Yah-h-yah-h-h!" he shrieked maliciously. "Scat!"

Bob, hanging limply over the steward's arm, wriggled feebly as he looked at the bird, and then turned toward the leaping, white-capped sea with jaws yawning. The steward carried him below.

Meanwhile Mr. Eaton devoted himself to cultivating the talents of his bird-friends. As an incentive to conversation, biscuits were fed to the talkative. Under this stimulus, volubility increased rapidly, and even creatures of shy and retiring dispositions developed unexpected conversational powers. Their teacher was delighted with his successes.

A lady-like little green bird was receiving special attention from Mr. Eaton. It had learned to say, "Please, sir, a cracker," and was now being taught a new phrase.

"Thank you, sir; thank you, sir; thank you, sir" —these words Mr. Eaton was repeating to his promising pupil, when an ear-splitting, raucous voice broke forth profanely:

"Darn your eyes, Biddy wants a cracker!"

The sound was sudden, and Mr. Eaton leaped a foot in the air. It was the voice of One-Eye, and his master was not displeased. Indeed, he rewarded the brazen-throated bird with a whole sea-biscuit—and so, in an instant, undid all the lessons he had taught the lady-like parrot, who, looking on with understanding, forthwith renounced polite speeches, and took forevermore to profanity, which, in the case of One-Eye, she had seen so bountifully rewarded.

Not only on this occasion, but in general, One-Eye showed himself a disturbing spirit. "Yah—scat!" became the war-whoop and the cry of distress on the *Cadis*. Even the sailors took it up. But the bird's rough tongue, loud voice, and rude, masterful ways seemed only to endear him to the heart of his owner.

After two weeks' sailing, the yacht was in the west mouth of the Orinoco River. Here Mr. Eaton cast anchor until he could enlist the services of certain netters—Señor Carlos San Sinbo, Señor Juan de Caribona, and Señor Antone Jiculan—whose skill was well known to the bird-fanciers of the world. Having found these gentlemen, he addressed them to this effect, in the purest Spanish:

"I desire you to make me the honorable favor of capturing young parrots."

The bird-catchers bowed very low and made motions as though they would ensnare the whole wilderness for so entirely gracious a *señor magnificente*, at whose service they placed their forever humble selves.

So the *Cadis* sailed up the delta to the main stream, and up the main Orinoco to the muggiest, densest, gloomiest wilderness, where Mr. Eaton's bid for a "really large collection of

parrots” was in a fair way to being satisfied.

In the quiet waters of the river, the *Cadis* was a gentle boat. Bob, the seasick cat, came up from below, at first timorously, and then with increasing confidence as he saw, on all sides, the thick vegetation—a sure sign of land. The other cats, though panting with the heat, viewed the scene with similar approbation, even while they were not without their doubts at night, when certain large animals of their kind raised voices of melodious despair by way of scaring timid deer from the thickets across the grassy savannas.

Mr. Eaton’s parrots, however, were in a state of hilarious joy. They approved the heat and the mocking cries of their kin in the forest. One-Eye, alone, remained silent. He disliked the long, bright chain by which he was compelled to remain on a shiny wooden perch instead of ambling around at will, as on the days when at sea.

The other birds, too, accustomed to the freedom of the ship, but now chained fast or caged, voiced their protests with shrieks. One-Eye was simply sullen. Unlike his companions, he did not forget his woes in observing the loads of parrots, disheveled and screaming, that were brought aboard by the netters. He disdained the common flock, standing glum all day long, turning his back on the preoccupied Mr. Eaton at every opportunity, and refusing to be cajoled by sweet crackers, chopped cocoanut, or ripe, creamy bananas.

“Good land!” exclaimed the steward at last. “Them dagoes has a hunder’ critters this trip!”

Sure enough, the bird-catchers had their cages full, and the yacht was alive with parrots. The cats were in a helpless, scandalized minority by this time. Occasionally Bob came blinking from the lower decks with a tiny feather flying suspiciously from his lower lip. The crew, evidently, had not forsworn its allegiance to the cats. A parrot more or less

would never be missed from that “bloomin’ chicken ship,” the sailors thought. But they were mistaken—in one case at least—as will appear,

Finally Mr. Eaton was satisfied, and as the lines were cast off one morning he bade the steward bring One-Eye. The steward found the bird, grim and desolate, on his perch.

“Hello!” said that functionary genially. The parrot sidled toward him, snapping its bill dangerously.

“Hold on now!” remarked the steward. “You bite me and I’ll wring your neck!”

The anklet and chain that kept the bird on the perch were unclasped, and One-Eye walked up the steward’s arm to his shoulder and thence to the top of his head. Mr. Eaton hailed the bird as he flapped his wings and flew toward him.

At that moment, from a tree on the edge of the wilderness, came a cry:

“Kee-e-e! Kee-e-e!”

“Kee-e-e!” answered One-Eye ecstatically, and, veering his course, he winged his way over the rail and up toward the tree-top from which the call proceeded. As he neared it a bird like himself came from the cover, and together the two flew into the forest singing in unison one glad song of “Kee-e-e! Kee-e-e!”

It was a clear case of love at first sight. One-Eye had found a mate whose society he preferred to that of the yacht where he had been subjected to the indignity of chains.

“Stop ’em!” cried Mr. Eaton as they soared away. “A hundred, a thousand dollars to the man who gets that bird!”

The men with the nets rushed ashore; the yacht was remoored; but there were no signs of One-Eye. Nor was a distant search more successful. Day after day the men hunted birds. The rainy season came on. Over the marshes rose thick miasmatic vapors. The cats languished; the parrots began to moult. For a time, Mr. Eaton urged his netters to pursue his beloved

pet. At last he retired, heart-sick, and yellow with malaria, to the seclusion of his own cabin

### III

THE captain made haste down the river. The pride of his flock was gone, and Mr. Eaton lost interest alike in his new captives and in his old pets. He did not feed them, nor smooth their ruffled feathers, nor wrap them up in linen for burial when they died. The flock rapidly diminished. Many cats went overboard, too, indecently thrown to the sharks.

Mr. Eaton had friends ashore, most of whom liked parrots, or felines, or both. Among them he distributed such of his birds and cats as survived. Before long his yacht became a normal yacht; the animal pets gave place to human guests. In the endeavor to forget his lost favorite, he began to entertain lavishly. He went to the Mediterranean, taking friends with him, and there ensued much talk and music, and much visiting of grand castles and great people, to say nothing of picture-gazing and sightseeing. But all to no purpose.

Mr. Eaton laughed with every one. He seemed the gayest of the gay, after the manner of some lofty, heart-torn souls; but in the silence of his cabin, while the moon shone silvery from the low east, he gazed sadly upon the teetering waves, gnawed by his secret sorrow.

Thus two years passed. Of all his parrots not one remained. Mr. Eaton ceased to entertain. He roved the seas from Newfoundland to the Nile, from the Baltic to Havana Harbor. At Havana he gave the word, and away the patient captain headed for the Orinoco. There were no bird-catchers on board, nor any birds, when the *Cadis* steamed up the delta to the parrot forest. The yacht came to anchor a few yards from the bank long after dark. Mr. Eaton insisted on seeing by moonlight first the fateful place where he had suffered his grievous loss. He saw it.

The air was thick with tropic mist,

warm, honeyed, soporific. The moon was huge, gray, encircled. The forest was dark; the tree-tops tossed and moaned. Now and then a lone cry was heard in the distance; near-by, the leaves rustled and insects hummed.

Mr. Eaton, watching the scene and listening to the myriad tropic sounds, sighed for the bird he had lost. After a time, as he reclined in a hammock on the forward deck, sleep overcame him. In his dreams voices seemed calling to him from afar. He woke with a start. The voices were drawing near, and soon familiar phrases sounded in his ears:

“Old maid! Scat! Old maid! Scat!”

Mr. Eaton sat up. It was dawn—the rapid, flaming tropic dawn. Sunlight flashed across the sky like a wave of white fire. There was no mistake. Real voices were calling from the surrounding wilderness, following the vast light-wave westward.

“Old maid! Old maid! Scat!” one voice shrieked.

With a gasp, Mr. Eaton sprang to his feet.

“Here, One-Eye!” he cried, his voice full of hope.

“Heigh-ho! Heigh-ho! Always been an old maid!” voices screamed.

“Gracious!” exclaimed Mr. Eaton, looking about him in astonishment. “A thousand One-Eyes!”

“Hit ’em! Hit ’em!” said a voice in a tree-top.

The crew, awakened by what they took for a babel of “dago voices,” rushed up on deck with belaying-pins and chunks of coal in their hands, to repel a attack. Looking about them, they saw all the trees on the banks alive with parrots of all kinds and sizes—large ones, small ones, green, yellow, crimson, and blue ones. Some walked on top of the branches; some hung from them; still others flew hither and thither. Apparently all were talking.

“Gracious!” exclaimed Mr. Eaton. “I

never saw the equal of this!"

"Blamed liar! Blamed liar!" shrieked a voice in the rigging of the yacht. Mr. Eaton, startled, looked eagerly aloft. There he saw a gray bird coming down a stay like a measuring-worm going backward.

When the journey down was nearly ended, the bird took a firm hold of the rope with his claws, raised himself to his full height, and relieved his mind in a burst of profanity.

"One-Eye!" shouted Mr. Eaton, with hands outstretched to welcome his long-lost favorite.

The parrot observed his former owner, and fixed him with a stare of his single yellow-and-black orb.

"Be it ever so humble," began the bird, breaking off to go further down the rope. Mr. Eaton met his pet half-way.

"Gracious!" he exclaimed. "It does not seem possible!"

"There's no place like Halifax!" the bird said, ignoring the interruption.

"You're a liar!" Mr. Eaton cried joyfully.

Then from the trees on all sides came cries of "Scat!" "Old maid!" "Heigh-ho!"

"Stand back. Let me look at you!" Mr. Eaton exclaimed, setting the bird on the back of a chair and retreating a few feet. Just then there came a cry from a nearby tree:

"Kee-e-e! Kee-e-e!"

Mr. Eaton, remembering how One-Eye had once before fled from the ship at that call, now stood paralyzed at the thought of losing him again. The bird, however, seemingly

terror-stricken, did not move, but only looked wildly from side to side. An instant later, as Mr. Eaton jumped to seize it, it leaped from its perch. At the same moment, the voice in the tree was heard again, still louder and more commanding:

"Kee-e! Kee-e!"

Mr. Eaton gazed despairingly at One-Eye, expecting to see him fly off to the tree-tops again. But to its master's surprise and delight, the bird turned and fled from the sound, making for a fly-netted port, through which it crashed, and plumped down upon the floor of the former bird-pen.

When Mr. Eaton ran down the hatchway, he found his pet in a far corner, under a table, all a-tremble, and muttering:

"Old maid! Old maid! What a mess! Scat!"

The whiskered sailmaker, who had witnessed the whole scene, poked the steward in the ribs, and pointed with a grin to the tree from which the call "Kee-e!" was proceeding. On a bare limb of that tree sat a gray parrot. She was a large, imposing bird, and, as she whetted her bill on the dry wood, she called irately and repeatedly "Kee-e-e! Kee-e-e!" There was wrath in that call, and a note of stern command, but One-Eye did not reappear.

Once more the old sailmaker poked the steward in the ribs. Then he jerked his thumb again toward the bird in the tree-top.

"Eh, matey," he remarked, "One-Eye's tried freedom an' a wife, an' he thinks he'll take a sea v'yage fer his health. Knowin' bird, that One-Eye!"