

Roberts Charles G. D. Sir

# Reube Dare's Shad Boat



Charles Roberts

**Reube Dare's Shad Boat**

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# Charles George Douglas Roberts

## Reube Dare's Shad Boat / A Tale of the Tide Country

### CHAPTER I. The “Dido” Goes Adrift

THE road from Frosty Hollow to Westcock, after climbing the hill by the red creek and passing Mrs. Carter's yellow cottage, ran through a piece of dark and ancient fir woods. With the sighing of the firs there mixed a deeper sound, the voice of the wild tides of the changing Tantramar, unseen and far below. Turning sharply to the right, the road presently emerged from the woods and came upon a very different picture from that which it had left behind. It traversed the face of a long, wide, steep slope of upland, set here and there with a gray or white cottage, here and there a little grove. From the upland foot a mile-wide belt of marsh stretched to the waters of the open bay. The pale-green marsh was divided sharply from the yellow and flashing waves by the long lines of the dike, to which it owed its existence as good dry land. At intervals could be seen small creeks winding through the grassy level. Every creek mouth formed a little haven, clustered about with net reels, and crowded with the boats of the shad fishers.

Out from the whispering wood and into the fresh June sunlight of the open came two tallish youths, walking slowly and talking with the joyous zest of old friends who had been long parted. The older-looking of the two was Will Carter, just home from college for the summer vacation. Two years of college life had changed him little. He was the same slim, thoughtful, discreet, yet blithely dauntless lad who had lifted the mortgage from his mother's farm and punished the ruffian Baizley, and softened the hard old heart of Mr. Hand.<sup>1</sup> College study had increased the somewhat scholarly pallor of his face, but college athletics had added poise and grace to the movements of his well-knit muscles. He had hastened home to his mother immediately on the close of the college, leaving his brother Ted to take a month's canoe trip through the inland waters.

Will's present companion, Reuben Dare, was a chum only second to Ted in his love. Reube Dare was just eighteen. He was about the same height as Will, but of a much heavier build. His was also a heavier and slower nature, but one of faithful loyalty and courage combined with strong common sense. His hair was light like Will's, but his face was round and ruddy. At a hasty glance one might fancy that he was good-natured to the verge of being “soft,” but there was a steady, controlling gleam in his light gray eyes which made folk very slow to presume on his good nature. In fact, his eyes gave one the peculiar impression of having reached full manhood before the rest of his face. He swung his long arms loosely as he walked, and occasionally he stumbled in the ruts, being too much absorbed in watching his comrade's words to note just where he was stepping.

It had long been Reube Dare's keenest ambition to put himself through college, but the poverty of his widowed mother – the population of that land of sailors and fishermen is largely made up of widows – had stood sternly in the way. The success of the Carter boys, however, in reclaiming that rich marsh by the creek had proved a strong stimulus, and given him new hopes, with results which this story will show.

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Roberts has already told the spirited story of “How the Carter Boys Lifted the Mortgage,” in a volume, *The Raid from Beauséjour*, which is published by Hunt & Eaton, New York.

All at once Will Carter, who had been talking eagerly for the last half hour, stopped short, wiped his forehead, and perched himself on the rail fence under a shady roadside maple. Reube leaned against the fence, and took off his round straw hat.

“Now, Reube,” said Will, “it’s your turn. I’ve talked myself dry, and gabbled right along like the ‘crick’ at low water. Your letters, you old oyster, have told me mighty little. What have you been up to all winter?”

“Building my shad boat,” answered Reube.

“Mother told me something about it. It’s great, old man!” said Will. “But you don’t mean to say you built her all yourself.”

“Well, pretty near,” replied his friend. “Old Chris Boltenhouse helped me with the frame, and set me right whenever I got in a muddle. It was hard work, but I tell you, Will, it was so interesting I could hardly take time to eat. I’ve thought of nothing else for months, except when I was worrying over mother’s eyes, and now – ”

“I heard about your mother’s trouble with her eyes,” interrupted Will, sympathetically. “I do hope it’s not going to be serious.”

“Worries me a lot,” said Reube, gloomily. And then, his face brightening again, he went on, “But now I’ve got her done, and rigged and tarred and afloat at Wood Creek landing.”

“Reube,” interrupted Will again, and this time in a tone of severe surprise, “what a singular way to treat your mother! I cannot imagine that dignified lady in any such absurd situation as you speak of.”

“Come off!” retorted Reuben, very literally, as he caught at Will’s ankle and, with a quick twist, jerked him from his perch. “I’m not talking of mother, but of the *Dido*, and I say there’s not a trimmer craft will go shad fishing from Westcock this season. I tell you, Will, I’ve just put my heart into that boat. If it were not for that grove of Barnes’s we could see her now, lying with the others, in the mouth of the creek; and even at this distance you could pick her out from the rest.”

“Well,” said Will, “let’s get along and inspect her as soon as possible. I’m as tickled about her as if I’d built her myself; and I’m going to help you with the fishing all I can, as my holiday diversion. Did she cost you much? Is she going to *pay*, like *new marsh*?”

“If she has a lucky summer,” answered Reube – “and they do say there’s going to be a great run of shad this season – I’ll have her all paid for and quite a lump of money in the bank this fall.”

“And then!” said Will, in a voice of joyous anticipation. “What then? College with us, for the winter term, anyway! And maybe a scholarship that will still further simplify matters!”

“No!” exclaimed Reube, shaking his head gravely. “No college for me till I have had mother away to Boston or New York, to get her eyes properly seen to.”

Will’s face fell a little. “That’s so, old man. The eyes must be fixed up first of all, of course. But if the boat’s a success, another season will straighten it all out, eh? And when you come to college you’ll be a freshman, while I’m a senior! Won’t I haze you though?”

“Come and practice a bit now!” said Reube, grimly.

Will ignored this invitation.

“What did you say you called the boat?” he queried.

“The *Dido*,” answered Reube.

“Imagine the stately queen of Carthage going out shad fishing!” chuckled Will. “What struck you to choose that for a name?”

“O,” said Reube, gravely, “it will serve to keep my aspirations before my mind’s eye, even when I am occupied in the prosaic task of splitting shad.”

At this moment a long, shambling figure was seen climbing a fence some distance down the hill, to the left of our pedestrians. Long, lank black hair fell on his shoulders from beneath a black and greasy slouch hat. Immediately the fellow disappeared in a choke-cherry thicket, after turning a furtive, swarthy face for one moment toward the road.

“How’s your hereditary enemy behaving himself these days, Reube?” inquired Will.

“Well,” said Reube, “Mart Gandy’s Mart Gandy, same as he always was. But it seems to me that of late he has been troubling his neighbors less and himself more than he used to. They say he’s seldom quite sober. He’s left us alone pretty much all winter, though he did shoot one of my best sheep in the upper pasture along in the first of the spring.”

“But didn’t you punish him for it?” asked Will, indignantly, glaring back at the cherry trees wherein Gandy had vanished.

“I didn’t actually catch him, or I would have,” said Reube. “And I didn’t want to have him taken up, for, bad lot as he is, he does look after his mother and sisters in a kind of a way, and he is all they have to depend on; for his drunken old father has become a regular idiot, doing nothing but sit in the sun, pick at his beard, and whimper for a drink.”

By this time they had reached the top of a knoll, whence the whole shore line was visible.

“There’s the *Dido!*” exclaimed Reube, proudly, turning with a sweep of the hand toward the mouth of Wood Creek. But the words ended in a cry of anger and anxiety. “She’s adrift!” he shouted. “Come on! Come on! We must catch her before she gets out of the creek. The wind’s right down the bay!”

As he spoke he vaulted over the fence and started on a run across the fields. Will was at his side in an instant.

“How can it have happened?” he asked.

“Gandy’s work, I’ll be bound!” muttered Reube, between his teeth; and his eyes grew pale and bright like steel.

## CHAPTER II.

### The Red Bull

THE short cut which Reube was taking across the fields and marshes was calculated to diminish by a good half mile the distance which separated him from his beloved boat. But it was a path beset with obstacles. Will Carter saw all these – the long strip of bog and alders at the foot of the upland; then the gluey stretch of “broad-leaf” marsh, passable enough at a later season, but now a mire with the spring rains; and beyond, furrowing the firm levels of young timothy and clover, the windings of a creek which he knew was, in most places, too wide to jump, and too deep to ford. With what breath he could spare – for his excited comrade was setting a terribly stiff pace – he spasmodically exclaimed, “We’d save time, Reube, by keeping to the road. We’ll be tangled up and stuck here the first thing we know; and the *Dido* will be off on her own hook to seek the ruins of Carthage.”

But Reuben made no answer. He saw no obstacles. All he could see was the far-off red stream, with the *Dido*, only a little way inside the line of the dikes, veering gently and aimlessly from one green bank to the other, but steadily creeping seaward with the current. Well he knew how soon, with the falling tide, this current would quicken its pace. Once let the *Dido* get outside the creek, and he knew not what might happen to her. She would certainly be off down the bay at a speed which it appalled him to think of.

And now, running in grim silence, Reube and Will drew near the foot of the uplands. Heavily, and with no waste of energy, they flung themselves over a peculiarly massive rail fence, and entered a spacious pasture. The field was dotted with mossy hillocks and a few low spruce bushes, between which the grass grew short and thick. Two or three wide-armed maple trees, standing far apart, relieved the vacancy of the sloping expanse, which ended in a broad fringe of alder swamp, spreading its labyrinth of black roots and bog holes a hundred yards out upon the marsh.

As they ran, threading their way among the bushes, and springing from hillock to hillock, they heard an ominous grunting bellow on their right, and turning sharply they saw a large dark-red bull stepping out from under the shade of a maple tree. The animal bellowed again, deep in his throat; and running his horns into the nearest mound, tossed into the air a little shower of turf and moss. This was an honest challenge, but our runners were in no mood to accept it.

“This seems to be his bullship’s private domain!” panted Will. “I wonder if he’s really as mad as he looks, or just bluffing?”

“No bluffing there!” muttered Reube, in a voice of anxious concern. “It’s Barnes’s bull, and he means every word of it! We’re in a muss, and we’ve just got to run for all we’re worth. I wish we’d stuck to the road!”

As he spoke the bull, seeing his challenge unanswered, charged like a great red thunderbolt. The boys rose into a fine burst of speed; but ere they were halfway across the field Reube felt his legs and wind failing. He vowed inwardly that he would not, could not break down, and he wondered in his heart how Will was holding out. Will was a little ahead, being the lighter runner; but his pace was flagging, and the bull was now gaining upon them with dreadful rapidity. Under fair conditions the fierce and active animal could have given his rivals a hard race; but now, fagged from their long run down the hill, they were no match for him. He was not more than fifty feet behind them, when their course took them right under one of those spreading maples.

“No use!” gasped Will. “Up with you, Reube!” And springing desperately into the air, he caught a branch and swung himself up into safety.

But Reube was not one who could change his purpose thus rapidly. “The *Dido*!” he groaned; and, pausing under the tree, he glanced irresolutely from the sea to his pursuer.

“Come up, quick!” yelled Will, his voice as sharp and inflexible as an ax blade. Reube saw that there was no help for it. His eyes glared fury at his pursuer, as a tiger glares at the hunters when he reluctantly retires before them, and he started to climb the tree. But his stubbornness was all but fatal. He grasped at a branch, and, missing his hold, fell back. He repeated the attempt, this time more eagerly, but again he would have missed and would have felt the bull’s horns pinning him to the tree had it not been for Will’s readiness of action. Locking his legs between two branches, Will reached down, grasped his comrade under the shoulders, and with a mighty effort swung him around to the other side of the trunk. The bull swerved slightly and shot past. Half climbing, half dragged up by Will, Reube found himself safe among the branches ere the bull had checked its rush and returned to the attack.

“You saved me that time, Will,” said Reube, in a somewhat shaky voice, grasping his companion’s hand and wringing it hard. “But that was an awful grip of yours. I think every finger took a piece out of me!”

Will grinned inscrutably, and it flashed across Reube’s mind that the severity of the grip had had some connection with his own obstinate delay in seeking safety. But the next instant all else was forgotten in his anxiety about the *Dido*, which was plainly visible through an opening in his leafy refuge. The boat had grounded for a moment on a grassy point, and now the quickening current wrenched her off again and carried her with slow gyrations beyond the very last of the landing slips. Fifteen minutes more, at this rate, and she would be in the open.

“I can’t stand this, Will! I must try another dash,” he groaned.

Immediately beneath was the bull, snorting and bellowing, thrusting with his great forehead against the trunk, and pawing the young turf so energetically that it seems as if he aimed at uprooting the tree.

“All right, old man,” said Will. “Run right along now, and I’ll wait here for you. Or perhaps you will mount the gentle steed beneath us and ride to your destination.”

To this Reube vouchsafed no answer. He sat silent on his branch, glowering across the marshes, and eating his heart in helpless wrath, while Will, stretched face downward across the limbs, eyed the bull pensively, and cudged his brains for a way out of the dilemma.

Suddenly he straightened himself with a radiant face, and exclaimed:

“I have it, Reube! We’ll trick his exasperated bullship and catch the *Dido* yet!”

But while the words were yet on his lips the bull lifted his head high, gazed out across the field for a second or two, and then dashed off at the same terrific gallop which had so nearly proved disastrous to our heroes. He had seen a burly, red-shirted figure traversing the upper corner of his field. It was seldom, indeed, that anyone other than his master, the only man he feared, presumed to enter the precincts of his sway, and here, in one morning, were three trespassers. The bull, blind with rage, charged upon the red-shirted figure, and the red-shirted figure, after facing him for a few seconds, turned and fled for the fence.

“It’s John Paul! He’ll get away safe enough,” said Reube. “But what’s your plan?”

“Got a better one by this time, old man,” replied Will, dropping out of the tree – “just to cut while his bullship is otherwise engaged.” And side by side the two sped on toward the shelter of the alders.

Before they got far the bull, having routed red-shirt and snorted at him loudly through the rails, turned, discovered their flight, and came once more thundering at their heels. But this time he had allowed his rivals too much handicap. Before he could get anywhere near them Will and Reube were among the alders. Once there, the big red bull could not match their speed. He floundered, foaming and grunting, through the shallow pools, and the deeper ones he had to skirt.

The boys, on the other hand, sprang lightly from root to hillock, from hillock to elastic, reedy tuft, swinging across the pools on the long, bending stems of the alders, and soon leaving their

persecutor far behind. They reached the fence, vaulted it, emerged upon the open marsh, and there before them, still half a mile away, was the *Dido*, wheeling gracefully out from the mouth of the creek.

## CHAPTER III. The Chase of the “Dido.”

REUBE uttered a cry of something like despair.

“Now, old man, what’s the matter with you?” queried Will, reprovingly. “Do you suppose the *Dido*’s gone? Why, you old chump, we’ll take one of the other boats and go after her. With this wind we’ll catch her before she goes half a dozen miles. She won’t get past the Joggins, anyway, I’ll bet you a red herring!”

Reube’s face brightened, beamed broadly, and resumed its old boyish frankness.

“Why, that’s so!” said he. “That’s just what we’ll do. What a perfect fool I’d be sometimes, Will, if you didn’t keep an eye on me!”

That half a mile across the marsh proved a long one owing to the many detours which our runners, now trotting slowly and deliberately, were forced to make by the windings of the full creek. At last they reached the landing place where the *Dido* had been moored. About the rickety old wharf stood four or five high reels, skeletons of light gray wood wound with the dark-stained folds of the shad nets. The fishing season was right at hand, but had not yet begun. Around the boats and the reels were many half-obliterated footprints, left by the feet of those who had been winding the nets and pitching the seams of the boats. Of fresh tracks there was but one set – the tracks of someone with long, narrow feet, who walked without turning out his toes. To these tracks Reube pointed with grim significance of gesture.

“Yes,” said Will, “I understand. Did you ever see a plainer signature than Mart Gandy makes with his feet?”

The smallest of the fishing boats at the wharf was a light “pinkie” – a name given by the Tantramar fishermen to a special kind of craft with the stern pointed like the stem. The pinkie, painted red and white instead of blackened with tar like the other boats, was a good sailer. She belonged to Barnes, the owner of the red bull; and to Reube’s judicial mind it seemed appropriate that she should be taken without leave. There was a further inducement in the fact that she could be got afloat more easily than any of the other boats. The tide had fallen so that her keel was high and dry; and the fine mud of Tantramar gripped it with astonishing tenacity. But after a few minutes of such straining as made the veins stand out on Will’s forehead, and brought a redness about Reube’s steel-gray eyes, she was afloat.

Up went her dainty jib; up went her broad white mainsail; and presently the red-and-white pinkie with Reube at the helm was nimbly threading the sharp curves of the creek. After a succession of short tacks the channel straightened, and heeling far over with the strong wind on her quarter the pinkie ran into the open with the tawny surf hissing at her gunwale. Reube held his course till they were a couple of hundred yards out, dreading some hungry shoals he knew of. Then he let out the sheet, eased up on the tiller, and put the pinkie’s head straight down the bay on the *Dido*’s track. Will loosened out the jib, belayed it, and lay down on the cuddy in its shadow. The *Dido* was out of sight beyond the rocks and high oak trees of Wood Point.

A stern chase, as has been said from of old, is a long chase; and while the red-and-white pinkie was scudding before the wind and shearing the yellow waves with her keen bow, Reube and Will had to curb their impatience. They did not even whistle for more wind, for they had all the wind the pinkie could well endure. When their ears had grown used to the slap and crumbling rush of the foam-wave past their gunwale they spoke of Mart Gandy.

Reube Dare’s father, whose farm adjoined that of the Gandys, had got himself embroiled with old Gandy over the location of the dividing line. While Reube was yet a very small boy old Gandy had pulled down the dilapidated line fence during one of Captain Dare’s absences, and had put up a new

one which encroached seriously on the Dares' best field. On Captain Dare's return he expostulated with Gandy; and finding expostulation useless he quietly shifted back the fence. Then his ship sailed on a long voyage to the Guano Islands of the Pacific; and while he was scorching off the rainless coasts of northern Peru, Gandy again took possession of the coveted strip of field. From this voyage Captain Dare came back with broken health. He gave up his ship, settled down on the farm overlooking the marshes, and called in the arm of the law to curb old Gandy's aggression. The fence had by this time been moved backward and forward several times, each time leaving behind a redder and more threatening line of wrath. When the case came into court the outcome was a surprise to both contestants. There were rummaging out of old titles and unearthing of old deeds, till Captain Dare's lawyer made it clear not only that Gandy's claim was unfounded, but also that before the dispute arose Gandy had been occupying some three acres of the old Dare property. The original grant, made a hundred years earlier to Captain Dare's grandfather, required that the line should run down the middle of old Gandy's sheep pasture – a worthless tract, but one which now acquired value in Gandy's eye. Down the pasture forthwith was the new fence run, for Captain Dare, fired to obstinacy by his neighbor's wanton aggression, would take no less than his rights. Then, the victory assured to him, the captain died, leaving to his widow and his boy a feud to trouble their peace. The farm was productive, but for some years old Gandy had vexed them with ceaseless and innumerable small annoyances. When the old man sank into imbecility, then his son Mart, a swarthy and furtive stripling, who betrayed the blood of a far-off Indian ancestor, took up the quarrel with new bitterness. In Mart Gandy's dark and narrow soul, which was redeemed from utter worthlessness by his devotion to his family, hatred of the Dares stood as a sacred duty. It was his firm faith that his father had been tricked by a conspiracy between judge, jury, and lawyers. The persistency of his hate and the cunning of his strokes had been a steady check upon the prosperity of Reube and his mother.

In answer to a remark of Reube on this subject Will exclaimed, "But you've got him all right this time, old man. There can be no difficulty in identifying those footprints."

Reube laughed somewhat sarcastically.

"Do you suppose," he inquired, "that the tide is going to leave them as they are while we go after the *Dido*, fetch her back, and then go and get those holes in the mud examined by the authorities?"

"Well, perhaps my suggestion was hasty," acknowledged Will.

After an hour's run Wood Point was left behind, and there was the *Dido* not a mile ahead and well inshore. She had been delayed in the eddies of the cove below the Point. Reube gave a shout of joy and twisted his helm to starboard, while Will warned him to look out for the mud flats with which the cove was choked.

"O," said Reube, confidently, "I know the place like a book."

The red-and-white pinkie was now rapidly overhauling the vagrant craft when a stiff current caught the latter and she began to race along the curve of the farther shore. Reube was anxious to catch her before she should round the next headland, and get back into rough water. The headland was a low, humped promontory of mingled plaster rocks and yellowish sand, without a tree upon its grassy crest. Shifting his course to intercept the *Dido*, Reube steered the pinkie straight for the point. Just then the *Dido* was seen to give a lurch, stop short, and keel over to the gunwale.

"She's run aground!" cried Will.

"But we've got her safe and will sail her back on next tide," said Reube, heaving a sigh of relief as he saw that his beloved craft stood still, refusing to be rolled over by the push of the yellow tide upon her ribs.

The pinkie was sailing at a great pace.

"Better take in the jib, Will," said Reube.

Will sprang up to obey. Just as he rose there was a staggering shock. The pinkie buried her nose in a hidden mudbank. The waves piled over her gunwales; the mast bent without breaking, like the brave, tough timber it was; and Will shot overboard headlong into the foam.

## CHAPTER IV.

### The Cave by the Tide

ACTING instantly on the impulse of an old sailor, Reube had sprung forward almost with the shock, and started to haul down the mainsail in order to relieve the strain. The next moment, however, while the half-lowered sail was bulging and flapping, he leaped into the bow to help Will. The latter rose with a gasp and stood waist deep, clinging to the bowsprit. His head and arms were bedaubed grotesquely with the mud into which he had plunged with such violence. He gazed sternly at Reube, and exclaimed:

“Perhaps you’ll claim that you know these mud banks as well as I do! I earnestly hope you may, some day, gain the same intimate knowledge of them!”

Then he climbed aboard and finished the furling of the sails, while Reube rolled convulsively in the bottom of the boat, unable to control his laughter. He recovered himself only when Will trod upon him without apology, and threatened to put him overboard.

When the sails had been made snug, and the pinkie bailed out, and the mud cleaned with pains from Will’s face and hair and garments, there was nothing to do but watch the *Dido* in the distance and wait for the tide to fall. In another half hour, or a little more, only a waste of red flats and yellow pools separated the two stranded boats. Reube took off his shoes and socks, rolled his trousers up high, and stepped overboard. These precautions were for Will superfluous; so he went as he was, and congratulated himself on being able to defy all hidden clam shells. Before he went, however, he took the precaution to put out the pinkie’s anchor, for which Reube derided him.

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