

THE CONDOR

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The Condor by Ernest F. Manchester

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ERNEST F. MANCHESTER

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BY
ERNEST F. MANCHESTER

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CHAPTER I.

As I sat on the wide porch of the roomy bungalow and gazed dreamily across the placid surface of the little lake which so truthfully reflected the green beauty of the wooded hills beyond, it seemed to me that I was the most comfortable person in the world.

To be sure, the bungalow was not mine, nor did I own the gleaming lake or the wooded hills, but they were mine to enjoy in my own way, for I was the welcome guest of a host who allowed me to amuse myself as I would.

For the last four years I had led a strenuous life in the far Southwest as assistant engineer on a hard proposition in the way of building a railroad through as bad a bit of country as I ever expect to encounter from a professional standpoint. It was

done, at last, and as I had taken a slight touch of the fever I came north to get it out of my blood and to enjoy the first vacation I had seen in five years.

The best friend I had in the North at this time was a classmate, who was a man of about my own age by the name of Samuel Murray. He had taken up electrical engineering and had become one of the most expert men I have ever seen in that line. He had done very well at the business, too, although he was far from being a wealthy man. He received large sums of money for his services in the course of a year, but he never seemed to be able to save much of it except what he invested in real estate, of which he owned considerable, and among the rest was the bungalow.

He also owned the land composing the shores of the lake, thereby controlling the fishing rights in that beautiful little sheet of water. He had not been with me for the greater part of the time I had spent here, but for the last three days his cheerful company had been mine, and as I lit my after-luncheon cigar he joined me on the porch.

"Well, Jack," said he, as he dropped into one of the comfortable lounging chairs and

began filling his pipe, "you are appearing in some better health than when you first came to this neck of the woods."

"I am feeling better. In fact, I am feeling so well that you will not be able to keep me much longer unless you give me something to do."

"Why? Are you afraid of getting lazy?"

"Hardly that, but there is nothing very interesting, to a man like me, in holding down a chair, no matter how comfortable that chair happens to be."

"Well, perhaps not, but don't get impatient. Any man who takes a vacation only once in five years ought to be willing to make that a good one."

"You may be right, and, for a fact, I have no intention of bringing mine to an end just now."

"Good. I am glad to find you so sensible."

"Thank you, and now to change the subject, what do you call that thing out there on the lake?" I asked, pointing to what, at this distance, had the appearance of a water-bug lifting long feelers at each side, although I, of course, knew it to be a boat coming directly towards us.

"That is a boat," he replied, with a

chuckle. "What did you suppose it was, a man-o'-war?"

"Hardly, but I understood you allowed none but your boats on the lake, and that isn't one of your boats, is it?"

"Well, there are no boats allowed here except mine as a rule, but that one out there is an exception. It belongs to a young man by the name of Frank Byrd, and as he had the boat on the lake when I bought the property, and, besides that, as he seemed to be a decent kind of a boy, I gave him leave to boat and fish any time he cared to, and I'm glad I did, for he has never abused the privilege."

"Live near here?"

"He lives with his parents and they own a small farm something like a mile and a half from the other side of the lake."

"Is the boy an only child?"

"Yes, but he is hardly what you would call a boy, as I believe he is twenty-four or twenty-five years old, although he does not look it."

"I suppose he works on the farm with his father and will go on with it after the old folks are gone. Is he married?"

"No, and you haven't exactly hit the case