

STREET & SMITH'S **Top-Notch** Magazine

NOV. 15th NUMBER
1931

15¢
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Top-Notch
**WESTERN
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AND
SPORT
STORIES**



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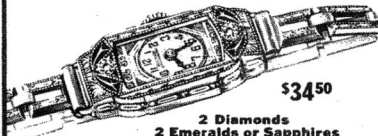
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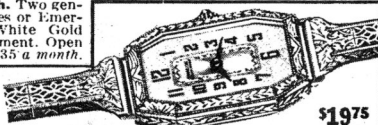
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FC 49... Richly hand engraved prong ring of 18-K Solid White Gold, with a perfect, genuine blue-white diamond in center and 2 matched genuine diamonds on sides. Only \$4.90 a month.



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FC 54... The "Love-Link"—new, square prong, engagement ring, with the elegance and grace of much higher priced rings. Exquisitely hand engraved; 18-K Solid White Gold mounting; perfect, genuine blue-white diamond in center and 4 matched genuine diamonds on sides. **Special terms:** \$5.00 with order. Only \$7 a month.



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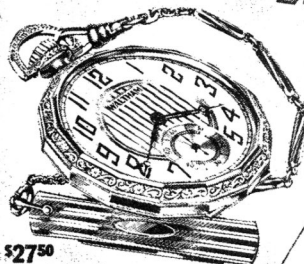
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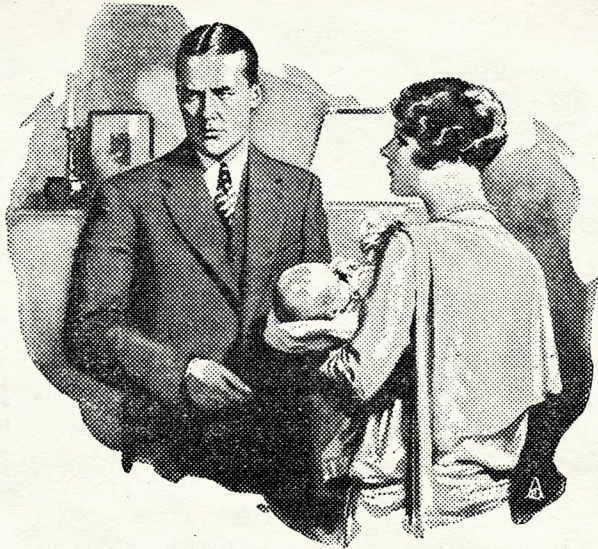
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Vol. LXXXVII

Number 6

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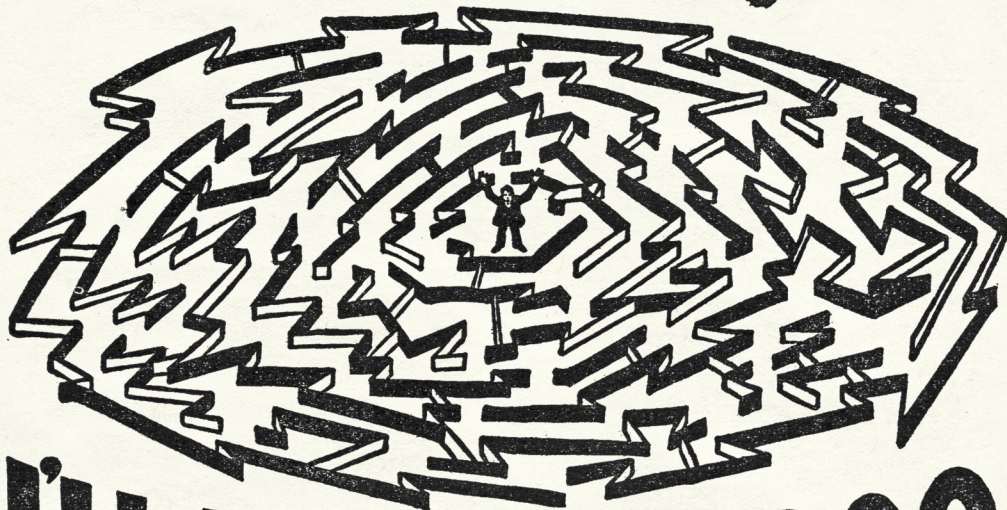
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32x4 1/2	3.20 1.45	28x5.25	2.95 1.35
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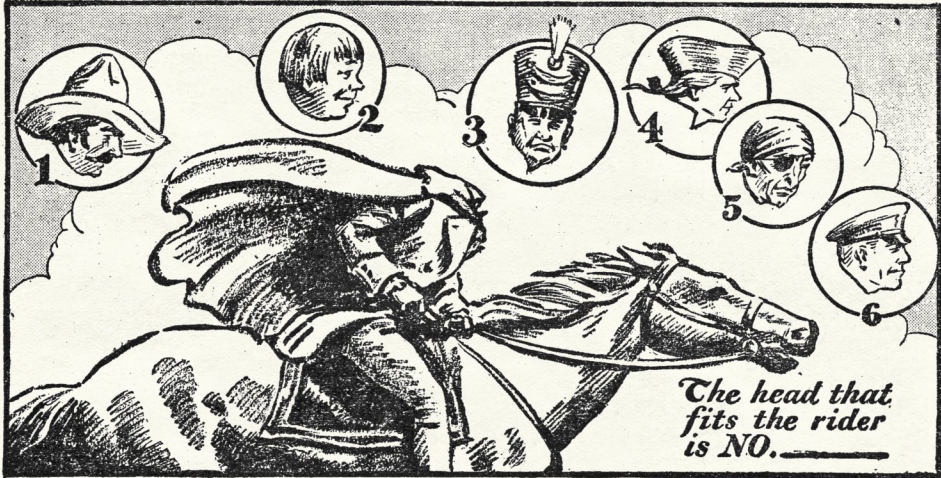
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Long, Tiresome Hours

Every hour of the day I was under somebody's supervision. The TIME-CLOCK constantly laid in wait for me—a monument to unfulfilled hopes and dying ambition. Four times a day, promptly on the dot, it hurled its silent challenge at my self-respect, reminding me how unimportant I was and how little I really COUNTED in the business and social world!



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Desperate

Happened to get a look at the payroll one day and was astonished to see what big salaries went to the sales force. Found that salesman Brown made \$200 a week—and Jenkins \$275! Would have given my right arm to make money that fast, but never dreamed I had any "gift" for salesmanship.



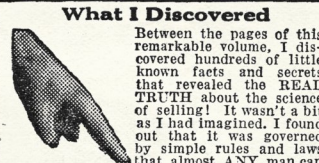
A Ray of Light

Stumbled across an article on salesmanship in a magazine that evening. Was surprised to discover that salesmen were made and not "born," as I had foolishly believed. Read about a former cowpuncher, Wm. Shore of California, making \$525 in one week after learning the ins-and-outs of scientific salesmanship. Decided that if HE could do it, so could I!



The Turning Point

My first step was to write for a certain little book which a famous business genius has called "The MOST AMAZING BOOK EVER PRINTED." It wasn't a very big book, but it certainly opened my eyes to things I had never dreamed of—and proved the turning point of my entire career!



What I Discovered

Between the pages of this remarkable volume, I discovered hundreds of little known facts and secrets that revealed the REAL TRUTH about the science of selling! It wasn't a bit as I had imagined. I found out that it was governed by simple rules and laws that almost ANY man can master as easily as he learned the alphabet. I even learned how to go about getting into this "highest paid of all professions." I found out exactly how Mark Barichievich of San Francisco was enabled to quit his \$8 a week job as a restaurant-worker and start making \$125 a week as a salesman; and how C. W. Birmingham of Dayton, Ohio, jumped from \$15 a week to \$7500 a year—these and hundreds of others! It certainly was a revelation!



FREE Employment Service

Furthermore, I discovered that the National Salesmen's Training Association, which published the book, also operates a most effective employment service! Last year they received requests from all over the U. S. and Canada for thousands of city, traveling and local salesmen trained by their method. This service is FREE to both members and employers, and thousands have secured positions this way!



Making Good At Last!

It didn't take me long to decide to cast my lot with N. S. T. A.—and after a few weeks I had mastered the secrets of Modern Salesmanship during spare time, without losing a day or a dollar from my old job. When I was ready, the Employment Manager found me over a dozen good openings to choose from—and I selected one which paid me over \$70 a week to start!



Was It Worth It?

Today my salary is \$4800 greater than ever before! No more punching time-clocks or worrying over dimes and quarters! NOW my services are in REAL DEMAND with bigger prospects for the future than I ever dared HOPE for back in those days when I was just another "name" on a payroll!



Get Your Copy FREE

Right now the book—"The Key to Master Salesmanship"—which banished all my fears and troubles and showed me how to get started on the road to success and independence—will be mailed as a gift to any ambitious man, absolutely FREE. And since there is no obligation, why not see for yourself what amazing facts it contains! Just mail the coupon now for there is no better way in the world to invest a 2-cent stamp! I KNOW! National Salesmen's Training Assn., Dept. R-584, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

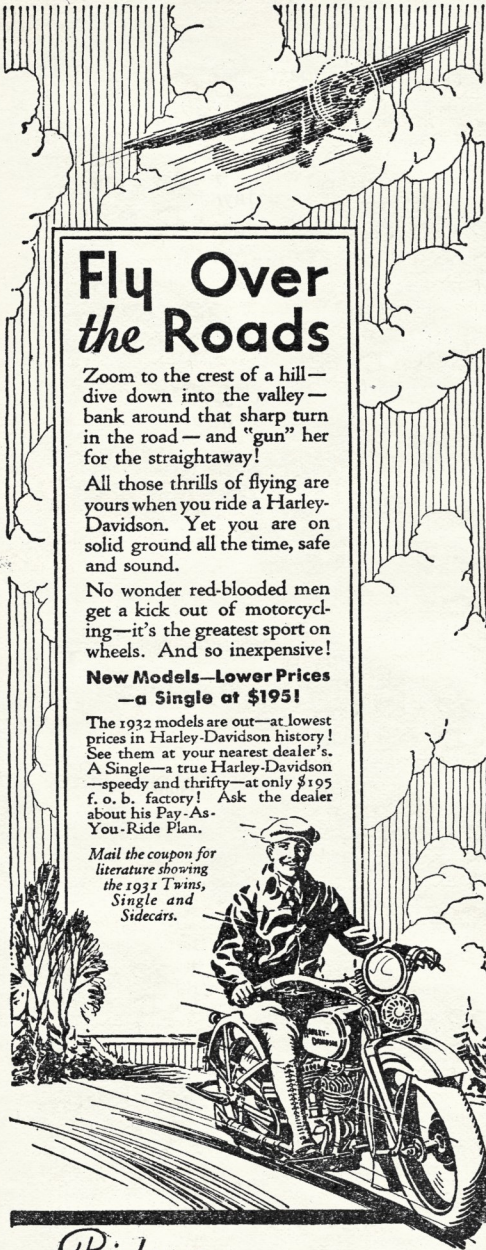
National Salesmen's Training Assn., Dept. R-584, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Without obligation, please send me a free copy of "The Key to Master Salesmanship." Also include full details of your training and Free Employment Service.

NameAddress

TownState

Age.....Occupation



Fly Over the Roads

Zoom to the crest of a hill—dive down into the valley—bank around that sharp turn in the road—and “gun” her for the straightaway!

All those thrills of flying are yours when you ride a Harley-Davidson. Yet you are on solid ground all the time, safe and sound.

No wonder red-blooded men get a kick out of motorcycling—it’s the greatest sport on wheels. And so inexpensive!

**New Models—Lower Prices
—a Single at \$195!**

The 1932 models are out—at lowest prices in Harley-Davidson history! See them at your nearest dealer’s. A Single—a true Harley-Davidson—speedy and thrifty—at only \$195 f. o. b. factory! Ask the dealer about his Pay-As-You-Ride Plan.

Mail the coupon for literature showing the 1932 Twins, Single and Sidecars.

Ride a
HARLEY-DAVIDSON

MAIL THE COUPON

Harley-Davidson Motor Co., Dept. 88 Milwaukee, Wis.
Interested in your motorcycles. Send literature.

Name _____

Address _____

My age is () 16-19 years, () 20-30 years, () 31 years and up.
() under 16 years. Check your age group.

PICTURE PLAY

selling at the new
price of

10c

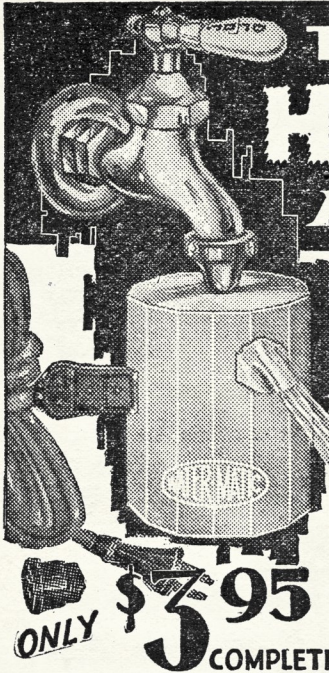
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circulation leader of
the movie magazine
field



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2. Acts instantly, works every time. AC or DC current
3. Handy and Portable
4. Insulated porcelain, safe for children
5. Will not rust, tarnish or short circuit
6. White-finish matches fine plumbing fixtures
7. GUARANTEED against breakage or part replacement.

ONLY \$3.95 COMPLETE

SNAP WATER-MATIC on Cold Water faucet, plug into electric socket and zip—*Running HOT Water!* Attaches quick as wink—NO fuss or plumber bill. \$3.95 pays everything. *Nothing else to buy!* Works instantly AC or DC current. Made of strong

SHOCK-PROOF PORCELAIN

insulated against short circuits and burn-outs; **SAFE!** Gleaming white finish matches your sink; equipped with famous Belden electric plug and cord. **WATER-MATIC** is the original big capacity HALF-GALLON-A-MINUTE detachable electric water heater based on a new discovery by America's foremost engineers. Sold under a **POSITIVE GUARANTEE** against breakage or replacement of parts.

1,000 AGENTS NEEDED!

WATER-MATIC is sweeping the country. *Inquiries are pouring in from every section.* We need live men and women as active agents. If you live where homes, stores, offices, garages or farms are wired for electricity, and **WANT TO GET INTO BUSINESS FOR YOURSELF** with one of the fastest selling specialties, **SEND IN THIS COUPON TODAY!**

THIS COUPON IS WORTH \$1.20

WATER-MATIC HEATER CORP.

Dept. 1014, 1140 Broadway

New York, N. Y.

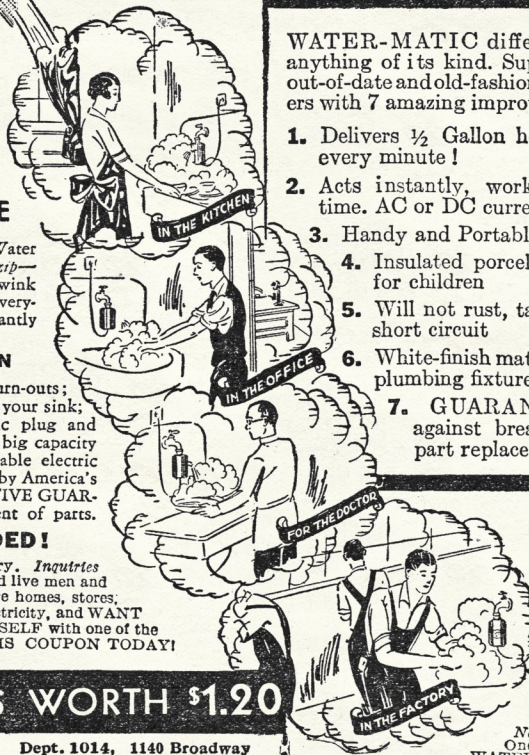
I wish to take advantage of your **SPECIAL AGENT'S OFFER** and enclose **MONEY ORDER** for \$2.75 (Canada \$3.75) for which kindly rush me your Official Agent's Outfit including Complete Sales Information, Order Blanks and One (1) \$3.95 **WATER-MATIC HEATER** (110 Volts AC or DC) ready for immediate use.

Upon receipt of Heater and Data, it is agreed that I am authorized to act as your Official Representative and collect my cash commissions of \$1.20 on every \$3.95 **WATER-MATIC** (110 Volts) and (\$1.75 on every \$5.75) **SUPER WATER-MATIC** (220 Volts) I sell. I promise to send you all orders immediately as received so that you can ship to my customers directly and collect the balance C.O.D. (Outside of U. S. price is \$1.00 extra on each unit and remittance must accompany order.)

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....



Get into BIG MONEY

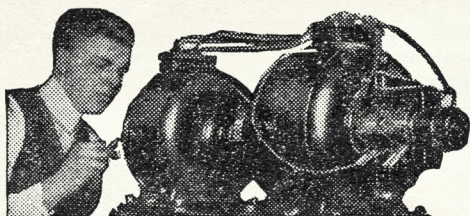
Why half-starve on a part-time job when you can get into the **BIG MONEY** with **WATER-MATIC!**

No experience needed. Once you see how **WATER-MATIC** works on your own faucet, you become so enthusiastic **NOTHING CAN STOP YOU!**

We show you everything — how to demonstrate; how to close sales, collect your **CASH**. Start in Spare Time—10 Sales, an Evening's Easy Work, nets you \$12.00 **CASH IN HAND**. Full time earnings averaging 25 Sales a Day net you \$30.00 a Day, \$180.00 a Week, \$780.00 a Month, More than \$9,000.00 a year Territory is Going Fast. Tomorrow May Be Too Late.

MAIL THE COUPON AT ONCE

WATER-MATIC



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By Actual Work in Great Coyne Shops

Dissatisfied with your job? Not making enough money? Then let me show you how to prepare for a real job at real pay—in **ELECTRICITY**—the money-making field!

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Come to Coyne in Chicago and learn Electricity the quick and practical way—By actual work on actual equipment and machinery. No useless theory! The average time to complete the course is only 12 weeks. No previous experience necessary.

FREE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

We employ three men on a full time basis whose sole job is to help secure positions for our students. Also some of our students pay a large part of their living expenses through part-time work we get them. Get the facts! **JUST MAIL COUPON BELOW FOR A FREE COPY OF MY BIG ELECTRICAL BOOK.**

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500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. 71-45, Chicago, Ill.

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Name

Address

City State

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Send me **FREE** particulars "How to Qualify", for position marked "X". Salaries, locations, opportunities, etc. **ALL SENT FREE.**

Name

Address

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Asthma Left Him Four Years Ago

No Sign of It Since. Found Quick and Lasting Relief.

Folks who seem making a losing fight against asthma or bronchial cough will find cheer in a letter from Frank E. Mead, R. 3, Greene, N. Y. He says: "I had asthma for 40 years, and in that time, tried about everything for it, without success until I tried Nacor. Right then I started getting well. Four years ago, I felt able to get along without Nacor or any other medicine, and I've been free from asthma and in wonderful health ever since."

Hundreds of people who suffered for years from asthma and bronchial coughs, state that their trouble left and has not returned. Their letters and a booklet of vital information will be sent free by Nacor Medicine Co., 773 State Life Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind. Write for this free information, and find out how thousands have found lasting relief.

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To men over 35, who feel the need of regaining prematurely lost **VITAL POWERS, VIGOR, PEP, and ENERGY**—use the amazingly scientific **DORAL VIGOR TAB.** A glandular stimulant recommended by physicians to increase vitality with long lasting results. \$1.95 postpaid for **ONE MONTH'S** treatment. 3 boxes \$5. Super strength \$2.95. 2 boxes \$5. (C. O. D. 15c extra. Cash only outside U. S.)

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Producers are clamoring for new short story ideas, plots, etc. Perhaps you can write one that we can shape and sell for you. One writer (V. M.) received \$3,000. New York best Market. Write now for free booklet, without obligation, **HOW TO WRITE FOR THE TALKIES** by Irwin R. Franklin, Staff Consultant, (Author of **FLIGHT**, Etc.), and Famous Director!

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AGENTS!
Make big money. New easy plan. Write quick for territory and Outfit Offer!

30-DAYS' TRIAL
Liberal Offer. Try it 30 days at our expense. Write at once for special, introductory, low-price offer and no-risk trial opportunity. No obligation. Send today.
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HELLO, EVERYBODY

I have a message for every man or woman who wants to get into Broadcasting as an:

Announcer	Program Manager	Musician
Singer	Sales Manager	Reader
Actor	Advertising	Writer
Publicity	Musical Director	Director

—Or Any Other Field of Broadcasting

Excellent positions in Broadcasting are open to men and women who have mastered the technique of radio presentation. Read below how you, too, can prepare yourself for a big-paying job in Broadcasting.

Let FLOYD GIBBONS show you how to get before the "Mike"

CAN you do something? Have you an idea for a Radio program? Can you describe things? Have you a Radio voice? Are you musically inclined? Have you the ability to write humor, dramatic sketches, playlets, advertising? Can you sell? If you can do any of these things—*Broadcasting needs you!*

Last year alone, more than \$31,000,000 was expended for talent before the microphone to entertain and educate the American people. The estimated number of announcers, speakers, musicians, actors, etc., who perform yearly at the 600 or more American Broadcasting Stations is well over 300,000 persons.

The Fastest Growing Medium in the World

The biggest advertisers in the country recognize the business strength of Broadcasting. They rely on it more and more for publicity, promotion and sales work. They are seeking new ideas, new talent, every day.

If you are good at thinking up ideas; if your voice shows promise; if you possess hidden talents that could be turned to profitable broadcasting purposes perhaps you can qualify for a job before the microphone. Let Floyd Gibbons show you how to capitalize your hidden talents!

Merely the ability to sing is not sufficient. It must be coupled with the art of knowing how to get the most out of your voice for broadcasting purposes. Merely the knack of knowing how to write will not bring you success as a radio dramatist. You must be familiar with the limitations of the microphone, and know how to adapt your stories for effective radio presentation. It is not enough to have a good voice, to be able to describe things, to

know how to sell. Broadcasting presents very definite problems, and any talent, no matter how great, must be adapted to fit the special requirements for successful broadcasting.

Floyd Gibbons, one of America's foremost broadcasters, has developed a unique method for training men and women at home for this fascinating work. This home study course offers you a complete training in every phase of broadcasting. Now you can profit by Floyd Gibbons' years of experience in Radio. You can develop your talents right at home in your spare time under his guidance, and acquire the technique that makes Radio stars. Out of obscure places are coming the future Amos and Andys, Graham MacNamees, Rudy Valkees, Olive Palmers, and Floyd Gibbonses, whose yearly earnings will be enormous.

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Men are needed to do special broadcasting of all kinds: Descriptive broadcasting of political events, banquets, football games, boxing, wrestling, baseball and hundreds of other occasions of a similar nature. Many men have made places for themselves as news broadcasters, book reviewers, play directors, readers, program builders, advertising writers, salesmen, and in scores of other highly paid Broadcasting jobs.

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A Complete Course In Radio Broadcasting by FLOYD GIBBONS

The Course has been planned to give you a thorough and practical training in how to announce,

to sing, to write, to sell, to manage Broadcasting Stations.

A few of the subjects covered are: *The Microphone, The Human Voice in Speech and Song, The Psychology of Announcing, Showmanship, Continuity, Writing for Broadcasting, Selling by Broadcasting, Commercial Sponsorship, Knowledge of Music, Publicity, Voice Culture, Studio Management and dozens of other subjects.*

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An interesting booklet entitled "How to Find Your Place in Broadcasting," tells you the whole fascinating story of the Floyd Gibbons School of Broadcasting. You can find out without obligation the opportunities there are for you in this work—and how you can acquire the experience and background so essential for successful Broadcasting.

Let Floyd Gibbons show you how to qualify for a leading job in Broadcasting. Let him show you how to turn your undeveloped talents into money. Here is your chance to enter a lifelong profession—to fill an important role in one of the most glamorous, powerful industries in the world. Send for "How to Find Your Place in Broadcasting" today. See for yourself how complete and practical the Floyd Gibbons Course in Broadcasting is. No cost or obligation. Act now—send coupon below to day. **Floyd Gibbons School of Broadcasting,** Dept. 510, U. S. Savings Bank Bldg., 2000 14th Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

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Dept. 510, U. S. Savings Bank Bldg.,
2000 14th St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

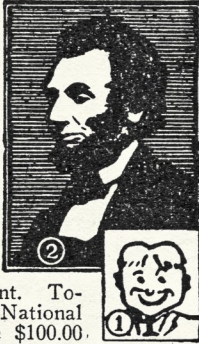
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Name Age
Address
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Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

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THE small crude sketch (1) was drawn by Herschel Logan before he had Federal School training. The large drawing of Lincoln (2) shows his recent work. Note the improvement. Today his drawings are seen in National Exhibits. Recently he made \$100.00 over his regular monthly salary. He says, "Any average fellow with the same instruction should be able to accomplish similar if not greater results."



Many Earn \$500 Monthly

Opportunities for artists have never been better. Publishers pay millions for illustrations every year. The Federal Home Study Course has been prepared by over fifty of the Nation's leading artists. If you like to draw, cash in on your talent. It's easy to learn the "Federal Way." You may have talent lying dormant in you, just as Logan had. Our Vocational Art Test will find that out. Send your name, address, age and occupation and we will send you the chart free. Act today.



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Pays You UP TO \$6.00 an Hour

Take orders for this amazing "Plastic Leather" that resoles shoes for as low as 9¢ a pair. No nails or tools necessary. Just an old knife. Sorends in two minutes like butter on bread. Fills all cracks and breaks. Dries hard and smooth overnight. Write for FREE SAMPLE NOW! Looks like leather. Wears like leather. Rebuilds run down heels. Guaranteed to satisfy. Agents earn up to \$60.00 per day. Miller of Ohio made \$185 his first week. No experience necessary. Start spare time. Write today!

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How often do you lose your greatest opportunities for more money, and for greater popularity because of mistakes in English, which you make, unknowingly? Can you talk and write your way guide you may be holding yourself back from whatever business and social advancement you desire.

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Just out—latest thing in home furnishings—hand-some, colorful Rubber Art Rugs, Comfort Foot Mats, Art Bath Mats—a full range of beautiful, colorful, Rubber floor coverings for all rooms. Artistic, practical. Outwear ordinary rugs. Never look shabby. Lie flat, will not curl. Cling to floor—never slip. Soft and easy on feet. Easily cleaned—simply wipe off. Ideal for hallways, between rooms, kitchen, bathroom, entrances, etc.

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If you feel old and run-down from Getting Up Nights, Backache, Leg Pains, Nervousness, Stiffness, or Burning, caused by Kidney Acidity, use quick-acting Cystex (Siss-tex). Often shows big improvement in 24 hours. Guaranteed to satisfy completely or return empty box and get money back. Only 75¢ at druggists.

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No Money Down—Actual Crime Cases—If You Act Quick!—We will send you this stirring book on Crime Detection, Secret Service and Identification Work for 30 days free reading. Send no money. If you decide to keep it, then send only \$1.00. If not, return it. WRITE TODAY. Not sent to boys under 17 years of age.

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I positively guarantee my great successful "Relief Compound." Safely relieves some of the longest, stubborn and unusual cases in three to five days.



FOR OVER A QUARTER OF A CENTURY women from all over the country have used this compound with remarkable results. Testimonials without number. No harm, pain or interference with work. Mail \$2. Double strength, \$3. Booklet Free. Write today.

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Improve your appearance with the Anita Nose Adjuster. Shapes flesh and cartilage—quickly, safely and painlessly, while you sleep or work. Results are lasting. Doctors praise it. 87,000 users. Write for 30-Day TRIAL OFFER and FREE BOOKLET.

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this gland

Can Often Be Re-stimulated

Say Physicians

Thousands of men who have given up hope because of the decline of a certain gland—will now learn that science has at last developed an amazing corrective method. This gland—called the prostate—cause of so many of the distressing symptoms that scourge the lives of older men—sciatic and rheumatic pains, foot and leg pains, broken sleep, bladder distress, nervousness, ebbing strength, etc.—can now be reached by a method so simple that every man can have its benefits, right at home.



Results Tested by 50,000 Men Past 40

Although comparatively new, this type of treatment has been quickly accepted by many hospitals, specialists and sanitariums. Doctors of a well-known Sanitarium have advised it for home use. Already 50,000 men have proved its amazing efficacy. And so quick and positive have been the results of this method that it will be sent to you with the understanding that if it does not produce results that will amaze you, within 7 days' time, its cost to you is absolutely nothing.

FREE Book Explains Method

If you are a victim of prostate gland disorder—if you have tried medicines or old, disappointing treatments without relief, this is the message you have long wanted to hear. Or if you are one of those men, who, though getting along in years, have not realized how the tiny prostate gland often brings about unpleasant changes and health faults, you likewise will want to hear of this vitally important discovery. Without cost, without obligation, either type of man may learn full details of this scientific achievement by simply mailing the coupon—printed herewith for the convenience of the readers of this publication. The book mentioned will come to you directly from the office of the President of the International Institution sponsoring the method—mailed in a plain wrapper, marked Personal. Address W. J. KIRK, President, 7646 Morris Avenue, Steubenville, Ohio.

If you live West of the Rockies, address The Electro Thermal Co., 303 Van Nuys Building, Dept. 76-Z, Los Angeles, Calif. In Canada, address The Electro Thermal Co., Desk 76-Z, 53 Yonge St., Toronto, Canada.

W. J. Kirk, President
7646 Morris Avenue
Steubenville, Ohio

Please send me, without cost or obligation, a copy of your informative booklet (mailed in plain wrapper) which gives full details of this new treatment.

Name

Address

City State

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Genuine BRAND NEW CORONA

Model No. 3
at NEW LOW PRICES

Now Only
\$39.90
or
on Easiest
Terms
Ever Offered
(SMALL CARRYING CHARGE)



Yours for Only \$1.00 DOWN



Hurry! If you want to be in on the biggest "BUY" in Portables. Only a very limited number of these Brand New Coronas available at this *Special Low Price and Easy Terms*. Don't wait. Here's your chance to get a wonderful nationally advertised Corona at a *real bargain*. Has up-to-date improvements and carries our regular New Machine iron-clad guarantee. Remember this exceptional offer good only while supply lasts.

Sent On 10 Days Trial!



Send for your 10 day trial of this new Corona Now. Try it the entire time at our risk. See for yourself the neat, smooth, perfect work it does. Note how easy and quiet it runs. Learn the joy and convenience of writing on a portable. Write all your personal and business correspondence during our generous trial—without obligation to buy. Compare its many improved features—its neat, compact and sturdy design; its superior workmanship, and its bright sparkling finish with other machines costing much more.

Iron-Clad Guarantee

Act At Once—only \$1 brings this shiny new Corona for full 10 days' trial—Write all the personal and business letters you want. If you decide to keep it send only \$3 a month until the special low price of \$42.90 (term price) is paid.

FREE Carrying Case

Beautiful Leatheroid carrying case with nickel trimming is included Free with each Corona while limited quantity lasts. If you have ever wanted a wonderful portable—here's your chance. Don't wait until it's too late. Send the coupon NOW. **LIMITED OFFER**—At this Bargain Price and unheard of easy terms—10c a day—these wonderful New Coronas will go in a hurry. Remember the Corona comes to you fully complete—book of instructions and all—nothing extra to buy. Send at once!



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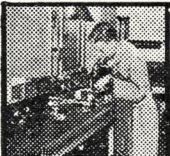




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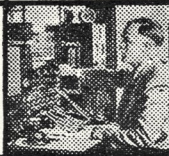
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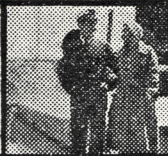
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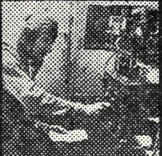


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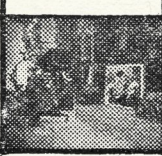
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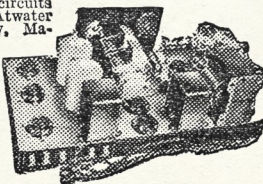
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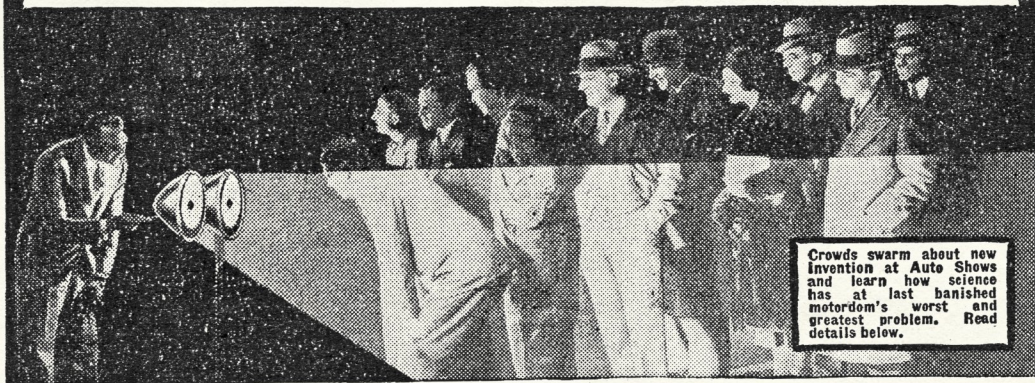
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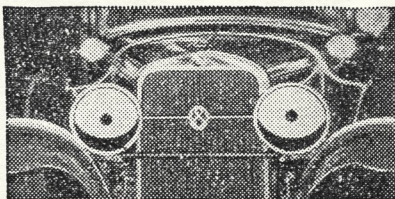
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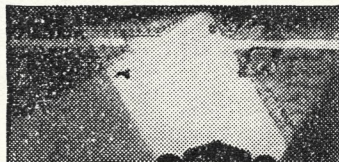
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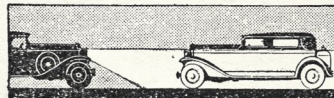
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Pinto Martin's Outlaw Pal

By Houston Irvine

Author of "The Cayuse Call," etc.

CHAPTER I.

PINTO FOOLS A POSSE.

CRASH-CRASH-CRASH!

The deep, angry voices of a number of rifles broke the stillness of the sunny morning.

The slender, long-legged cowboy, riding slowly around the base of a giant, sugar-loaf rock butte, hastily, almost automatically, reined his buckskin pony into the slight concealment afforded by a patch of scrub oak and weeds.

"Another posse!" he muttered, with a note of sadness in his tone.

The young waddy's chestnut-brown eyes flashed narrowly. His freckled face twisted in a frown of worry, as

his hard, bronzed right hand closed about the handle of the revolver holstered at his thigh.

"They won't git me." His lips set in a grim line.

Swish! A bullet cut through the leaves a foot from his head.

"Too close!" he grunted, jerking in his saddle. "Now, kin anybody tie thet? How in heck did they know I rid in hyar? I never seen them, an' it's lucky fer me the shootin' started when it did. They must 'a' spotted me from the top o' the butte an' laid to catch me, the danged, misguided coyotes."

Tom Martin, who was better known as "Pinto," because of the wide band of

chocolate-colored freckles across his slender, tip-tilted nose and cheek bones, could not be blamed for thinking that the rifle shots were meant for him. For the puncher was an outlaw—a fugitive in that lawless strip of semiarid land, known variously as the Oklahoma Panhandle, the Cimarron country, or “No Man’s Land.”

Pinto had fled to the region after he had been forced to kill a crooked money lender and barkeeper in Colorado in self-defense. His victim’s pals had framed the evidence so that the case looked like murder. The cowboy had escaped the noose by breaking out of jail and fleeing on his fast horse, which he called “Yaller Jacket.”

Although the Cimarron country was an outlaw’s paradise, with its only law a homemade variety, administered by a fake, self-appointed judge, named Jay Conners, Pinto Martin had not found a life of ease there. Rather, he was doubly hunted.

The few hardy, honest ranchers in the region were banded solidly against all the crooks. And the mere fact that Pinto had the name of being an outlaw, even though he was innocent, made them his enemies.

On the other hand, the cowboy was bitterly fought at every turn by the real desperadoes. His possession of the buckskin cayuse made him the target of every gunman, since a great number of circus tricks that he had taught the animal made it a prize greatly to be desired.

Pinto was a broad-shouldered, slim-waisted fellow, an inch over six feet in height, whose high-heeled cowboy boots made him look taller. His legs were unusually long, and his hands and feet big, but not awkward-looking.

But for the one wide strip of freckles over his nose and cheeks, his face was tanned a smooth, light bronze. Heavy, brown eyebrows, a strong jaw and prominent ears gave him an appearance

of sturdy reliability. He had molasses-colored, wavy hair, with a stubborn cowlick that fell down over his high forehead whenever it could escape from beneath the crown of his ten-gallon, battered gray Stetson.

Pinto’s batwing chaps were of black leather, old and worn, as were his boots. His blue shirt was faded by many washings and patched in several places, in a manner which showed that the cowboy himself had done the sewing.

The young puncher’s holster and cartridge belt showed less wear and age than any of the rest of his outfit, since, until he had been forced to kill the man in Colorado, he had had little use for them.

Next to his horse, the most valuable of all Pinto Martin’s possessions was his hand-tooled, silver-decorated saddle. It was worth quite a bit of money in itself; but it was doubly prized by its owner, since he had won it in a broncho-riding contest in a rodeo up at Monte Vista, Colorado.

It might have been noticed that the pockets of the saddle bulged exceptionally much. There were two reasons for this. Beneath one flap reposed the extra revolver, which Pinto had learned never to ride without. And beneath the other was a big sack of dried apples—a luscious treat for Yellow Jacket.

The outlaw puncher sat grimly listening to the shots and the pounding of hoofs, as the chase drew closer. He hardly knew what to do. He hated to expose himself by flight. Yet, if the riflemen were ranchers instead of enemy bandits, he did not want to stay and fight, at the risk of killing an honest, if misguided, hombre.

Bullets were sailing through the brush more dangerously, as the shooters galloped nearer. One slug bored through the crown of Pinto’s sombrero. Another grazed his left hand.

Still, he had not seen the men who seemed to be after him.

Yellow Jacket jumped, as a bullet ripped an ugly gash across his shoulder, and he started to dance nervously.

"Easy now, old boy," young Martin murmured sympathetically, patting the pony's neck. "We won't stay hyar, whar we might be trapped; though, I reckon, if I knowed fer shore them fellers were crooks, I'd give 'em a merry battle."

Turning Yellow Jacket, he was about to race away, when the crashing of the brush a few feet to the left startled him. Jerking halfway around in his stirrups, he stared at a rider and a horse, breaking through the foliage toward him.

The cayuse was a small roan, that appeared to have about reached the end of its endurance. Lather streaked its sides, as well as crimson spur marks. Its eyes stared vacantly. Its head drooped weakly, and its breath came in gasps.

The hombre on the critter's back was a short, wiry fellow of nearly Pinto Martin's age. His features were sharp and thin, and not as deeply tanned as the average cowboy's. His eyes staring out from under the brim of a black sombrero and from beneath narrow brows, that looked almost like pencil marks, were icy gray, but as venomous as a rattlesnake's.

If it had not been that the stranger was wearing the garb—chaps, boots, and spurs—of a cowboy, Pinto would have decided at once that he was a gambler, and probably not too honest a one, at that.

"What the——" Seeing the freckled waddy almost barring his way, the fellow started to swing up the six-gun, which he had clenched in his long, slim-fingered right hand.

"Don't try it!" cried Pinto, jerking his own .45 from his holster and covering the other, so quickly that the man gasped.

"Who-all are yuh?" demanded the stranger, in a hoarse, panting voice.

As bullets cut through the brush, he cast a furtive, frightened glance back the way he had come.

Pinto suddenly realized that it was the newcomer and not himself who was being chased. Without answering the man's question, he asked one of his own

"Who's after yuh?"

"A bunch o' fellers from Sand Crick." grunted the other nervously.

"Jay Conners's gang?" Pinto's brown eyes narrowed at the thought of Conners, the man who pretended to be a judge, but in reality was the most powerful crook in the territory.

"Yeah." The stranger nodded quickly. Then, as if fearful that the cowboy might suspect him, he added: "But, I ain't done nothin'. I'm as innercent o' killin' the feller, like they say I did, as a newborn baby."

Pinto Martin's sympathy was instantly aroused. He knew that the fellow might be lying, might be guilty of every crime in the world, but his own case made him quick to pity any person who was on the dodge.

If the pursuers had been properly authorized officers, or even the honest ranchers of the Panhandle, the young outlaw might not have interfered with their pursuit. But he would not let even the lowest killer be captured by the Jay Conners's outfit, to face a trial that was no better than a farce and meant certain death at the end of a dangling rope.

That the fugitive was bound to be caught in a little while was apparent from the condition of his pony. The pursuers could be heard, riding around outside the thicket, hesitant to enter the brush, where their quarry was likely to be waiting for them with a deadly six-gun.

Rifle bullets still sailed through the leaves at intervals. If the posse ever

seriously began to sweep the copse with shots, Pinto's position would be as dangerous as that of the fugitive.

"I'll give yuh a hundred dollars fer yore horse," offered the stranger.

"No." The cowboy shook his head.

"A thousand!" The other reached inside his shirt and pulled out a thick sheaf of bills. "My critter's done fer, an' I got ter have another, at any price."

Pinto's eyes narrowed. The money held no temptation for him, but he wondered where so much had come from.

"I got ter have yore hoss." The stranger's voice rose to a shriek. "If them crooks catch me, it means the noose. An' I'm innercent. I tell yuh, I'm innercent."

The outlaw puncher thought that he had never seen such a display of terror before. Still, who would not be excited, if they saw a hangman's rope dangling for them almost before their very eyes?

"What's yore name?" demanded the cowboy.

"Snake Dorgan," was the quick reply.

"Mine's Pinto Martin. Yuh can't buy my hoss at any price, an' yuh couldn't stick on his back if I would sell. But I'll try to save yuh." Pinto's jaw set doggedly.

"How yuh goin' ter do thet, if yuh won't let me have yore fresh cayuse ter git away on?" retorted Snake.

"Gimme yore black hat. Hyar, yuh wear mine." The puncher snatched off his gray Stetson. "We ain't got time to trade clothes, but mebbe jest the hats'll fool yore enemies. I'll ride out an' try to lead 'em away, so yuh kin take yore time."

"Ain't yuh skeered?" cried the fugitive. "Gosh, feller, if yuh do thet fer me, I'll be yore friend the rest o' my days."

The promise was made with such apparent sincerity that Pinto blushed beneath his tan and freckles.

"Aw, chuck the thanks," he growled. "I know what it is to be on the dodge. Lonesome days, an' nights thet are wuss. If yuh git away hyar an' want to see me again, I'll meet yuh after sundown to-night up at Rocky Point on the Cimarron. Know whar thet is?"

"Uh-huh," "Snake" Dorgan grunted. "I'll be thet."

"So long."

Pulling the too small black sombrero as far down as he could to conceal his features, Pinto Martin touched his spurs lightly to Yellow Jacket's flanks and bolted out of the thicket.

"Thar he goes!" a dozen men, huddled in a nervous group at the base of the butte, shouted together.

Pinto had scant time in which to recognize any of the grim-faced, serious-eyed fugitive hunters. But, with the first quick glance that he did throw toward them, his heart leaped into his mouth.

The posse was not made up of Jay Conners's bandits from Sand Creek, as Snake Dorgan had claimed! The posse was made up of ranchers!

The outlaw cowboy was in a muddle. He realized that he must have made a mistake in trying to save the fugitive. He would have liked to turn back into the brush and demand an explanation from the fellow.

But it was too late to do that. Pinto would be in as much danger as Snake, if the ranchers surrounded him. There was but one thing to do, if he did not want to shoot it out with honest men, and that was to flee, as rapidly as his pony could move.

Apparently, the members of the posse did not recognize that he was not the same hombre they had been chasing. In their excitement, they were easily fooled by the simple exchange of hats. Tom scrunched as low in his saddle as possible, so that his height would not be so evident.

"How did he git a fresh hoss?" yelled

one of the more practical-minded man hunters.

"It don't matter how he got it. We got to git him," bellowed one of the others. "Come on, fellers. Don't let him give us the slip again."

The speaker raised his rifle to his shoulder. At the same instant, Pinto jerked Yellow Jacket away, spurring more deeply than he generally did.

Wham! The bullet buried itself in the cantle of his saddle.

The rifles in the hands of the other ranchers started to roar. But, already spurring their cayuses madly in pursuit, their lead went wild.

Bending low on the pommel of his saddle, Pinto Martin rode for his life.

"Give us all the speed yo've got, pal," he begged, shoving his unused revolver in its holster and running his fingers through Yellow Jacket's flying mane.

Yelling like Indians, and wasting ammunition at almost every jump of their horses, the pursuers came pounding after the cowboy, grim determination to kill or catch him pictured in every line of their set, hard features.

CHAPTER II.

PINTO WAKES TO A SURPRISE.

THE buckskin horse ran like a streak of yellow light, its white-stockinged, muscular legs moving with machinelike precision, its light-colored, flying hoofs scarcely seeming to touch the earth.

Even with everything else equal, Pinto Martin would have been willing to match the speed of his cayuse against that of any other pony in the region. But, to-day, Yellow Jacket was fresh, while the horses of the ranchers were worn by their long pursuit of Snake Dorgan. As a result, the buckskin simply ran off and left them.

In a few moments, the outlaw puncher was completely out of range of their rifles. He did not check the pace of his pony until he knew that he was

absolutely safe, however. By that time, he was several miles away from the copse of brush where he had met Snake.

"Good hoss! Yuh shore showed 'em a clean pair o' heels."

He straightened in his saddle, looked back at his pursuers, and tugged on his reins to slow Yellow Jacket somewhat.

Well in the rear, the members of the posse were halting their weary animals, with gestures of disgusted defeat. One of them shook his fist at the cowboy. Others brandished their rifles, in silent promise of what his fate would be if they ever got close enough to him.

Pinto waved back at them jauntily enough, and went on, gradually reining his buckskin down to a comfortable, mile-eating lope. He continued for several miles at that pace, looking behind him every few moments.

Three of the ranchers, evidently mounted on better ponies than the others, followed him for some time after the short halt. But they, too, were finally shaken off, one by one, and the outlaw stopped his buckskin beside a sluggish, red-muddied creek, bordered with cottonwoods.

The first thing that Pinto Martin did, after dismounting, was to remove the bit from Yellow Jacket's mouth and let the horse bury its muzzle in the water. He was careful not to let the heated animal gulp down too much at once, however.

Pulling the buckskin into the shade of the cottonwoods, the cowboy next removed his saddle and amused himself by putting the cayuse through tricks that he had patiently taught it—shaking hands, lying down, playing dead, rolling over, and the like, at command. As a reward, he took a double handful of dried apples out of his saddle pocket and gave them to Yellow Jacket.

Pinto had reason to be proud of his intelligent cow pony. But even its tricks could not keep him amused for more than a little while. Tiring of the play,

he sat down, with his back to the trunk of a cottonwood, where he could watch the trail he had come over, and tried to think things out.

Why had Snake Dorgan lied about the identity of the posse men? What had the fellow done that he had been forced to flee? Where had he got all the money that he had pulled from his shirt?

Pinto could not help being suspicious of Snake Dorgan. At the same time, he had to admit that the small man might be innocent, a victim of circumstances, as he himself was.

"I reckon I'll see if he keeps our date at Rocky Point, so I kin git my hat back anyhow," declared the puncher, taking off the black sombrero and brushing vigorously at the cowlick, which immediately tumbled over his eyes.

Although Pinto did not say it, the real thing that made him decide to try to see Snake again was loneliness. Always on the dodge, feared and distrusted by criminals and honest men alike, the existence of the outlaw puncher in No Man's Land was almost as friendless as a hermit's.

Surely, even the companionship of the doubtful Snake would be an agreeable change.

Rocky Point, on the Cimarron, was several miles north of the butte where Tom had run into the fugitive. In order to reach the meeting place, he would have to circle considerably, since he did not care to risk meeting the ranchers again. Some of them, on fresh horses, might be searching the region.

The cowboy ate a light snack of food, which he had wrapped in the slicker behind his saddle, and started on his way. He rode slowly and cautiously, for he had plenty of time to get to his destination by sundown.

His precaution seemed to be well taken. Twice, he saw parties, whom he took to be groups of the posse men, riding at a distance. But he kept to

coulees and stream beds as much as possible, and the searchers did not spot him.

Rocky Point was a jagged, wedge-shaped bluff jutting out into the water of the Cimarron River. In frontier days, it had been a favorite spot of Indians, lying in wait to pounce upon immigrant trains. Later, its elevation, overlooking a stretch of many miles, made it popular with the outlaws. There was but one trail to the summit of the rocks, and it was so narrow and steep that one man could guard it indefinitely.

Pinto rode up the path, wondering whether Snake would be waiting. The puncher would not have been surprised if the small fugitive had fled clear out of the Panhandle at the first chance.

But the cowboy was pleasantly surprised. As he reined Yellow Jacket between two giant boulders at the top of the trail, Snake stepped into view, thrusting his six-gun into its holster.

"Howdy." He grinned. "I didn't know whether yuh'd git hyar, or not."

Pinto might have retorted that he had scarcely expected to find the other. But he only gave a short laugh and said: "Yuh had yore smoke pole ready, I see."

"Yeah. Nobody was goin' ter trap me up hyar." Snake scowled.

The puncher would have liked to ask some questions. But men didn't do that in No Man's Land. So he just stared around the flat top of the Point and at the sun, setting in a blaze behind a towering butte to the west.

"I want ter thank yuh fer what yuh done. When the posse took out after yuh, I didn't have no trouble gittin' hyar. I left my hoss down below ter rest an' clumb up on foot." The sharp-featured fugitive drew tobacco and papers from his pocket and deftly rolled a cigarette.

"Why did yuh lie about who was chasin' yuh?" demanded Pinto.

Snake shrugged and snickered.

"I saw yuh was a cowboy, an' thought fer a minute yuh might be in cahoots with them ranchers," he replied glibly.

The cowboy saw the logic in that. If he had been in the other's boots, he would have been plenty wary, too.

"Yuh know"—Snake lit his cigarette, inhaled, and blew a dense cloud of smoke out of his nostrils—"I been thinkin'. Yuh ain't got me fooled none, Pinto. Yo're on the dodge, like me an' purty nigh evr'body else in this danged country."

Pinto's start was enough of an admission that the other was right.

"What yuh gittin' at?" he asked suspiciously.

"Why don't we team up? It's a danged sight better fer two fellers ter travel tergether than by their lonesome." The small fugitive put into words the very thoughts of Pinto.

The latter was nearly swept off his feet for an instant, though.

"I—I ain't a crook," he stammered. "Yuh kin count me out of any deal thet ain't right."

"Oh, shore." Snake's teeth glistened in a smile. "Yuh don't reckon I'd do anything crooked, do yuh?"

"Waal——" Pinto looked doubtful.

The other seemed not to notice the lack of enthusiasm.

"Let's move out o' this Cimarron country an' hit fer some place whar a guy kin sure-nuff live," he suggested.

"Meanin' whar?" The cowboy sighed.

"Colorado," replied Snake.

"Colorado!" repeated Pinto, with a start.

Thoughts piled in his mind. Colorado was home to him. His widowed mother and his younger brother were up there. How he would like to see them!

If Snake Dorgan wanted to ride up with him, what better opportunity could he hope for? It would be much safer traveling with some one than alone.

If Snake were headed for something

criminal, Pinto would not be in it with him, would know nothing about it, in fact.

"Thet ain't such a bad idee," the outlaw puncher said, after a long silence. "But I repeat, feller, I ain't mixin' in nothin' crooked."

"As if I would!" The other leered. "When do yuh want ter start?"

"In the mornin'. We're purty safe up hyar, an' our cayuses need a rest," answered Tom.

Snake looked at Yellow Jacket with a peculiar, almost greedy gleam in his cold gray eyes.

What was he thinking? Did he, like so many other men, covet the buckskin horse?

If Pinto even guessed at such a possibility, he did not let it worry him. Pulling his gear off the pony's back, he quickly set about making camp, a simple task of spreading out a blanket and unwrapping some cold food.

"We better not risk a fire up hyar," he grunted, offering some of the grub to his companion.

Snake ate wolfishly, and the meal was a silent affair. Pinto was thinking about the folks at home.

Following their meager supper, the pair soon stretched themselves out to sleep, Pinto explaining that they wanted to get a start the very first thing in the morning.

Still suspicious of his companion, he slept lightly. It was some time near dawn, when a movement near him disturbed him. Always on guard against danger, he was wide awake instantly, staring around him in the white moonlight that bathed the cliff.

At first, he saw no cause for alarm. Then, half a dozen feet away, crouching in the shadow of a rock, he saw Snake Dorgan, with a drawn revolver in his hand.

The weapon was pointing toward Pinto!

"What the heck?" The puncher

leaped to his feet, clutching for his .45, lying on the ground beside his blanket.

The thought swept over his mind that Snake was trying to kill him as he slept. Was it in order to steal his horse?

In another half second, the six-gun in Pinto Martin's hand would have roared. But the other man stepped into the moonlight, lowering his revolver at his side.

"What's the idee, feller?" demanded the puncher.

"Heh-eh-eh!" Snake Dorgan laughed nervously. "I thought I heard somebody comin' up the trail. I was ready fer 'em."

"Ye-ah?" Pinto listened carefully, but heard nothing. He did not know whether his companion was lying or not.

Well, he would give him the benefit of the doubt anyway. There was a possibility that he was telling the truth, that he had imagined he heard some one coming.

"Go on back to sleep," the young outlaw ordered sharply. "An' try to keep that revolver o' yore's in its holster, whar it belongs."

He remained standing, until Snake dropped down on his blanket again. Then Pinto, too, stretched out once more. But it was not to sleep. He was too puzzled by his trail mate's actions, and resolved to keep one eye upon him the rest of the time they were together.

CHAPTER III.

THE QUICKSAND TRAP.

PINTO MARTIN did not give Snake Dorgan credit for the trickiness that the latter possessed.

The small fugitive was too cowardly to stand up and fight with his six-gun, as long as the other fellow had an even chance. But he had a sly brain that could figure out other ways of getting rid of a fellow, without the smoke of powder.

The cowboy was watchful, but uncertain of the depths to which Snake would stoop to gain his ends.

Dawn found them riding along the south bank of the Cimarron, in search of a ford. To a person strange to the region, it would have looked as if the horses could wade across the stream at nearly any spot, but Pinto knew that the river was full of quicksand. Many were the men who had been sucked to a horrible death in the grip of the Cimarron's shoals.

The outlaw puncher said nothing about Snake's strange actions during the night. He was willing to let the matter drop, although he did not cease his watchfulness.

Snake was ready to forget it, too, evidently, but many were the sly, greedy glances he gave to the cowboy's buckskin, as he jogged along at Pinto's right side.

The young waddy rode on the left, because he wanted to be next to the river, looking for a place to cross.

The two fugitives were about a mile east of Rocky Point, riding slowly along the edge of a steep bank, about seven feet above the innocent-looking surface of the water.

"How 'bout puttin' our hosses down the bank an' crossin' right hyar? It looks all right." Snake broke the long silence.

Pinto drew Yellow Jacket to a stop, easing sidewise in his saddle so that he faced the stream, with his back toward his companion.

"Looks are deceivin'." He raised his right hand to point. "If yuh notice close, yuh kin see the water ain't more'n three feet deep, with the quicksand layin'—"

The explanation was not completed. A sudden squeal from Snake's roan pony made Tom jerk around in his stirrups. He was just in time to see the cayuse rear, as if it had been suddenly and brutally spurred. Its rider yanked

at his reins, seemingly fighting to control the startled animal, but, instead of pulling the critter away from Yellow Jacket, jerking it in that direction.

Smack! Pinto felt his horse lurch under him, as the other cayuse crashed into it.

Halted upon the edge of the cut bank, Yellow Jacket was almost knocked into the river. Fighting for its balance, the buckskin seemed to lose, as the rim began to cave beneath its sharp, frantically pawing hoofs.

Like a flash, Pinto Martin had visions of death in the quicksand trap. If he and Yellow Jacket ever got into the river, they could never escape except by means of help from shore.

Of course, if Snake had tried deliberately to push the cowboy in, he would probably save the buckskin, but let Pinto die, the latter thought.

The roan pony was still shoving against Yellow Jacket, while its rider cursed and used his reins and spurs in what might have been an effort to force the beast away.

The buckskin seemed to drop sickeningly away from under its master, when a big section of the bank collapsed beneath its forehoofs.

In another instant, Yellow Jacket would have plunged down into the sucking sands. Pinto would face a nightmare death.

Throwing his entire weight back on his reins, the puncher literally held his cayuse's head up, until the animal could heave itself back with its powerfully muscled rear legs.

Pinto jerked the horse around with his reins and jumped it to safety on the solid bank with a dig of his spurs.

When the buckskin was out of the way, there was nothing to check the roan. Maddened by its master's spurring and the jerking of the bit in its mouth, it plunged straight to the edge of the bank.

A shriek of fear burst from Snake

Dorgan. He tried to kick his feet free of his stirrups and fling himself to safety, but he did not have time.

Snorting and pawing wildly, the roan slid down the caving bank.

The manner in which the horse fell threw its head down and its tail up, almost as if it were bucking. Snake was already trying to dive from the cayuse's back, so he got plenty of help.

He shot out over the river, with his legs spreadeagled, and his arms fanning the air, to land with a splash in the muddy water.

Instantly, he attempted to wade toward shore. But his feet seemed to be glued in the bed of the stream. Each time he tried to take a step, he sank deeper.

The roan horse, whimpering in terror, was fighting and sinking a little nearer to the bank.

Pinto Martin, breathless after his own narrow escape, could do nothing for a few moments. Everything had happened so quickly that he was still startled.

"Help! Help!" Snake screamed, sinking rapidly, with the water already reaching almost to his shoulders.

The cry seemed to jerk the cowboy out of a daze. His brown eyes widened, then narrowed. His lips pressed into a thin, hard line. His freckled nose wrinkled up jeeringly.

"Help!" The screams grew more frantic.

Grimly silent, Pinto shook out the kinks of his lariat. Very deliberately, he built a loop. He knew that he had plenty of time. Believing that Snake had tried to push him to death, he was determined to teach the little fugitive a lesson.

Swish! The rope shot out like the lash of a whip, true to its mark. But the mark was not Snake Dorgan. The cowboy had dropped his loop on the struggling roan horse first.

Dallying the free end of his lariat around the pommel of his saddle, Pinto spoke a low word to Yellow Jacket. The buckskin braced its legs and pulled.

For a moment, it looked as if the rope would surely break. But a lariat that could stand the shock of throwing a heavy steer was not going to snap in a straight pull like that required in freeing Snake Dorgan's cayuse.

The question was, rather, whether Yellow Jacket had the strength to pull the other horse out. It seemed doubtful, but—finally the sands let go with a gulping sound. Half dragged and half helping itself, the roan reached the bank and struggled up to safety, where it stopped, trembling, with its legs far apart, and its head drooping.

"Help!" Snake was hoarse with terror. "Yuh wouldn't let me die hyar, jest so yuh could steal my hoss, would yuh?"

How had he happened to think of such a thing, unless it had been what he had planned for Pinto? The latter grinned.

Slowly, he removed the rope from the roan cayuse and pretended to be about to coil it.

"Save me! Don't go 'way an' leave me hyar," Snake shrieked.

Pinto Martin knew that he had waited long enough. If the other fellow had not learned a lesson against double-crossing by that time, he never would.

With swift motions, the young puncher spun another loop on his rope and tossed it toward the sand-trapped man. Crying in joy, Snake gripped it in his frantic fingers. It took but a few seconds then for Yellow Jacket, guided by Pinto, to drag the small fugitive out on the bank.

"What yuh mean, pullin' out my hoss 'fore yuh did me?" Soaked and mud-died, Snake leaped to his feet, snarling like an angry beast.

"I reckon yore hoss deserved it most,"

retorted the cowboy coolly. "Would yuh save me at all, if yuh'd succeeded in shovin' me into the sand?"

A surprised expression sprang into the other's eyes. The next instant, they were like icicles.

"Do yuh mean yuh think I tried ter crowd yuh off the bank?"

"Course I do." Pinto nodded.

Snake's manner underwent a swift change. All his defiance and anger faded. He became fawning.

"Aw!" His tone was an oily whine. "Yuh don't think I'd do anythin' like thet ter a pard, do yuh? My hoss, the crazy critter, shied at somethin'."

"So yuh had to spur an' rein it into Yellow Jacket, huh?" Pinto laughed dryly.

"Honest, I never meant ter do thet," cried Snake. "I was fightin' ter control my cayuse all the time. Why, yuh saved my life when thet posse was after me. We're goin' ter Colorado tergether. Do yuh reckon I'd want anything ter happen ter a pal like yuh?"

The outlaw puncher did not reply. He did not know what to believe.

"We are goin' ter Colorado tergether, ain't we?" demanded the rescued man.

"To Colorado—an' together?" Pinto stared searchingly at the other. Should he trust him again?

"Aw, come on. Yuh oughtn't ter let a li'l accident make no difference in our plans," whined Snake.

"All right. I'll go on with yuh." Pinto Martin suddenly grinned. But he was saying to himself:

"I'll be watchin' Snake all the time. He won't git another chance to pull a gun when I'm sleepin', n'r push me off the edge of a cut bank."

The smaller fugitive climbed on to his sorry-looking roan cayuse, with a sly, self-satisfied leer on his face.

Together, the two men started on their way, Pinto riding with one eye on the Cimarron, in search of a ford, and the other on his companion.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOUBLE CROSS.

YUH must know this part o' the country purty well," remarked Snake Dorgan, exhaling cigarette smoke from his grinning lips.

Pinto Martin, gazing away over the Colorado prairie, with a strange, wistful expression in his brown eyes, turned around with a short laugh.

"I do know this region purty fair," he admitted. "It was my home, until I was outlawed from thet town over thar."

He jerked his head in the direction of a cluster of buildings, about half a mile away. The low roofs could just be seen above the brush-lined bank of the arroyo in which the trail mates were camped.

It was evening. Beyond the town, which was named Two Buttes, the sun was setting.

Snake, fully recovered from his fright in the quicksand, stood up, the better to view the village. The red glow of the sun gleamed in the ice of his eyes. Or was the fire internal?

"Gosh!" he murmured, in his smooth, oily way. "Yuh must be a brave feller. Ain't yuh skeered ter come back? Ain't the sheriff lookin' fer yuh?"

The outlaw cowboy shrugged, and the wistful look deepened in his eyes.

"I want to see my folks," he answered simply.

His companion whistled and turned his head to hide his sneering, wolfish grin.

He had tried twice to get rid of Pinto—once at Rocky Point and again on the bank of the Cimarron—so that he could steal the prized buckskin pony, Yellow Jacket. Now he thought he saw a way to collect more than the horse was worth on the young puncher himself.

If Pinto Martin was an outlaw, there no doubt was a reward posted for him in Two Buttes.

Snake fingered the thick sheaf of bills beneath his shirt.

"Thet reward, added ter what I took off the rancher I plugged down in Oklahomy, will make me a big stake. I guess I ain't nobody's fool," he thought.

"I ain't much afraid o' gittin' caught," Pinto declared. "As long as I don't show myself in Two Buttes, thar ain't much danger. An' the sheriff is purty dumb, anyhow."

"What's his name?" asked the other.

"Palmer," replied the cowboy, without guessing what was passing through the mind of Snake.

The latter grew serious.

"Listen hyar!" he cried. "Yo're a fool ter come back ter yore home town, Pinto. Yuh don't know when the sheriff might git wise an' come huntin' fer yuh."

"He never will, 'less somebody tells him I'm around," retorted the waddy unworriedly.

"How do yuh know a lot o' people ain't already seen us, ridin' up hyar ter-day? If I'd even guessed this was the place yuh was outlawed from, I wouldn't 'a' listened ter yore comin' with me." Snake seemed to be genuinely upset for fear of his companion's safety.

Some of his excitement transmitted itself to Pinto Martin.

"Mebbe I *am* takin' a chance," grunted the puncher, "but——"

"Yo're makin' a fool's gamble," the smaller fugitive cut in. "Yuh saved me from thet posse down in No Man's Land. Now I got a chance ter pay yuh back. I ain't goin' ter let yuh run the risk o' gittin' caught."

"How do yuh figger on perventin' the risk?" asked Pinto.

"Thet's easy," replied Snake glibly. "Nobody knows me up in this country. I'm goin' inter town an' make some inquiries. If Sheriff Palmer is organizin' a posse, or anything ter catch yuh, I'll find out about it an' warn yuh."

At first, the double-crosser had planned on slipping away from camp after his companion was asleep, a dangerous thing to attempt, considering how lightly the cowboy slumbered.

The quickness with which Pinto fell for the plan of his going to Two Buttes to make inquiries nearly startled Snake.

"I reckon yo're right," agreed the outlaw puncher unsuspiciously. "When yuh goin' an' how soon yuh comin' back?"

"I might as well git on my way at once," asserted the reward seeker. "It'll take me a little while ter find out if the sheriff knows anything. An' then, o' course, I might look the town over."

"It won't take yuh long to see ever'-thing in Two Buttes."

"Waal, if I ain't back by the time yuh want ter hit yore blanket, don't worry none. I kin find my way back ter camp all right." Snake picked up his saddle and walked toward his horse, grazing on the short grass in the bed of the coulee.

A few moments later, the little fugitive swung into his stirrups and spurred his roan up the steep bank of the wash. At the top, he turned and waved to the cowboy who had twice saved his life.

"So long," he called.

"So long," answered Pinto. "I'll be waitin' to hear what yuh find out."

With a couple of cruel jabs of his spurs, Snake Dorgan sent his pony racing over the brown range land toward Two Buttes. A few minutes later, he was galloping along the dusty, rutted main street of the typical cow town.

Low, false-fronted buildings flanked the street on either side. There were stores, a livery barn, a feed yard and the large, ugly frame structure that housed the Silver Dollar Saloon, once owned by "Silver Dollar" Slater, the money lender whom Pinto Martin had been forced to kill, and now operated by one of the late Shylock's henchmen, Lew Myrick, a bartender.

Snake would not have minded stopping at the saloon for a drink of whisky, but he spied a different goal a little way farther along the street.

The building in front of which the crook stopped was the county jail, the only brick building in Two Buttes. A large sign over the oak door read:

SHERIFF'S OFFICE.

Snake Dorgan grinned, as he scrambled from his saddle and, without bothering to tie his horse, ducked under the hitching rail and clattered across the wooden sidewalk to the entrance.

"Is Sheriff Palmer hyar?" he cried, jerking open the door and stepping inside the office.

"Huh!" A middle-aged, medium-sized man, who had been sitting in a swivel chair, with his boots propped up on a spur-scarred desk in front of him, nearly overbalanced himself as he tried to assume a more dignified position quickly.

"I'm Sheriff Palmer," he asserted, successfully steadying himself on his feet and stepping into the center of the room.

The light of a ceiling lamp, already burning, since it was growing quite dark inside the office, revealed features that were kindly, honest, and square cut. A pair of gray eyes, staring out of the weather-beaten face, were wide with astonishment and questioning.

Pinto Martin had called the sheriff dumb, but he was hardly that. True, Palmer was a poor officer, but his trouble was that he trusted everybody too much. He couldn't be hard boiled enough to handle his job efficiently.

Until a severe winter had killed off most of his cattle, he had been a leading rancher of the county. Following his failure in the stock business, his many friends boosted him into the sheriff's office.

"What yuh want me fer?" he demanded gruffly.

Snake's eyes shifted nervously, taking in the details of the room, especially the heavy steel door at the back, which he could guess opened into the cell chamber.

"Do yuh know a feller named Pinto Martin?" asked the double-crosser.

"Pinto Martin!" Palmer's face reddened with memory of the times that the famous young outlaw had outwitted him. "Yeah. I know him. Do yuh know whar he is?"

The reward seeker laughed shrewdly.

"Mebbe I do," he admitted.

"Tell me, then," cried the sheriff. "Dang thet smart ranny! If I ever git my handcuffs on him again, he won't escape."

"Oh-ho! So you want him bad!" Snake chortled. "What price yuh offerin' fer him?"

Palmer snorted.

"What are yuh tryin' to do. Double-cross a pal?" he jeered.

The speaker's face reddened.

"Naw," he said hotly. "I ain't no pal of an outlaw. I'm jest a saddle tramp, driftin' along through yore country. It's all right if I see Pinto Martin, ain't it, an' reckernize him from a reward notice I seen at some town farther up the line?"

"If yuh seen a notice, yuh ought to know how much reward is bein' offered fer Pinto," growled the sheriff, getting into one of the sour moods he suffered from every time he began thinking about the outlaw cowboy.

"Yuh don't expect me ter remember a thing like that, do yuh?" Snake sneered. "Besides, I thought mebbe the reward had been increased recently."

"It has been," grunted Palmer, not suspecting that almost every word of his visitor was a lie. "The county'll pay five thousand dollars fer thet murderer."

"Murderer!" The double-crosser whistled.

He had not expected that his trail mate faced as serious a charge. Believ-

ing that Pinto had been outlawed only for stealing a horse, or some lesser crime, Snake would have been glad to sell his knowledge for a few hundred dollars.

But five thousand! He broke into a sweat, thinking about the gambling hall he could open with the reward and that money he had committed murder to obtain in Oklahoma.

"How soon kin I git the cash, if I tell yuh whar yore man is right this minute?" he demanded excitedly.

"Waal, I don't carry the money around with me," replied the sheriff dryly. "Atter Pinto is hung, yuh'll have to git an order from the county board fer the county treasurer to write a check."

Snake's face fell. He had hoped to get the reward quickly and be on his way.

"How soon'll Pinto hang?" he asked huskily.

Palmer shrugged.

"Thar won't be no delay," he growled. "I won't take the chances on thet outlaw escapin' another time. It'll take mebbe a couple o' days to build the scaffold an' git the necessary order from the judge. An' then——"

He spread his hands suggestively of the end.

The hopes of the double-crosser rebounded. He could afford to wait two days for five thousand dollars. The chance that he would be arrested for that killing in No Man's Land was remote.

"Do yuh guarantee I'll git the reward fer tellin' yuh whar Pinto is?" he asked.

"Who do yuh reckon is goin' to cheat yuh out of it?" The sheriff glared.

"Waal, I thought thet mebbe yuh an' yore deputies might want a little share," replied Snake.

"Dang yuh!" Palmer looked almost as if he were going to strike the squealer. "We're officers, yuh low-down money grabber. We do our dooty,

sometimes painful, but we ain't lookin' fer no blood money in it."

"Heh-heh-heh!" The small crook's thin features mirrored his relief at not having to split what he would receive. "I jest wanted ter make shore."

"Don't worry! I'll see thet nobody cuts in on yuh." The sheriff sneered. "Come on, now. Whar's Martin?"

Snake took a deep breath and made the final plunge.

"He's camped in the arroyo about a half mile east o' town," he said.

"Huh!" Sheriff Palmer started with astonishment that the outlaw would dare come so close.

Jerking his holstered .45 forward on his thigh, he leaped toward the door.

"I'll git a posse an' have Pinto in a half hour," he hurled over his shoulder. "Are yuh comin' along?"

"Naw." Now that he had completed his treachery, Snake Dorgan was trembling. "I've had a hard day, an' I'm tired. Good luck!"

If Palmer heard the words, he did not reply. As his hurried footsteps resounded along the board sidewalk outside, the double-crocker's sharp features broke into a grin.

"Five thousand dollars!" he chortled. "Who says I ain't a smart hombre? I'll give the sheriff time ter git started, an' then I'll go ter thet big saloon an' do a little celebrating."

Snake waited until he heard a rush of hoofbeats on the street, which he knew signaled the departure of the posse. Then, still chuckling to himself, he left the unlocked sheriff's office in quest of more cheer, in liquid form.

CHAPTER V.

FACING THE NOOSE.

PINTO MARTIN did not intend to go to sleep, but, sitting with his back to the bank of the arroyo, staring at the bright stars, and thinking about his folks, he simply dozed off.

He did not know how long he had been asleep, when he suddenly was jerked wide awake by the snorting of Yellow Jacket. The buckskin horse was almost like a watchdog in sensing the approach of other critters.

Hoofs were pounding up the draw. The cayuses were still some distance away. Seizing his saddle from the ground, the outlaw ran to his pony in the darkness.

He did not know who was coming, but he was certain that it was not the lone Snake Dorgan. He did not want to risk killing honest men, even Sheriff Palmer, who had hunted him so bitterly in the past. It would be better to flee, even though he was sick and tired of continually doing that.

In the few seconds that it took him to cinch his saddle tightly on his buckskin, the thought flashed through his mind that Snake might have betrayed him.

"The crawlin' reptyle!" he growled. "It couldn't 'a' been anybody else. I ought to have my head examined fer trustin' him at all, but I was so danged lonesome I jest couldn't help it."

With a leap, the cowboy seated himself in his saddle. As his feet groped for his stirrups, he reined Yellow Jacket around, intending to race down the coulee.

Clipitty-clop! Clipitty-clop! Other hoofbeats, which he had not noticed before, resounded in that direction.

"Trapped!" The single, groaning word burst from the young outlaw's lips.

After all his happy dreams of seeing the folks at home, to think that he had allowed himself to be cut off like that! But was he caught?

There remained the routes over the walls of the arroyo. Yellow Jacket could clear either bank in a few scrambling leaps. Once he was out on the open range, Pinto would not worry about any one overtaking him.

Reining the buckskin to the right, he was about to head south, back the way he had come, to No Man's Land and comparative safety.

Again pounding hoofs warned him. Men were galloping across the range from the south. Their noise had been muffled before by the coulee's bank.

Turning to the north, his last hope for an avenue of escape, the unlucky outlaw found that this direction, too, was closed to him.

With men racing toward him from every direction, he was surrounded. Sheriff Palmer must have at least fifty men in his posse to spring as complete a trap as that, thought Pinto.

"But mebbe it ain't the sheriff. Thar's plenty o' crooks up hyar, too; Silver Dollar Slater's old gangsters, who'd shore like to git me," he grunted hopefully.

How could he glean hope from that thought? Why, it was easy. Although he would not use his gun against the law, except as a bluff, if he knew the men about him were crooks, he would not hesitate to try to battle his way out of the trap.

Even if he were shot, there might be some satisfaction in taking a few of his enemies to death with him.

The many horses were coming close, converging on the spot where Pinto waited. No one but Snake Dorgan could have revealed so accurately the place where he was hidden, the puncher knew.

"The next time I try to l'arn him not to double-cross a friend, I won't do it by trustin' him," he muttered grimly, drawing his revolver.

Clippity-clop! In a few seconds, the men riding from each direction in the arroyo would be upon him. Other foes would be piling down the banks.

With almost a prayer that his trappers would prove to be known crooks instead of posse men under the sheriff,

Pinto backed Yellow Jacket into the blackest shadow of the walls.

"Mebbe this is our last trip together, old pal," he said, with a catch in his throat, as he thumbed back the hammer of his .45.

Suddenly it seemed that the coulee was alive with horses and men.

"He's right along hyar some place," rose a shout, in a voice that the outlaw recognized as Sheriff Palmer's.

"Mebbe thet feller who told yuh 'bout Pinto campin' hyar was tellin' yuh a tall story," replied one of the posse men.

"Naw, he wasn't," growled the sheriff. "Thet little, thin-faced ranny was too interested in collectin' the reward to bother lyin'. I thought he was goin' to go clean off his noodle when I told him the county'd pay him five thousand dollars fer Pinto."

Several of the man hunters snickered.

"Five thousand would sort of excite most anybody, I'm thinkin'," declared one fellow. "I wouldn't mind gittin' it myself. It's a heck of a note, Palmer, when yuh promise all thet money to a feller yuh never seen before."

"Shet up!" shouted the sheriff. "I don't keer nothin' about the money, n'r who gits it, long as I land Pinto Martin. Git busy now an' find him. Strike some matches."

If the waddy whom they were hunting had been the quick-triggered gunman he was supposed to be, the order for light would have been the dumbest possible. Pinto could have got six men easily with six shots, as matches flared in their hands. But he gripped his revolver as if his hand were paralyzed.

There was but one thing that he would attempt against the law—escape. But that appeared impossible. So closely was he surrounded by the posse men that his buckskin could hardly move a foot without colliding with one of the other horses.

A dozen of the pursuers spied him at the same time.

"Thar he is!" rose the shout, as a grim row of .45s were trained on Pinto.

In an instant, the young cowboy would have been riddled with bullets, but the sheriff crowded to his side.

"Do yuh surrender?" he bellowed, motioning to his followers to hold their fire.

"I reckon that's about all thar is fer me to do." Pinto Martin smiled mirthlessly.

Without batting an eye, he reversed his revolver and held it for Palmer to take.

"I didn't expect yuh to give up so easy this time." The sheriff took the weapon, with an air of relief.

The outlaw gave a dry, taunting laugh.

"Who said I've give up?" he retorted.

"Huh! I'd like to know what yuh call handin' over yore gun without a fight," Palmer grunted.

"I surrendered, because I didn't want to have to shoot yuh. But if yuh think I've give up, yore mistaken," Pinto replied quietly.

It took a couple of minutes for his meaning to filter through his captor's brain. Then Palmer gave a roar like an angry bear.

"Don't figger yuh kin escape again, or you'll be the one who's mistook," he shouted. "Yo're goin' to hang this time, feller, an' don't fergit it. Ter-morrer mornin' I'll start a gang o' carpenters workin' night and day buildin' the gallows fer yuh."

Snap! The cool steel of a handcuff clicked about the outlaw's right wrist.

Obediently, Pinto Martin held out his other arm for the br  celet.

So, they were going to rush up a gallows for him, were they?

His lips twisted into a thin, jeering smile in the darkness.

He had cheated the hangman's noose before. He might not be able to do it

again, but at least he had not given up. He had surrendered, true, but he would never admit that freedom was beyond his reach, until the rope choked off his final breath.

CHAPTER VI.

SNAKE'S HOLDUP.

TAP! Tap! Tap! The steady, rhythmic sounds of the carpenters' hammers echoed like a dirge inside the brick-walled sheriff's office. The scaffold, from which Pinto Martin was scheduled to swing on the morrow, was being rushed to completion on a vacant lot next to the jail.

Already, death seemed to hang over the office like a cloud. Sheriff Palmer felt it and showed it in his scowl. The two deputies, on guard in the corridor of the cell room at the rear, wore expressions of the utmost gloom, whenever they swung open the great steel door and looked out, which was frequently.

Snake Dorgan, sitting across the battered desk from Palmer, was nervous and jumpy, partly from the large quantity of whisky he had consumed in the Silver Dollar Saloon, but mostly from worry. He would not feel secure until he saw the companion he had double-crossed dangling from the gallows.

Twisting his fingers and licking his dry lips, he stared at the sheriff out of blood-shot eyes.

"Yuh got thet outlaw now. So why don't yuh let me have my money?" he whined, for perhaps the twentieth time.

"Yuh danged rat!" Although duty had made him jump at the chance to capture Pinto Martin, Palmer's tone expressed how deeply he despised the man who thought only of the reward.

"I got the five thousand dollars comin' ter me," Snake croaked. "I don't see what's ter pervent yore givin' it ter me now."

"Yuh act like yuh was in a powerful

big hurry to give on yore way," growled the sheriff.

"I am." The squealer shuddered. "Gosh! Listenin' ter them carpenters poundin' is drivin' me crazy."

Palmer smiled cynically.

"Jest like ever' nail reminded yuh of a dollar, eh? Waal, what I've been tellin' yuh fer a couple o' days still goes. Yuh can't collect the reward until Pinto is hung," he said.

"My gosh!" Snake groaned.

"Git out o' this office now. An' stay out!" thundered the sheriff.

The double-crosser got out, his sharp features twisted in fear and hatred.

"Dang thet fool!" he muttered, as he reached the street. "I'd like ter show him whar ter git off. The idee o' holdin' back the money I've earned."

Feeling upset, Snake Dorgan hurried along the wooden sidewalk to the Silver Dollar Saloon. It was another evening, but the small crook was not in the mood to pay any attention to the beauties of the sunset.

He pushed his way through the swinging doors and approached the fifty-foot bar in the big room.

In spite of the early hour, the saloon was crowded. The plans for the hanging of Pinto Martin had acted like a magnet, drawing the curious and morbid to Two Buttes from many miles around.

Lew Myrick, a short, fat, red-faced hombre, in a dirty apron, was toiling behind the bar, with the help of two sweating assistants. The bell on the cash register kept up a continuous tune.

"Gimme whisky!" Snake squeezed into a small space between two ranchers and planked a bill down on the bar.

Myrick expertly slid a quart bottle down the counter so that it stopped directly in front of the customer. An empty glass followed. In the rush, a chaser was not thought of, but Snake did not care. He liked his liquor straight.

Stopping the fiery amber whisky on

the bar because of his nervousness, he poured himself a drink and downed it hurriedly. Another followed, and another.

Three drinks in rapid succession seemed to settle his nerves somewhat, and clear his brain. By the time Myrick got around to collecting for his liquor, the double-crosser had got over his shakiness. His eyes were bright, and his thin face wore a sly, scheming leer.

The barkeeper picked up Snake's bill and turned to the money drawer, on the back bar, to make change. The little squealer stood on tiptoe on the brass rail in order to see better.

His gray eyes narrowed craftily. His breath came faster. Again the lure of easy money held him in its grip.

The register in the Silver Dollar Saloon was packed almost to overflowing with coin and currency. Snake could see the little compartments inside the drawer stuffed with bills and silver dollars, and more valuable gold pieces were heaped up so that the register could scarcely close.

"Three drinks out." Myrick turned and slammed down a handful of change.

Snake did not bother to count it, as he ordinarily would have done. He was too excited over the money in the drawer. Stuffing the change into his pockets, he started to back away from the bar.

"Have one on the house?" asked the saloon owner, motioning to the customer to help himself from the bottle again.

Snake Dorgan was not one to turn down anything free. Without a word of thanks, he poured himself another drink and gulped it. Then he hurried from the saloon.

He did not go far, however—just around the corner into a dark alley, where he could lean against the wall while he laughed over the way luck was breaking for him.

"Thet barroom is a cinch ter hold up

ter-night," he crowed. "Hundreds o' dollars in the drawer, an' nobody suspectin' anything. This whole county is full o' saps like the sheriff anyhow, too dumb, or too skeered ter do anything."

The double-crosser took time to roll a cigarette and light it.

"Uh-huh. I might jest as well make the most o' my time, while I'm waitin' ter collect the big dough on Pinto," he declared, between puffs of smoke. "I'll wear a mask, so nobody kin prove it's me, an' jump in with my six-gun wavin'. Ever'body will be so surprised they won't be able ter move fer a few minutes. In thet time, I kin grab the money in the drawer an' beat it."

The schemer interrupted himself with a snicker.

"A little while later, I'll take off my mask an' walk back inter the saloon as innercent as anything," he asserted. "I'll act surprised when I hear thet there has been a holdup, an' if anybody does suspect me, they'll change their mind, 'cause they'll figger I wouldn't dare come back if I was guilty."

Snake Dorgan already had a mask, a hoodlike black one, which fitted over his head like a sack, and had eyeholes cut in the front. Once he had donned it, he was pretty well concealed. Of course, some one might recognize his clothing, but, in order to guard against that, the robber took off his chaps and threw them away, and robbed his trousers and shirt of their new appearance by lying down and rolling in the dirt.

Later, when he wanted to return to the saloon, he could brush off the dust and recover his chaps.

The small schemer was not foolish enough to fail to realize that something might go wrong. He wanted a horse handy for escape, although he did not expect to need it.

Pinto Martin's Yellow Jacket was the fastest in the region, Snake knew.

The young outlaw had warned him that he could not stick on the buckskin, but the squealer did not believe that. The animal appeared to be so gentle when ridden by its master.

It was a simple matter for Snake to steal Yellow Jacket out of the livery stable where the horse had been taken, since the attendant, supposed to be on duty at the barn, was over at the Silver Dollar Saloon. The buckskin offered no opposition, as the robber saddled it and led it along the street to a point directly in front of the barroom.

It was very dark outside now, but the yellow light from the curtained windows of the saloon made the cayuse's buckskin coat gleam like burnished copper.

Feeling his mask to make sure it was pulled down properly, Snake Dorgan ducked under the hitching rail and sprang across the narrow board walk. Just outside the swinging door, he hesitated for an instant.

Then, shoving his gun ahead of him, he sprang through the entrance.

"Hands up!" His command rang out sharply, as he halted just inside, swinging the muzzle of his .45 in threatening arcs.

The squealer could be quite brave when he had the deadly drop. If anybody had started for a gun, the robber's nerve would have fled.

Customers, gamblers, and bartenders alike turned in amazement to look at the masked gunman.

"What's the idee o' the joke?" Lew Myrick grunted.

"Yo'll see whether it's any joke, or not, if yuh don't git yore hands up pronto," snarled Snake, turning his weapon toward the saloon owner.

A glance down the barrel of the revolver was enough for Myrick. He reached quickly for the ceiling.

The example of the barkeeper guided the rest of the crowd, who had less to lose. Every man in the room raised his hands.

They were not being cowardly, just careful. They knew that if they went for their guns, they would be certain to get the robber. But he was likely to kill a few of them, too, as he fell.

"Don't nobody try nothin' now, or I'll drill yuh," warned Snake.

Swinging his revolver, he backed behind the bar and to the money drawer. Without removing his eyes from the crowd, he jerked the register open and stuffed its contents into his pockets.

In two minutes, the holdup was over. Congratulating himself upon how easily it had been done, the robber backed toward the swinging doors.

In another second, he would have vanished into the night. But, at that instant, Sheriff Palmer stepped into the saloon.

Palmer seldom drank, but that night, with the carpenters *tap-tap-tapping* to complete the scaffold for Pinto Martin, he felt the need of a bracer.

A glance at the crowd in the barroom, with their arms raised and the hooded robber backing toward him, told the sheriff instantly what was happening. Grabbing for his revolver, he let out a bellow.

"Stop, yuh crook!"

Snake Dorgan jerked around and saw the officer's silver star shining in the lamplight.

The six-gun in the hand of the robber swung quickly toward Palmer.

The latter's .45 leaped from its holster.

The fingers of each man were tightening on the trigger of his weapon.

CHAPTER VII.

A BREAK FOR PINTO.

PINTO MARTIN, haggard and grim in the dim light that filtered into his cell from the lamp in the corridor, paced up and down his narrow cage.

For the first time in his experience as an outlaw, the cowboy had nearly

reached the depths of despair. Escape seemed impossible.

The sheriff had taken every imaginable precaution to insure against it. The prisoner had been placed in the strongest cell, next to the door to the office, where any unusual sound might be heard outside.

In addition, Pinto could see the young deputies, Joe Long and Bob Hogan, on guard in the corridor. They talked in low, growling tones, but the outlaw did not bother trying to overhear their words.

Tap! Tap! Tap! Through the small barrel window in his cage, the prisoner could see the black framework of the gallows, outlined against the stars. The carpenters were working late to complete the gruesome structure.

Pinto Martin leaned against the bars of the windows and laughed.

"They've got me at last, it looks like," he murmured thickly. "So this is my last night on earth, I reckon. But Palmer better be keerful the rope don't bust while he is hangin' me, or I'll give him the slip again."

The outlaw did not really believe that he had even a slim chance of escape. But he got a grim humor out of the situation as it was. At least he would show his foes how a brave man could die.

Suddenly, Pinto stiffened, staring out of the window and listening.

Crash-crash! The echoes of revolver shots died away in the distance.

But others quickly followed. In a few seconds, it sounded as if almost every free man in Two Buttes was taking part in a battle. From the sounds, the prisoner could guess that the shooting was taking place in the Silver Dollar Saloon.

Then it seemed as if the fight must have burst out of the barroom into the street. Scores of men were yelling, and as many guns were booming.

From his cell, Pinto could glimpse

nothing of the battle. But he heard the carpenters, building the scaffold, throw down their hammers and dash toward the street to see what was happening.

Behind the cowboy, the heavy steel door leading from the corridor into the sheriff's office clanged. Glancing quickly around, the prisoner saw that one of his guards had been unable to withstand the temptation, and had rushed out to get into the fight.

Joe Long, the remaining deputy, looked as if he wanted to go, too. With drawn revolver, and a puzzled, longing expression on his bronzed face, he opened the steel door and gazed toward the street entrance.

Pinto Martin saw his hoped-for opportunity in a flash. As long as both guards had stayed in the corridor, it had been useless to think of attacking one of them. But now, Long would be almost within reach of the outlaw's hands, reaching out through the bars of the cell.

Pinto moved softly across his cage to the steel fence along the corridor. He need not have been so cautious, for the excited deputy had ears for only one thing—the roar of guns along the street.

The prisoner stretched his arms between the bars. But his outspread fingers lacked six inches of reaching Long.

The guard had his right side toward Pinto, so that the hand gripping his revolver was nearest to the young waddy.

If Pinto could only get his fingers on that gun!

"Joe!" The outlaw counted upon the element of surprise to make the deputy turn. And it worked.

Hearing his name shouted, Long jerked around, as if suddenly just remembering that he had a prisoner to watch over.

In turning, the deputy naturally swung his gun hand a few inches closer

to the bars. And he stepped back a pace, as the steel door banged shut.

With a quick, darting motion, Pinto seized Long's wrist in a grip of steel.

"Ou-ee!" The guard shrieked with pain, as a sharp twist threatened to break his arm.

The revolver thudded to the stone floor, when his nearly paralyzed fingers let go their grip.

Pinto had disarmed his man, but that was only the first step toward escape.

"Kick yore gun into my cell," he ordered.

Long started to refuse, but another twist of his wrist changed his mind. Pushing the revolver with the toe of his right boot, he sent it flying along the floor, between the bars into the prisoner's cage.

"Now fish out yore keys with yore left hand an' unlock my door," commanded Pinto.

"I—I ain't got the keys," retorted the deputy. "Bob Hogan ran out with 'em."

"Yeah?" The cowboy's brown eyes flashed. The freckles across his nose and cheeks seemed to darken with anger.

"Honest, I—I—I——" Long's voice rose to a shrill scream of pain, as his arm seemed about to snap.

"If yuh don't want me to bust yore wrist, quit lyin' an' let me out o' hyar," growled the prisoner.

"Stop it! Fer Pete's sake, I can't stand the pain. I'll unlock the door," yelled the guard.

Pinto released his pressure enough to allow the other to cease writhing. Long's left hand immediately went to his hip pocket and pulled out a bunch of heavy keys. Twisting around, he managed to insert one of them in the lock of the cell door.

In an instant, it swung open. Pinto Martin once more had a road to freedom.

Thrusting his toe into the opening, so that the door could not be slammed shut

again, he let go of the deputy's wrist and snatched up the revolver from the floor.

"Now!" he shouted, pointing the weapon at the trembling guard. "Yuh git in hyar an' see how yuh like bein' locked up."

Long obeyed without protest. Pinto walked out, leaving the deputy penned in the cage that had been his.

Racing through the office and jerking open the front door, the outlaw plunged into the mêlée such as he had never seen before.

More than a hundred men, outlined in the light from the saloon and store windows, were running frantically about the street, yelling like insane fools. Guns flashed in the darkness, and the acrid smoke of burned powder hung like a cloud in the air.

"What's goin' on?" Gripping the revolver that he had taken from the deputy sheriff, Pinto stood in the shadow of the jail doorway, listening and watching.

The excitement that seemed to hold every one else in Two Buttes, gripped him. In the back of his mind, he realized that the smart thing for him to do would be to get his horse and make his escape from town while the trouble, whatever it was, was at its highest pitch. But—

He was just as curious as any other person would have been. He felt that he had to find out what all the shooting was about.

The center of the trouble seemed to be in front of the Silver Dollar Saloon. Most of the firing was there.

"Thar he is! Git him!" came in Sheriff Palmer's bellowing voice. "Go git him, I tell yer!"

Other men took up the cry, and the outlaw saw a couple of dozen shadowy figures merge into a black group in front of the barroom.

"They got somebody surrounded!"

cried Pinto, springing from the jail's door and racing toward the spot.

Although the manner in which he himself had been surrounded in the coulee made him sympathize with any fellow in the same plight, it was not the outlaw puncher's intention to interfere in the fight in any way when he did not know the reason for it. He simply wanted to see what he could, then go on in search of Yellow Jacket.

"Guess I won't see maw an' my kid brother this trip, after all," he found time to think, as his feet pounded along the wooden sidewalk toward the saloon.

He was almost to the shouting, milling group of men, when a slight, dark figure detached itself from the bunch and raced toward a horse, tied to the ground, a dozen feet away.

As the fellow ran across a lighted path, Pinto gave a start of recognition. With his black mask torn off his head, Snake Dorgan's sharp, pale features were plainly visible.

The little crook's eyes were wide with fear and hatred. His mouth twisted in a snarl. In his right hand, he gripped the six-gun that he had been too cowardly to use until he was trapped like a beast.

Pinto Martin spasmodically lifted the .45 in his hand. He would have liked to shoot the man who he knew had sold him out to the law. Still, he could not kill even a snake without giving it a chance.

Apparently, none of the others knew that the robber they were after was escaping. They were milling around in a group still, yelling and clutching at one another.

With a spring, Snake reached the back of the horse that he wanted. Kicking his feet into the stirrups of the saddle, he drove his spurs into the cayuse's flanks and jerked on his reins.

Instantly, it seemed as if a charge of dynamite had gone off. The horse gave a leap and came down stiff-legged.

Without giving the man on its back time to recover from the first shock, Yellow Jacket followed with a series of plain and fancy bucks that would have puzzled a rodeo rider.

Pinto Martin had been right when he told Snake that no stranger could ride Yellow Jacket. And the crook was rapidly finding it out.

The cowboy recognized his pony, as it leaped across the light from the Silver Dollar's windows.

Almost at the same second, Snake Dorgan flew from the saddle, to land in the dust a dozen feet from where Pinto was standing, with his jaw agape in surprise.

The robber was shaken, but not hurt by his fall. He still clutched his revolver in his hand. Jerking to his feet, he leveled the gun toward Yellow Jacket, with an oath.

"I'll teach yuh ter throw me, yuh fool critter," he snarled.

Pinto Martin suffered a second of chill fear for his prized pony. Then, with a yell, he leaped out of the shadows.

"Leave thet hoss alone, yuh double-crossin' rattler!" he cried.

Snake whirled with a start, recognizing the voice of the trail mate who he thought was safe behind the bars.

"You!" croaked the squealer. "I'll kill yuh!"

The revolver in his hand jabbed forward, with his finger tightening about its trigger.

Two shots roared in the street, where so many guns had been thundering but a few moments before.

With a curse freezing on his lips, Snake Dorgan pitched forward in the dust, a bullet through his heart, crimson soaking the package of bills that he had killed to get in Oklahoma.

As the group of men in front of the saloon turned, Pinto, bleeding from a fresh wound across his left shoulder, stepped back into the shadows, unseen.

"Thar he is!" Sheriff Palmer, limping as the cowboy had never seen him do before, strode to the body of the dead double-crosser and turned it over, so that the wide, glassy gray eyes stared icily at the stars.

"Who shot him?" demanded Lew Myrick.

"I don't know." The sheriff looked around him vaguely. "It don't matter much, though. The danged coyote plugged me in the hip, when I tried to give him a chance to surrender thar in the saloon."

"Yeah." Myrick grunted. "Yo're danged lucky he didn't git away from yuh, Palmer, like Pinto Martin gin'rally does."

"Don't worry!" The sheriff snorted explosively. "Pinto ain't gettin' away from me no more. He's goin' to hang to-morrer mornin', if them carpenters ever git them gallows done."

"Is thet so?" A mocking voice came out of the shadows, where the young cowboy outlaw had reached the side of his quivering horse. "If I was you, Palmer, I'd save the county money by callin' them carpenters off the job right now. I've already saved the taxpayers five thousand dollars by killin' thet reward-seekin' snake in the grass, I reckon."

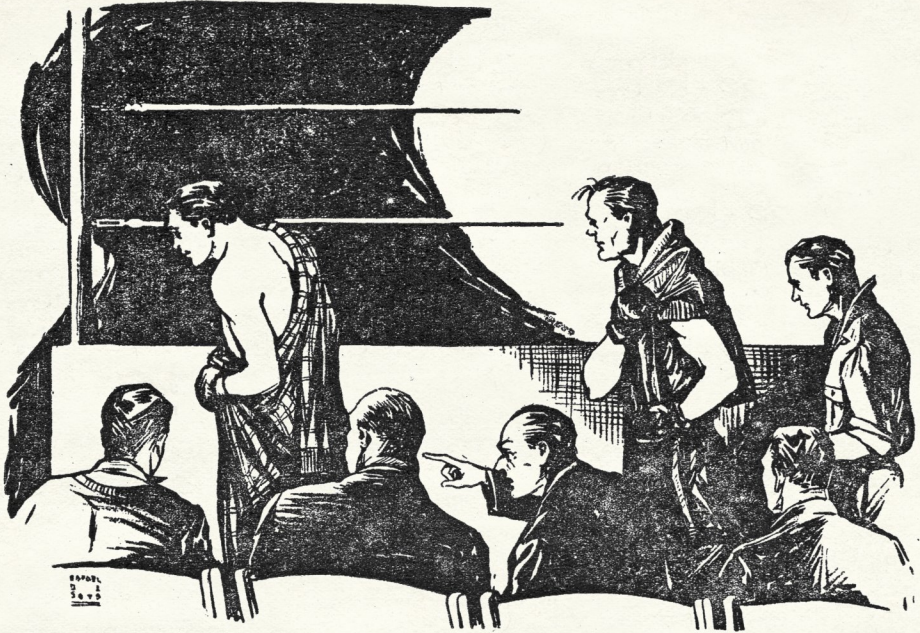
"Huh!" Sheriff Palmer bellowed.

"So long! Mebbe yuh'll have better luck hangin' me the next time," shouted Pinto Martin. "But somehow I don't reckon yuh will, hombre."

With a leap, he was in his saddle. Yellow Jacket jumped across the lighted patch in the street, then into the darkness.

Before the surprised sheriff, or any one else, could make a move, the outlaw was on his way, back toward No Man's Land and freedom.

Watch for Pinto Martin's further adventures in an early issue. A fast-action Western novelette!



Baby-face Mauler

By Ivan March

Author of "The Has-been," etc.

JOSEPH E. WILSON sprawled into one of the two easy-chairs in the lobby of the Commercial Hotel and stared disgustedly through the grimy window. He had a room upstairs, a lovely room with a gorgeous view of the railroad tracks.

"Some dump," he grumbled.

He glanced across the single main street to the New Jordan Garage. His high-powered, flashy roadster was over there with its bearings burned out.

"Talk about your hard luck! Get stuck in a burg like this. Get put in a hotel that ain't as good as a barn. Not even a dining room. And now probably I can't find any grub."

Food was important to Joseph E.

Wilson. He was a huge man, barrel-shaped, red of face and well-fed. His nose wandered aimlessly over his flat face, and both ears were cauliflowered. He wore a sportily-checked suit, and a diamond horseshoe flashed in his gay necktie. Yes, quite obviously Joseph E. Wilson was out of place in that little backwoods town. And he was wolfishly hungry.

"Gotta find a hot dog stand or something," he announced, pushing himself to his feet and turning toward the door.

A call sounded behind him. Joseph E. Wilson turned.

A man was advancing from the telephone booth, a tall, thin man of funereal expression and funereal garb, a man

who might well be the village undertaker.

"Hello, stranger," he said. "Can I do anything for you?"

Joseph E. Wilson grunted. "Gotta find some grub," he said. "Where do I go in this burg?"

"My name's Black," the fellow announced, extending a long thin hand. "Hugo Black."

"Umph," grunted Joseph E. "Mine's Wilson. Athletic promoter in the city. Run the Athenæum Athletic Club—biggest fight club in the State."

"Not Nipper Wilson? Say, I've seen your pictures in the papers a dozen times."

"The same. I've been searching the State for a fighter. Some one to meet Bat Moreno. He's my first-string slugger, you know. Trouble is, can't find any one to fight him. Then my bearings burned out, and I got stuck in this hick—this town, I mean. Now where do I eat?"

"Like beans?" demanded Black.

"Beans?" repeated Joseph E. Wilson, and his eyes gleamed. He had a passion for beans. He thought of home-baked beans with great slabs of ham floating in them, beans baked for hours under a caressing blanket of bacon until each bean was a masterpiece of deliciousness. "Do I like beans?" he repeated.

Hugo Black fawned. "We're having a bean supper in the church house tonight. Also an athletic exhibition. Thought you'd like to know about it."

"Never mind the athletics," ordered Joseph E. Wilson, "but lead me to them beans, brother."

"Fine! Just one more telephone call. You see I've finally persuaded a young friend of mine to take part in this exhibition tonight and I have to let the committee know about it."

Brother Black was at the telephone a very long time. Apparently he had considerable fixing to do, because his

voice rose persuasively several times. Finally he left the booth with a grin on his saturnine face.

"Come on, Mr. Wilson," he said. "I got it all fixed. This young boy friend of mine—his name is Cecil Holmes—is going to take part in the exhibition. He's a nice boy, Cecil is."

Joseph E. Wilson wasn't interested in nice boys at the moment. He was interested in beans. And when Brother Black led him to a table in a far corner of the Jordan Memorial Church House and began to surround him with plates of beans, he was utterly happy.

Along with the beans came a dozen crisp biscuits, two cups of coffee and finally a slab of pumpkin pie. Joseph E. Wilson beamed.

"Much obliged, Brother Black," he rumbled. "Great feed. Guess I'll drop 'round to the garage now. If I don't keep that red-haired mechanic working on my car I won't get outa here for two days."

"Don't hurry, Mr. Wilson," pleaded Brother Black. "Stay and see our athletic exhibition. That Cecil Holmes—he's good. And he's boxing a mighty good boy from Connorsville."

Joseph E. Wilson hesitated a moment. Through his mind flashed thought of the dead town, the long hours ahead.

"Sure," he said, "I'll stay."

He grinned to himself. He never thought that the great "Nipper" Wilson, biggest fight promoter in ten States, would live to see an athletic exhibition in a church house.

II.

The church-house gymnasium was merely a wooden box whose walls were covered with sets of dumb-bells, wands and similar apparatus.

In the center of the barnlike room a squared ring had been set up, surrounded by chairs apparently from an undertaking parlor. Glancing at the

somber Brother Black, Nipper Wilson felt sure that he knew the owner of those chairs.

"Here they come now," Brother Black called excitedly, pushing Wilson down the aisle to two ringside seats. "Look at Cecil!"

Wilson glanced up. A thatch of yellow hair was making its way toward the ring. Under it was a face round and cherubic, a complexion as fresh and pink as a girl's. The eyes were large, sky-blue, childish.

"Baby Face!" Wilson muttered. "Say, where've I seen that face before? Some girl, probably. He looks like a girl."

He pulled a cigar out of his coat pocket, bit off the end and jammed it into his mouth. Brother Black glared at him with raised eyebrows, and quickly Nipper Wilson replaced the cigar in his pocket.

Black nodded approvingly. "We don't smoke in here," he said. "Look! There comes the boy from Connorsville. He's the Sunday school champion over there. They say he's good. But Cecil will out-punch him all right. Yes, sir!"

Nipper Wilson stared at the second fighter.

"Sunday school fighter, did you say?"

The fellow was a big, tough-looking customer, heavy of shoulder, thick of neck, swarthy of skin. A shock of black hair framed his square face.

Nipper Wilson nodded approvingly. Here was his type of fighter. A little heavy in the legs perhaps, but certainly not a cherubic angel like that Cecil Holmes. Yep, he'd probably pound the home-town boy all over the ring. Wouldn't hurt him, though. Not with those ten-ounce gloves. Just like hitting a man with a pillow.

The timer struck a gong which sounded very like a dinner bell, and the two boxers moved to the center of the ring.

Stripped of his bath robe the blond boy looked better. In fact, Wilson decided, he looked very good—reminded him of old Bob Fitzsimmons. The long, lanky type with tough, slender muscles, but strong, like whipcord.

The boy's arms pleased him particularly. They were long, very long, hanging half way down his thighs. If the kid knew anything, he could stand off and left jab the black-haired boy all night.

The two boys touched gloves in the center of the ring, and the dark lad led with a right hook. It was a good right hook, and Wilson guessed that he had not learned it in a Sunday school gymnasium. Connorsville, he knew, was a tough little mining town. Not much Sunday school there.

Baby Face merely dropped his shoulder and shifted his head. The dark boy led again, this time a left which almost clipped Baby Face's chin. Baby Face danced away.

"Your kid ought to join a ballet," Wilson grumbled. "Don't he know what his mitts are for?"

Again Brother Hugo Black smiled complacently. The dark boy came tearing into Baby Face, trying to force him into a corner, occasionally landing a body blow.

Suddenly Baby Face's left darted out. It was a short jab, didn't travel more than a foot, but it landed squarely on the button. The dark boy rocked back on his heels, his eyes wide with surprise.

Baby Face rushed in and threw a terrific right hook into the other's midsection, then a left to the chin. The dark boy sat down suddenly in the middle of the ring just as the bell rang. The crowd stood up and loudly roared its approval.

Wilson removed the stub of a cigar from between his lips. He didn't know how the cigar got there. Baby Face was a "natural" if he had ever seen one.

"Where'd this kid learn to fight?" he

asked. "He didn't pick up his stuff at no Sunday school picnic."

"No, you're right there," Brother Black admitted. "A gentleman that lived at his mother's house taught him. He was a fighting gentleman. Had t. b. and came up here to get well." Brother Black's voice dropped. "The poor fellow died last fall. His name was Patrick Egan."

Wilson whistled.

"Patsy Egan. That explains it. Old Patsy was one of the smartest pugs that ever wore a glove. So Patsy taught the kid, eh?"

The bell sounded again. Wilson leaned forward. He was interested now. Through the succeeding rounds of the exhibition, he thought of old Patsy Egan, coming up to this town to die and teaching that baby-faced kid to fight. No two ways about it, when the fight game got you, it got you.

Wilson pictured Patsy Egan giving the kid pointers between coughing spells, and now he could see Patsy Egan in every move Baby Face was making.

When Baby Face came out of his corner for the last round he was mad about something, that was obvious. His round pink face was scowling like a spoiled child's.

Wilson chuckled. Now he'd see whether or not the kid could fight.

He remembered Patrick Egan's old maxim: "You're a boob if you get mad; only if you can fight when mad, you're a boob *not* to get mad."

The Baby-Face kid was mad now. But could he fight?

He leaped out of his corner, his round face thrust forward and his blue eyes gleaming. The dark boy met him in the center of the ring and shot a stiff left to the face.

Baby Face backed away and then in again. Right, left, right, left—he threw an avalanche of gloves into the dark boy's face. The dark boy fell into a clinch and hung on. The referee sepa-

rated them. Baby Face backed into the middle of the ring and seemed to be measuring his opponent.

Then something remarkable happened. Baby Face seemed to cave in at the middle; he crouched until the gloves at the end of his long arms touched the floor.

Suddenly he left his feet. He hurtled through the air, a human ball, his knees near his chin, his long arms dangling below him. It was an awkward leap.

The blow which followed was almost impossible to see. It was a perfect co-ordination of precision and timing. In mid-air the body of Baby Face seemed to uncoil like a snake. His right hand shot out to his opponent's jaw.

The dark boy went down. But Nipper Wilson wasn't interested in the dark boy. He knew that the referee would count him out.

"Diggity dog!" he muttered to himself. "A knock-out with ten-ounce gloves!"

That freak kangaroo dive! Carpentier used to jump at them, but he struck first and followed by leaving the floor. Uzcudun used the same tactics. But this Baby Face! He actually struck in mid-air. Wilson's mind flashed back to the Athenæum Athletic Club. Say, let the crowd in there see that freak blow just once, and they'd go wild. It wouldn't make any difference whether the kid could fight or not—he'd certainly be a novelty.

Nipper Wilson grabbed the arm of Hugo Black.

"Take me around to that kid," he ordered. "I'm going to line him up for my stable. You bet!"

Brother Black looked surprised. He shook his head and smiled sadly.

"I don't understand what you mean. If you think Cecil will become a prize fighter you're very much mistaken. Cecil thinks it's wicked to fight for money, and he hates to leave home. He's a good boy, Cecil is."

Nipper Wilson wiped his red face with a silk handkerchief. He was thinking, thinking slowly, laboriously. Suddenly his eyes narrowed and he turned again to Brother Black; he surveyed the seedy black suit, the narrow, avaricious eyes.

"Listen, Black," he said low-voiced. "There's one grand in it for you if you can get that kid to come to the city for just one fight."

"One grand?"

"Yes. A thousand simoleons, ten hundred smackers. I mean it. Listen! I've been combing the whole State for a set-up for my ace, Bat Moreno. Couldn't find a pug who'd take the job. Bat's good. This kid'll be a set-up of course, but I'll tell Bat not to hurt his baby face. And the crowd will love it. A thousand dollars just for one night!"

"But I couldn't dishonor——" Black began weakly.

"A thousand smackers, I said," Wilson repeated. "Think what you could do with a thousand dollars, Brother Black."

"It isn't that," Brother Black declared. "It would be quite legitimate for me to act as your agent in this matter. But Cecil wouldn't consider fighting for money."

"Lead me to him," Nipper Wilson ordered. "I'll do the talking. You keep mum—and remember that grand."

III.

Baby Face sat on a stool changing his clothes in the dumpy locker room back of the gym. Brother Black shooed his many admirers away.

"Good fight, Cecil," he said. "You certainly gave that chap a drubbing."

Cecil Holmes ceased dressing. He shook his head at Brother Black. "Don't call it a fight," he said. "The word 'fight' sounds like a vulgar pugilistic affair."

Nipper Wilson winced. "Vulgar

pugilistic affair!" This kid smacked them cold with ten-ounce gloves and then called it a boxing exhibition! Wilson controlled his facial muscles. He plunged.

"I'm the Reverend Joseph Wilson," he announced. "Just happened to be here to-night on church affairs. I asked Brother Black to bring me around here. I wanted to tell you how much I admire boys who know the science of the manly art. Such a clean sport!"

Baby Face stared at Nipper Wilson with obvious doubt. A clergyman in a checkered suit, race-horse diamond? Nipper Wilson plunged again desperately.

"Your pastor tells me that the Sunday school has grown almost double since you started these—er—boxing exhibitions."

That seemed to settle it. The kid nodded. "More than double. More than three times," he boasted.

"Yes, yes," Nipper Wilson agreed. "Nothing like a mauling match between two heavies to pack the house—er—what I mean to say is that no work and all play makes Jack a dull boy. I'm very interested in what you have done here because I have a club in my own church. The young chaps call it the Athenæum Athletic Club. And it sure brings them out! Say, when Bat Moreno—er—I mean to say that our exhibitions are well attended."

He licked his lips and went on:

"That's what I want to talk to you about, Mr. Holmes. I wondered if you would be kind enough to take part in one of our little exhibitions. We have a young fellow in our club, a nice clean boy named—er—Percy Moreno. Bat—I mean Percy—is the champion of the Sunday school league in our city. Now you're the Sunday school champion in this part of the State, Brother Black says. If you champions would hold an exhibition, I think we might dare charge a small admission fee. The money could

go to foreign missions, you see. In that way your abilities would be a great help to the world."

The eyes of Baby Face widened doubtfully. "I'd sure like to box with that Percy Moreno, but it makes my mother nervous if I'm away from home."

"Oh, that could be fixed easy," Wilson declared. "You just leave here on the afternoon train and we'll put you back on the night train before midnight. Sure."

"But the midnight train doesn't stop here," Cecil Holmes declared.

"Oh, that's all right." The pseudo-Reverend Wilson swelled visibly. "One of my—er—vestrymen is an official of the railroad. He would take care of stopping the train."

The thought that the midnight train would stop at North Jordan solely to permit him to alight seemed to please Baby Face mightily.

"Well, I guess I'll do it," he said. "Yes, you can count on me, reverend."

"Fine, fine!" Nipper Wilson pounded the broad back of Cecil Holmes. "I'll count on you then."

He turned and stared at Brother Black. His eyes hardened and his jaw set in an ugly cast. He pulled the fellow to one side.

"Keep the papers away from the kid, see? And get him on that train next Thursday. I'll phone you every night. I'll count on you! What I mean is, count on you!"

IV.

One hour before the afternoon train was due to arrive from North Jordan, Nipper Wilson entered the training quarters and general hangout of the Athenæum Athletic Club. He stared about him with expert eyes.

Two palookas were sparring half-heartedly in the ring. Otto Haas, the trainer, was reading the sports section of the evening paper. Louie Angelo was sleeping on the ratty, overstuffed sofa in

the far corner. He woke up as Wilson entered, brushed a lock of black greasy hair out of his eyes and rubbed his broken, twisted nose.

"Hello, boss!" he called, pushing himself to his feet and displaying his dark suit. "Here I am, all dressed up like a funeral!"

Nipper Wilson removed the chewed stub of the ever-present cigar from his mouth.

"Well, look at me!" he said, swelling visibly under a blue serge suit. "Look kind o' neat myself, don't I?"

"Sure!" agreed Otto Haas, the trainer. "You're one minister already, eh?"

"Sure," Wilson agreed. "What does the evening paper say, Otto?"

"Plenty. They've got it doped out that this Baby Face Mauler is an ex-champ comin' back under an assumed name. The *Times-News* swears it's Mickey Muerto, barred from fightin' in New York because of fouls. You sure got the papers guessin'."

Nipper Wilson beamed with satisfaction. "And every one else, too! Say, the house is a sell-out to-night. Better than that, I got nine thousand placed at three to one. Imagine that! Some sap who was willing to take the short end of any bet, I guess."

Louie Angelo whistled. "Great work, boss! I thought I was pretty smart, and I only got one grand down at five to one on Bat."

"What about Bat?" demanded Wilson. "Good shape?"

Otto Haas made his report. "Sure, boss, he's fit as a fiddle. And I got him all primed already about that kangaroo leap o' the Baby Face Mauler. He's promised not to kill the boy, either."

"Good! Come on, Louie!" Nipper Wilson swept his eyes over the other men.

"Listen, you guys! The Baby Face is on the train. Just got a wire from Brother Black. This is a natural. But

you got to keep your wits about you. See? That Baby Face will back out at the last minute if he gets wise. So you all keep your traps shut and hide in the corner. Get me?"

With a chorus of "Sure, sure!" booming in their ears, Nipper Wilson and Louie Angelo started for the station. They were all set. As soon as Cecil Holmes stepped from the train, Wilson caught him by one arm and Angelo by the other. They literally dragged him to a waiting taxi, thrust him inside.

A reporter from the *Times-News* came running up. Brother Black was just behind him. Wilson shoved both men away and slammed the door.

"Baby!" he said, mopping his forehead and staring out the back window at the two men left on the platform. "That was a close one. Them news hawks get wise to—I mean to say, Mr. Holmes, the gentlemen of the press are very curious people."

Baby Face, not yet recovered from the shock of his greeting, was smoothing his disarranged clothes.

"Why you leaving Hugo behind?" he asked. "And why are you afraid of reporters, reverend? They gave me a dandy write-up in the *Bedford County Journal* last month."

"No doubt, Mr. Holmes," Wilson said, placatingly, "but our church dislikes publicity."

Louie Angelo lowered the window between the driver's seat and the tonneau and thrust his head through the aperture. "We're just passing the church, reverend," he said. "Maybe Mr. Holmes would like to see the joint."

"Oh, yes, yes! By the way, Mr. Holmes, meet Mr. Angelo, our Sunday school superintendent. On our right you see our modest little church." Wilson pointed to the looming mass of stone. "Our gymnasium is in another section of town. Just temporarily, you understand, while we make alterations. You may deem it a little rough, but it's

the best we can do for the present. Now we'll show you the town and get you a bite to eat."

Two hours later, the taxi drew up to the side entrance of the Athenæum Athletic Club. Otto Haas was waiting at the door. Wilson and Angelo hurried Baby Face out of the taxi and into the entrance.

"Hey!" Otto yelled. "Where you been, eh? Two knock-outs we had already in ten minutes; the semiwindup is already goin' on."

Wilson pushed Cecil into Otto's arms. "Speed!" he exclaimed. "We gotta hurry. Otto, get this kid ready. If those palookas in the semiwindup blow, I'll try an' hold the gang. Angelo, see how Bat is getting along."

Wilson hurried down a narrow hall leading to the arena proper, while the fat trainer dragged Baby Face to a dressing room. The boy had hardly got out of his clothes and into his fighting togs when Wilson stuck his head in the doorway.

"Ready? Let's go. Them palookas went flop. Bat's in the ring. For Pete's sake, step on the gas."

"No, no, no, we ain't ready!" Otto Haas cried. "First we must get the boy new pants! See! Look what he is wearing yet! Blue panties, with fringes on 'em. He can't fight in blue panties with fringes!"

Wilson glanced at Baby Face. His eyes bulged. Neatly draped around the boy's waist were a pair of baby-blue trunks which came almost to his knees—blue silk panties with a fringe around the bottom.

Baby Face patted the pants defensively. "What's the matter with these?" he challenged. "They're lucky. I won the Y. M. C. A. championship in these pants."

"All right, all right, I won't argue!" Wilson cried. "We haven't time! Come on! Listen at them customers, yowling for blood."

He tossed a bath robe over the boy's shoulders and hustled him down the corridor, through a doorway into the arena. Before them, floating in the thick haze of tobacco smoke was an indistinct mass of faces.

In the back rows sat a ring of Mexicans with a scattering of Chinese. The next circle was composed of the regular fight bugs at a dollar and a half a throw—tough guys who wanted to see action and blood. The ringside was composed of the sports, with a fair scattering of brightly-dressed women.

"Bat" Moreno was already in the ring, angry and scowling because he had been compelled to make the first entrance. The crowd was impatient, waiting for the mystery mauler.

Cecil Holmes held back. "Say, Mister Wilson," he exclaimed, "this doesn't look like a Sunday school——"

Wilson gave him a shove. "Sure, big boy! You'll think it's a whole camp meeting before you're through!"

Propelled by Wilson, Baby Face made his way down the aisle and clambered into the ring, a bewildered expression on his face.

Louie Angelo, who was to second him, pushed him a stool, but the boy ignored it. Wilson climbed into the ring and led the boy into his corner. A reporter wanted a flashlight, but Wilson shouldered him out of the ring.

"Ladees and gentlemen!" he bellowed. "In this corner we have 'Bat' Moreno, light-heavyweight champion of the State!"

He turned to face Cecil Holmes and waved a pudgy hand in his direction. "In this corner we have the man of mystery, the re-incarnation of Fitzsimmons—Cecil Holmes, known as the Baby Face Mauler!"

A cheer sounded, and Moreno mitted the crowd, but Cecil Holmes merely blinked like a startled owl. A drunk a few rows back from the ringside stood up on his chair and waved his arms.

"Hey, I know you!" he bellowed. "You're Buster Keaton!"

Louie Angelo began to hiss advice.

"The boss says you got a good left. Well, use it, see? Left hand the mug off that big bum. Just keep your left mitt on his beezer all the time. Get me?"

Baby Face goggled Angelo.

"Say, what's the matter with you?" Angelo demanded. "Scared stiff?"

Cecil Holmes shook his head. "No, I'm not scared," he mumbled, "but this isn't a Sunday school match."

"Sure it is! Look down there in the first row! See that guy with the bald head? Well, that's Billy Sunday. Look over there in back of him. I mean the dame with the red hair. You can see for yourself, she's Aimee Semple McPherson. Now you get in there and fight, kid!"

The referee called the two fighters to the middle of the ring and chanted the usual formula. "No holding in the clinches, no butting, no rabbit punches. If either of you guys hit low, you lose your share of the gate receipts."

"What gate receipts?" Baby Face asked, but Angelo pulled him into his corner.

V.

As the gong sounded for the first round, Moreno leaped lightly to the center of the ring, but Baby Face remained seated.

Angelo gave him a vicious shove that sent him sprawling. He got to his feet and for the first time, the crowd saw his baby-blue fight pants.

There was a moment of shocked silence followed by a slow rumble like distant thunder, gradually mounting into a mighty tornado. The crowd clapped, roared, laughed. All except Bat Moreno. He stood in the center of the ring and scowled, thrusting out his battle-scarred jaw. A puzzled frown creased his low forehead.

So they had framed him with a comedy match, eh? He dropped his hands and spat disgustedly on the canvas. Just at that moment Baby Face, coming suddenly to life, launched an awkward left hook which somehow landed squarely on Moreno's jaw. The veteran fighter sat down on the canvas with a surprised grunt. The crowd roared.

"Oh, look!" the drunk bellowed. "Li'l Baby Face spank old bad mans!"

Moreno scrambled to his feet and rushed forward, throwing an ugly overhand right. It just grazed Baby Face's ear. Again he lashed at the boy with a short left, and again Baby Face was not there.

The crowd howled its delight. Moreno charged in his usual crouching, weaving manner, but Baby Face danced away lightly, reaching the older fighter's face now and then with a left jab.

Moreno bellowed, and rushed again, but only crashed into the ropes. On the rebound Baby Face jabbed him twice. The round ended and the crowd rose to its feet. The drunk snatched a powder compact from his girl companion and tossed it into the ring.

"Hey, Bat!" he cried. "If those blue panties can make the kid that good, you use a little powder on your nose!"

Moreno scowled at the drunk and spat into his water funnel.

When the gong sounded for the second round, he came tearing out of his corner, intent on settling things once and for all.

He launched a terrific right at Baby Face, but the boy side-stepped and countered with a straight left which opened Moreno's eyebrow. The crowd roared for Baby Face to follow it up, but he stepped back.

Moreno bored in again, head down. Baby Face met the rush with a hook to the face which further opened the cut eyebrow and sent a trickle of crimson down Moreno's scarred, ugly visage.

For the rest of the round, Baby Face was content with checking Moreno's mad rushes with that relentless left.

The third round was a repetition of the second. The crowd grew restless. They had it figured out now. That Nipper Wilson was a smart old fox, all right. Dressing this kid up in blue pants and coaching him to act funny was good ballyhoo. The kid was smart, too, but Bat would quit fooling in a round or two and put the youngster away. The gong sounded for the fourth round.

"Come on, Baby!" Moreno bellowed. "Come on and fight!"

Baby Face lunged in and jabbed with a light left—just what the heavier fighter wanted. He worked in close and began pumping right and left to the boy's body. Baby Face lurched into a clinch and hung on desperately. The crowd began to boo and shout. Just another build-up for Moreno!

The referee separated the fighters, but Moreno charged back to finish it. He launched a terrific right at Baby Face's jaw, but it didn't land. Baby Face was on the run with Moreno fast after him.

The first three rounds had frightened the older fighter. The kid was good. To be beaten by a baby-faced boy in blue pants would mean the end of Bat Moreno, and he knew it. He had to finish it.

He backed Baby Face into a corner at last. The boy covered up, and Moreno struck viciously—the ill-famed rabbit punch in the neck. Baby Face managed to crawl into a clinch and the gong sounded before the fighters were separated.

Louie Angelo mopped the boy's face and applied smelling salts to his nose.

"Don't let him get close!" he ordered half-heartedly.

Cecil Holmes shook his head stubbornly. He was mad. Moreno had fouled him. His mild blue eyes were

hard, his face set. Even his conversation changed.

"I'm going to knock that big palooka clear out of the ring!" he muttered. "Try to rabbit-punch me, eh?"

The gong rang for the fifth round. Baby Face slipped out of his corner and crouched low. Those long arms of his touched the floor. Moreno, confident of victory, started out to meet him.

"I'm going to get you this round, kid," he drawled. "You can wrap up them blue panties and go home!"

He took one step forward. As suddenly as if launched from a catapult Baby Face hurtled through the air, straightened out like a steel spring and struck—one—two!

The blows landed almost as one—that same miracle of timing and precision.

Moreno spun backward as if struck by a battering-ram. He fell against the ropes, dangled there a moment, and slowly dropped into a ringside seat. The force of the charge almost carried Baby Face through the ropes, but he regained his feet and backed to a neutral corner.

Press writers pushed Moreno back into the ring, but he was out, cold. The crowd had gone mad. Some one dragged Baby Face over to the microphone. The operator thrust it before his face.

"Say something!" he commanded. "They expect it."

Baby Face smiled foolishly.

"Sure. Hello, everybody! See you in Sunday school."

This got a big laugh from the sports writers. The kid had a sense of humor.

The *Times-News* man grabbed him by the arm.

"Good work, Kangaroo!" he shouted. "They'll have to give you a fight with Jack Downs after this! A go at the champ, eh, boy?"

Baby Face grasped the sports writer's hand and pushed it up and down.

"Yeah! Does a cat like liver? You write it up strong, Danny, and I'll give

you a whole grip full of Annie Oakleys when the big bout comes off."

Nipper Wilson pushed forward, wiping his brow. He thought of the nine thousand dollars he had bet and lost; thought of his first-string fighter knocked out by a baby-faced kid in blue pants. One more thought he had. He caught the arm of the *Times-News* man.

"Say, Danny," he asked the reporter, "you know that kid? He called you Danny. Ever see him before?"

"Sure!" Danny said. "His ring monicker is Kangaroo Donovan. I saw him fight a dozen times when I was working on the *Tribune* in Chi. Came up from the second-raters like a skyrocket. He's good—too good. Honest. The big boys wouldn't let him break into real money. They couldn't fix him. He's what you call a straight fighter, if you know what that means. He tried a dozen times to get a match with Bat Moreno and you know it. Then he had a touch of flu and went back to his home town to fatten up. Worked out in a church gymnasium or something. He and his manager. That was a smart trick of yours—digging him out as a mystery man, but I never thought you'd give him a chance at Bat Moreno."

Wilson mopped his perspiring head. "And a guy in a long black coat like an undertaker?" he asked.

The reporter laughed.

"Don't kid me, Nipper. You know him. That's Deacon Black, the boy's manager. He told me when you ran away from us at the station this afternoon that he had three grand bet against your nine. Probably he's collecting about now. And say—that straight kid, the Baby Face Mauler, as you called him, will get a chance at the championship at last! You're straighter than I thought you were, Nipper!"

"Thanks," grunted Nipper Wilson. He tried to grin.

"You ever paid nine thousand dollars for a bean supper?" he asked.



The Hawk Goes to Sea

By John Paul Seabrooke

Author of "The Hand of the Hawk," etc.

CHAPTER I.

KIDNAPERS!

THE young man in the bow of the dory in Whitehorse harbor didn't look like a member of high society. No one would have taken him for a person accustomed to wearing evening clothes and dining as an equal in the fashionable homes of millionaires.

He was dressed in a khaki shirt and khaki breeches. His sleeves were rolled up, and his collar was open at the front. There was no hat on his head. A healthy tan was beginning to show on

his high, well-shaped forehead and on the bridge of his straight nose.

Yet the young man was Duke Pierson, once a millionaire in his own right and still a member of exclusive social clubs—the same Duke Pierson whose activities as the mysterious "Hawk" had on several occasions stirred the press and the police of the near-by city to a pitch of feverish excitement.

But now Duke was on an outing, and he didn't believe in doing things by halves. Being no snob, he liked to rough it and get close to nature once in a while. Just now he was lolling back in the dory's bow, gazing toward the stern

where a small man with mouse-colored hair and a flat nose sat with a fishpole clutched in his hand.

Duke's own fishing rod rested on the edge of the dory. Momentarily he had given up his attempts at fishing.

"The fish don't seem to be biting to-day, Limey," he said. "They're too proud to eat, I guess. Must be getting high-hat because of all the millionaires' yachts around here."

The small man, Peter Lewin by name, but more familiarly known as "Limey" because of his cockney accent, was Duke's valet and general handy man. He pulled a long face now.

"It looks that way, sir," he said. "I've baited my bloomin' 'ook with the finest piece of clam I could find, an' 'aven't 'ad a nibble. These blarsted flounders don't seem to 'preciate good bait."

Duke chuckled, and drew out his cigarette case.

"Never mind, Limey. I'm glad we came, anyway, even if we don't get any fish. The view here is fine. There are easily two million dollars' worth of boats in this harbor—not to mention those handsome country estates along the shore."

He made a sweeping motion with his hand, indicating the steam yachts, auxiliary schooners and fast motor boats that were either bobbing at anchor or moving in and out of the harbor.

Limey merely grunted. He did not seem to be impressed. With listless eyes he gazed across the water.

"Anybody could run those tin tubs," he said. "All you got to do is start the engines. But it tykes a real man to 'andle a boat w'at 'asn't anything but sails. I used to——"

Suddenly he stopped speaking and the listless look vanished from his face. He straightened up and rested his hand on the dory's gunwale. With the other hand he made a shade for his eyes to cut off the blinding glare of the sun.

He was gazing interestedly toward the shore, but not at the luxurious yachts or millionaires' estates.

"W'at's that?" he said. "Look there, sir, in that dinghy. There seems to be a bloke wavin' 'is arm."

Duke turned and looked, too. A dinghy, or small yacht tender, was going past about two hundred yards away, moving at an angle from the shore toward one of the big steam yachts at anchor in the middle of the harbor.

There were five men in it. Four of them, so far as Duke could make out, were dressed as sailors. The fifth, seemed to be clad in civilian clothes. It was at him that Limey was pointing.

As Duke stared, the man's arm raised again. Then a faint cry came across the water. Two of the sailors sprang up and seemed to struggle with the man in civilian clothes. They were too far away for Duke to see any of their faces; but he saw their bodies swaying and lurching, and the boat seemed to rock.

Then that cry came again. This time it was louder and plainer.

"Help! Help! Ahoy, there, dory! Help!" There was a hoarse, agonized note in that shout.

But it seemed to bring about the man's undoing. Duke saw the blue-coated arm of one of the sailor's shoot out. There was something in the sailor's hand that flashed in the sun. It struck the man's head, and he suddenly sank down in the boat. He collapsed like a sack of meal and disappeared below the dinghy's edge.

Duke's face was grim. At least part of the little drama was clear to him. The man in the boat had called to them for help and then, for some reason, one of the sailors had knocked him unconscious with a wrench or some hard object. Perhaps the man had even been killed.

"Quick!" said Duke. "Pick up that oar, Limey. Never mind the fishpole. Let it go. Grab the oar and get busy."

Limey obeyed with alacrity, and Duke himself lifted the other heavy oar. He fitted it into the tholepins and braced himself on the dory's seat.

"Now, Limey—stroke! We'll run up alongside that dinghy and see what it's all about."

In perfect unison their two oars struck the water. The heavy dory stirred and then seemed to jump forward like a horse lashed with the whip. Limey was wiry and strong-muscled in spite of his small size, and Duke Pierson had powerful arms and shoulders, for he always kept himself in the pink of condition.

Twenty yards were covered by the dory before the sailors in the yacht tender seemed to wake up to the fact that visitors were on their way.

Then one of the sailors issued a sharp command. All four of them took seats, two in the bow and two in the stern. Four oars touched the water. They rose and fell, and the narrow, sharp-prowed dinghy forged ahead. She was a light craft with sleek, varnished sides and a low freeboard.

Duke and Limey were excellent oarsmen and handled the dory as well as anybody could; but, though they drew nearer the yacht tender in that first rush, they soon found they were no match in speed with the lighter, faster boat. It was a case of four against two, and the dinghy's lines were devised for efficiency in slipping through the water while the dory was built for stability in heavy seas.

"Laws!" gasped Limey. "The bloomin' blighters are going to get away."

Duke said nothing. He was pulling till the muscles in his bare arms stood out like knots. At every fifth stroke, he glanced around. And he soon saw that it was hopeless so far as catching up with the dinghy was concerned. Still he did not relax.

"Keep it up, Limey," he shouted.

"She's making for that big steam yacht."

"Righto!" said Limey, and he tugged on his oar manfully.

Duke saw the brightly-varnished dinghy heave to beside the towering side of the yacht. The sailors pulled in their oars with a clatter. One of them sprang up the stairway that led from the deck down to the water.

Then Duke saw something else—the name on the yacht's stern.

Dolphin.

That name stirred memories in his brain, and they were not pleasant memories.

"Great Scott!" he said. "That boat's the *Dolphin*—Judson Stanhope's yacht. I've read about it in the papers—seen pictures of it."

"You don't say!" gasped Limey. A quick scowl spread over his face. He needed no explanation as to who Judson Stanhope was. He knew that Stanhope was one of the wealthy and crooked law partners who had, through legal cunning, robbed Duke Pierson of the fortune left him by his father. He knew that Stanhope was now one of Duke's most dangerous enemies, since Duke had taken the law into his own hands and had tried to recover some of the fortune that was rightfully his.

"The dirty thief," said Limey angrily. "'E buys 'is yachts and 'is swell 'ouses on the money 'e stole from you and others like you."

"Never mind that now," said Duke. "What I'm interested in is the fellow in that boat. What was he shouting about, I wonder, and why did they silence him like that?"

They were still drawing closer to the yacht. Duke could see now that it was a magnificent craft. It had two broad funnels and the lines of a fast navy destroyer. There were white awnings spread over the decks fore and aft. The paint was spotlessly white. The railings and metal trimmings shone in the sun-

light like burnished gold. A faint feather of smoke hung above one of the stacks, indicating that they were getting steam up.

"Oh, look!" cried Limey. "They're tyking the poor bloke up. 'E's knocked out, all right."

Duke turned again and saw two of the uniformed sailors carrying a limp form up the iron stairway that ascended the yacht's side. The man's arms and legs were dangling.

"Come on," said Duke. "We'll find out about this yet. We'll go aboard, if necessary."

He tugged on his oar still harder. They were within a hundred yards of the yacht now. Soon the sailors and the limp form they were carrying disappeared over the yacht's rail.

Then a queer thing happened. There came a sound somewhat like the whining of a huge hornet, and a small geyser of water shot up close beside the dory in which Duke and Limey sat.

Limey jumped, and almost dropped his oar.

"What's that?" he cried.

Duke's eyes flashed with the cold, hard light of polished steel. His mouth grew grim.

"A bullet," he said harshly. "Some one is shooting at us from that yacht. Look out, Limey, the next one may be nearer!"

CHAPTER II.

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST.

HARDLY had Duke spoken when the sinister whine in the air sounded again close by. Limey ducked down, as though by doing so he could escape the shot. But Duke pulled sharply on his oar and turned the dory's stern toward the *Dolphin*, for it had drifted broadside-on during the time they had examined the yacht. He wanted to present a smaller target to the unseen sniper.

"Come on, Limey!" he said. "Man

your oar and let's get away from here. It seems an unhealthy spot."

Limey needed no urging now. He pulled on his oar until his face turned an apoplectic red.

"The blarsted killers!" he panted. "Take pot shots at us as though we was bloomin' ducks, would they? I 'ope their old tub sinks with every bally one of 'em on it."

Two more bullets spatted into the water to right and to left of the dory. That seemed significant to Duke.

"I don't think they're trying to kill us, Limey," he said. "That man handling that rifle looks to me like an excellent shot. He could have hit us if he'd wanted to; but he didn't dare—not if there was any other way. I wouldn't trust him though if we ignored the warning and kept rowing right up to the yacht."

"Neither would I," said Limey fiercely. "It's a chance I'd 'ate to take, sir, anyway. If I want a 'aircut I'll go to a barber an' not 'ave it done with a blarsted bullet."

The shots stopped as they continued to row away. All seemed peaceful aboard the yacht now. But Duke's expression was still grim.

"There must be something pretty queer going on," he said. "No matter how good that marksman was, he was taking a chance in shooting so close to us. The situation must have been important enough to make him *willing* to take a chance."

"I guess they didn't want us to find out who that bloke was," said Limey. "I'll bet my new 'at that Stan'ope is up to some dirty work again."

"It looks that way, Limey. And I'm certain that no one on board that yacht recognized me. They probably saw the dory and thought we were just a couple of local fishermen nosing into what was none of our business."

"Too bad we let 'em think they could scare us so easily," said Limey. His

courage was returning, now that they were out of range.

"On the contrary," replied Duke, "it's a good thing. Stanhope has some scheme in mind, and I'm going to find out what it is. He won't know that I suspect anything—and that will give me an advantage."

"What are you going to do?" asked Limey.

"Well, first we'll row ashore. Those old salts who hang around the docks spend most of their time gossiping. They know all the latest water-front news. Maybe they can tell me something about the *Dolphin*."

They rowed the half mile to shore and beached the dory. Then Duke strolled to the docks and entered into conversation with a couple of old mackerel fishermen.

When he came back, he was smiling broadly. Limey looked up as he approached.

"What luck, sir?" he asked.

"Splendid," said Duke. "The yacht sails late this afternoon. There will be quite a party on board, I hear, including an old financier named Browning—a man I know quite well. Stanhope will be surprised when he finds me among the guests."

"You, sir?" cried Limey in surprise.

"Yes—he doesn't know it, but I'm going to get myself invited. I think a little sea air will do me good, Limey."

There was a sardonic twinkle in Duke's eyes as he said this. Limey caught on.

"You mean you're goin' on board the yacht to see if you can find out who that bloke we saw this morning is?" he said.

"Well, I might do a little investigating in that direction," admitted Duke with a chuckle.

Back in the city, Duke found it a very simple matter to get himself invited on board the *Dolphin*. He called

up Browning at his business office. The old financier answered courteously and seemed delighted to hear from Duke.

"How have you been, Pierson?" he asked genially.

"A bit under the weather," said Duke plaintively. His misfortune had been purely financial ones caused by Stanhope's treachery; but he wanted Browning to get the impression that his health was in poor shape. "I've been thinking of taking a holiday," went on Duke. "But I thought I'd like to see you first—late this afternoon if possible. Had something to talk over."

There was a pause at the end of the wire. Then Browning spoke.

"You say you've been thinking of taking a holiday?"

"Yes."

"And you want to see me?"

"Yes."

"Fine!" cried the financier. "It happens that I'm going on board Stanhope's yacht, the *Dolphin*, for a cruise this afternoon. You can join my party—I know Stanhope won't mind. It will be just the thing for you, Pierson. We can have our little talk aboard ship."

Duke appeared doubtful, and smiled as Browning urged him. Finally he agreed with seeming reluctance.

"But we won't mention it ahead of time to Stanhope," said Duke. "We'll let my coming be sort of—er—pleasant surprise."

"Good," said Browning. "He'll be delighted, I'm sure. You can join me at the dock at five. We'll go out to the yacht together. It will be a great trip."

"I rather think so," said Duke, and there was an edge to his tone which Browning did not quite understand.

Dressed in white-duck trousers, a double breasted blue coat and a yachting cap, and with a grip in his hand, Duke met Browning at the wharf.

They went out to the *Dolphin* in the same dinghy that Limey and he had

seen that morning. The sailors did not recognize the spick-and-span Duke as the doryman they had seen earlier that day dressed in khaki.

Duke had left Limey ashore after giving him certain, mysterious instructions.

As they climbed up the steps at the side of the yacht and reached the deck, Stanhope greeted Browning cordially. Then he turned to Duke, and his expression underwent a change that was startling.

Stanhope's small eyes seemed to pop momentarily from his head. His bland pink face turned a shade paler. He licked his lips under the shadow of his small, pointed mustache. Then he found his voice.

"It's—er—an unexpected pleasure to see you, Pierson. Never thought you'd condescend to come on a sea voyage with me, or I'd have invited you before this. Awfully glad you came with Browning here."

Duke knew that Stanhope was lying. He knew that he was the last person in the world that Stanhope was glad to see. Several times Stanhope had hired private detectives to trail him, and he knew that nothing would make Stanhope so happy as to see him in jail. But now, since he was there with Browning, there was nothing for the lawyer to do but appear to welcome him.

Duke was introduced to the other guests, about eight in number. Then he was shown to his stateroom by the steward. Fortunately, one was empty. As soon as he was alone, he took two things out of his grip—a mask shaped like a hawk's head and a black cloak. These he carefully hid under his commodious bunk, which was really more like a bed in a room on shore.

The yacht was soon under way. It slipped through the calm water past the green shores with their magnificent estates. The afternoon gradually gave way to evening as the yacht turned into

the open sea and headed down the coast.

After dinner, the guests sat on deck and watched the stars come out one by one. There was nothing in the conversation or manner of any one present to indicate that the air was charged with tenseness.

When darkness came, Duke seized the first opportunity to prowls around the ship. He was very careful to avoid the crew. He had a way of walking noiselessly, and of slipping around corners like a shadow. It had stood him in good stead more than once. Now he had a definite purpose in mind.

When he saw that Browning and Stanhope were engaged in conversation, Duke took a chance and went down to the lower deck. He walked forward through a corridor that took him over the engine-room gratings, and on past the crews' quarters. Then he stole up on deck again and crouched in the shadows by a small capstan.

After a time he saw the galley door open and a figure appeared on deck. It was the steward. The man had something in his hand—a tray with a few things on it.

Duke waited until the steward had passed, and then followed him. The man looked back once or twice, as though nervous. Then he disappeared into a side entrance. Duke slipped in after him, walked around a bend in a corridor and saw the steward pause before a door that seemed to lead to one of the yacht's storerooms. The steward took a key out of his pocket and inserted it in the lock, after which he opened the door and went inside.

Now Duke stepped forward quickly. The door was half closed after the steward. There was a faint overhead light burning inside.

Putting his eye to the crack in the door, Duke saw a sight that brought a strained expression to his lean face.

A young man was lying on one of the

two narrow bunks that showed on one side of the storeroom. His clothes were disheveled; his face pale, and his hands and feet were fastened by means of handcuffs to the two outer metal supports of the bunk. There was something about the set of his head and shoulders that looked familiar.

There was no doubt about it—it was the same young man that Duke and Limey had seen that morning in the dinghy rowed by the sailors, the same one who had been knocked unconscious and carried up the side stairway of the yacht.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRISONER'S STORY.

DUKE smiled in grim satisfaction at this discovery. He watched while the steward put the tray down and unlocked the steel bracelets on the young man's hands. The steward made some low-voiced threat that Duke could not catch; but he judged that he was warning the prisoner not to make any attempt to escape. This seemed unnecessary for the young man's feet were securely fastened to the bunk.

Duke's face clouded and took on the hard, alert aspect of a hawk on the hunt. He was more determined than ever now to investigate this thing. He was glad he had come for a cruise on the *Dolphin*. Stanhope was obviously up to his old tricks.

The young man on the bunk hardly spoke. His eyelids looked heavy. He seemed dazed, still, from the blow that had knocked him out; or else they had drugged him to keep him quiet. He had blond hair, even features and, though his clothes had been mussed up, he was well-dressed.

He drank a cup of soup, and listlessly ate a few pieces of bread. He seemed to have no appetite, and Duke didn't blame him. In a like situation he doubted that his own appetite would be of the best.

The steward mumbled something else, took the dishes away, and snapped the two handcuffs over the young man's wrists again. Then he turned and came toward the door.

Duke quickly tiptoed along the corridor and out of sight. He waited till he heard the steward shuffle past. Then he reached into his pocket and pulled out a large key ring. On it were skeleton keys in three different sizes. These were something that he had grown into the habit of carrying since taking on the character of the Hawk. You could never tell when they might come in handy. Now was one of the times.

He went back along the corridor, tried the keys in the lock and found that the third one fitted. After a few moments of careful probing, he got the key in the right place, turned it, and the door opened.

Duke walked in quietly, then closed and locked the door after him. He found the light switch controlling a small overhead bulb, and snapped it on.

The young man on the bunk rolled halfway over and stared up at him with frightened eyes. He looked almost like an animal at bay. But Duke smiled, and the prisoner's tense expression slowly relaxed.

"It's all right," said Duke. "Don't be afraid of me. You don't know who I am, but I may be able to help you. That is—if you'll tell me what it's all about."

"Who are you?" the young man countered. "What are you doing on this yacht?" His voice was hoarse. The muscles in his face twitched.

"Just one of Stanhope's guests," said Duke easily. "My name's Pierson, Duke Pierson. I was in a dory in the harbor this afternoon when they brought you aboard. I saw you wave, heard you cry out for help, and then one of the sailors struck you. So I thought I'd come aboard and investigate. Stanhope and I are—er—old acquaintances. I know his tricks."

A look of hope came into the prisoner's eyes.

"My name's Malcolm Carter," he said. "Stanhope had me brought here—I don't know exactly why; but I can guess. He's a devil. I think I know what he's up to. Wants to get me out of the way so two of his clients can inherit my cousin's property."

"Just what do you mean?" asked Duke. His eyes glowed now. He was on the track of something. This was just the sort of thing he had suspected.

"Well," said Carter, "I've been corresponding with Stanhope for some weeks about this estate of my cousin's. I'm really the sole legal heir. But two of his clients contested the will. It's a big estate, and they want to get it. I suppose Stanhope will get a rake-off."

"But how did he come to kidnap you?"

"That was easy. I was a fool—didn't suspect anything. He asked me to come to his office and have a talk with him. I did, and he spoke vaguely—tried first to scare me off and then to buy me off; but I showed him papers proving my right to inherit my cousin's property. I told him he didn't have a leg to stand on. He seemed to agree and finally hinted that the interview was over and that he would withdraw his clients' claims. I left, thinking the thing was settled. Then in the street, right outside his office, two men jumped me. They pulled me into a closed car before I knew what it was all about. The next thing I knew they had clapped a cloth soaked in chloroform over my face. I fought, but they held me down."

"You passed out then, I suppose?" asked Duke.

"No, they didn't give me quite enough for that—just enough to make me feel dopy and weak. They drove me right down to the dock and hustled me into the boat you saw. There were some sailors there. One of them told me that if I made any noise I'd be shot; but I

took a chance when I saw your dory. I was feeling better by that time. The salt air had revived me. They knocked me out then, and when I woke up, I was here."

Duke could piece the rest of the details together in his own mind. It was just the sort of thing he would expect of Stanhope. The lawyer's evil, crooked brain was cooking up some scheme to leave the way clear for his own clients. No one could say just how far he might go—for he had a way of twisting the law to his own advantage, hiding behind legal technicalities and bribed witnesses. He wouldn't have started this desperate game if he hadn't thought he could get away with it.

"I suppose," said Duke, "that they took your papers away from you—the will?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Carter. "I haven't been able to investigate—my hands are fastened as you see. But I'm sure they went through my pockets and that Stanhope now has my papers. You can look, though, if you will—just to satisfy my mind. The papers were in my inside coat pocket, just—"

Carter stopped speaking, and cast a frightened glance at Duke. Duke tensed, also. They had both heard the same thing—footsteps outside.

Duke took one swift glance around the storeroom. That it was a storeroom there was no doubt. Boxes and barrels were piled against the rear wall. The topmost ones were tied to keep them from rolling and slipping if the yacht encountered rough weather. But Duke saw a big packing box which seemed to have some room behind it.

He darted forward and snapped off the light switch. It would never do to have them find that on. Then he groped his way across the floor until his hand touched the packing case. He moved around to the farther side, slipped in between it and the boxes in the rear, and crouched down.

He was not a moment too soon. A key turned in the lock and the door swung open.

CHAPTER IV.

STANHOPE'S THREAT.

THE light switch snapped again and the room was flooded in the illumination of the overhead bulb. Duke didn't dare raise his head. He waited breathlessly.

He heard the door swing shut, footfalls sounded on the floor near by, and then a voice spoke. At sound of it Duke almost stopped breathing. Every nerve grew alert, and he cocked his ear so as not to miss the smallest inflection. It was the voice of Judson Stanhope.

"Hello there, Carter," said Stanhope. "Comfortable?"

He uttered the words casually as though it were quite possible for Carter to be comfortable lying manacled on a bunk in a stuffy storeroom and after being half chloroformed and completely knocked out with a blow on the head.

Carter didn't answer at once, and Stanhope chuckled. It was the dry, grating chuckle that Duke had heard before; the chuckle that set his teeth on edge and made him want to strike Stanhope in the face or throttle him. But he knew that was not the way to combat a man of his type. It would merely result in a long jail sentence for assault and battery. The way to fight Stanhope was by reverting to the cunning of the fox, and the swift elusiveness of the hawk—as Duke had done on a number of occasions.

"Too bad," went on Stanhope, "that you weren't more reasonable in my office. I am an exceedingly just man, and we could have come to terms. But you forced my hand—made me resort to these—er—rather inhospitable methods." Again Stanhope chuckled; but Carter let out a hissing breath.

"You crook!" he said. "I forced

your hand, did I? You mean you wanted to rob me and expected me to sit back and allow it with a smile on my face."

"A few smiles never hurt anybody," said Stanhope. "You see what your peevish disposition has brought you. I assume that you don't like your present quarters—even though this yacht has the reputation of being rather luxurious—and I'm going to give you a chance to be more comfortable."

"Yes," said Carter bitterly. "You mean you've got some other crooked scheme up your sleeve."

"I mean," said Stanhope, "that I've got a simple little paper all drawn up and waiting for your signature. By signing it you will relinquish your claims on the estate we talked of; but you'll also avoid no end of trouble and be happier in the long run. My clients will get what—er—legally belongs to them, and everybody will be satisfied."

"You liar!" cried Carter, his voice hoarse now and almost hysterical. "The estate doesn't legally belong to them and you know it—I have the will and——"

Stanhope cut him short and there was a hard note in his speech.

"I wouldn't be sure of that," he said. "Some of my men thoughtlessly went through your pockets and removed a certain paper they found there. Your dear deceased cousin made a great mistake in not putting a copy of his will on file in the probate office—and it was extremely careless of you to carry the *original* around with you. Now that it has unfortunately been lost, I could turn the estate over to my clients without your signature on the paper—if I chose to make a point of it. But I'd prefer to have the signed paper and clean the whole matter up efficiently."

"You'll never get me to sign your crooked, lying paper," grated Carter. "And that's definite!"

"Is that so?" said Stanhope, his voice suddenly harsh and threatening. "You

don't seem to realize, my young friend, that you're in a bad situation right now. We're at sea, running parallel with the coast, but out of sight of land. You could yell till you were hoarse here, and no one would hear you. Not only that—a couple of my sailors on this yacht took offense at the way you spoke to them on the way out. I can't watch them all the time. They might decide to take revenge some night when a heavy sea is running and the decks are dark. Who can say?"

"That would be murder," said Carter. "You know you'd never dare do that, you yellow, treacherous skunk."

"Who said *I* would do it?" replied Stanhope with another grating chuckle. "You have guessed that I am not a man of violence—but these sailors of mine have bad tempers, and if they were sure that there were no witnesses——"

Stanhope paused to let the threat sink in. Duke, as he listened was sure that it was merely a threat. He knew that Stanhope had never resorted to anything like murder in his life. The man was too afraid of the law for that; but then one could never tell—and he could at least make it terribly uncomfortable for Carter. His next words showed that.

"I'm not saying that you are shortly in danger of losing your life, or anything like that," continued Stanhope. "But hunger and thirst are too very unpleasant sensations. After a few days with no water and nothing to eat, I think you'll be in a more reasonable frame of mind. Just think it over, Carter. My steward will visit you every day."

Stanhope turned then and moved toward the door. Carter yelled after him, but Stanhope calmly snapped off the light, plunging the room into darkness again. Then he went out the door and closed and locked it after him. Duke could hear his footsteps gradually growing fainter.

He came out from behind the packing case and flexed his muscles.

"A nice chap isn't he?" said Duke to Carter who still lay on the bunk. "He's just the ideal host for a week-end cruise. The kind who makes you comfortable—thinks of every little detail."

But Carter was in no mood for joking. He was muttering, and there was an almost feverish light in his eyes.

"Here," said Duke, "don't take it so hard, old man. You don't know what a lucky fellow you are—with me here to help you."

"These handcuffs!" moaned Carter. "The steward has the keys. You can't help me with them."

"Nonsense," cried Duke gayly. "I've been thinking about that. It's really very simple. Of course I could trouble the steward for his key ring. I've no doubt he's a reasonable fellow at heart, and could be made to see the folly of his ways. But I don't think I'll bother him. Those steel uprights at the side of the bunk look very strong to me."

"What do you mean?" asked Carter.

"Why, you'll notice that four handcuffs were used and that one ring of each has been fastened around those uprights. Steel is hard to file but very brittle. A metal belaying pin and a bit of leverage will snap those bracelets where they go around the uprights. The other end will dangle on your wrists and ankles; but you won't mind that for a while. Just watch."

Duke snapped off the light, opened the door and went outside. He walked through the corridor and groped along the yacht's rail till he located a metal belaying pin. His alert eyes had noticed the location of these when he came on board and when at the time he had considered their possible use as weapons.

He went back to the storeroom, and, as he had predicted, it was an easy matter to insert the belaying pin into the ring of the handcuff, twist downward and snap the metal. In five minutes Carter was free and standing upright.

Duke tore his handkerchief in two

and wrapped it around the metal cuffs at Carter's ankles.

"We don't want you to jingle like a prize pony," he said. "I've got to take you out on deck and to my cabin. It may be a bit ticklish; but I have a scheme. Come on."

Malcolm Carter sniffed at the fresh sea air on deck like a man who has just escaped from some dungeon where he expected to spend the rest of his life. Duke cautioned him not to make any sound.

"This way," he said, and moved off in the darkness toward the small iron stairway that led to the upper deck. But at the top of the stairs he paused. Sailors were on this upper deck in front of the charthouse now. He could see the glow of their cigarettes in the darkness. He ducked back down the ladder.

"I guess we'll have to try going right through the forecabin," he said. "The crew all seem to be up on deck above getting the air. Let's hope that they are, anyway."

He had studied the construction of the yacht and the location of the various staterooms and quarters. He walked through the corridor from the storeroom into the forecabin occupied by the sailors. Two men were snoring in the bunks; but Duke and Carter hurried through.

They passed the quartermaster's room and stole through the deserted officers' mess and out onto the deck again. Duke thanked his stars that it was a nice evening. Otherwise some of the crew would have been below decks, and they never would have been able to reach the after part of the vessel without being seen.

Duke made sure that Stanhope and his guests were clustered along the spacious rear deck. Then he drew Carter down the main stairway and along the red-carpeted corridor into the passengers' quarters. In another minute

he had unlocked the door of his stateroom and had drawn Carter inside. He breathed a sigh of relief. So did Carter. The young man was pale and trembling, still weak from the blow on his head and the nerve-racking experience he had gone through.

"If anybody comes," said Duke, "you'll have to hide under the bunk. It won't be very comfortable; but it will be better than falling into Stanhope's clutches again. I'll have to go out on deck for a while. Stanhope will get suspicious if I stay out of his sight too long."

He left Carter alone in his cabin and ascended to the deck. As he did so he noticed that the yacht had come in nearer shore. He could see the twinkling lights on a point of land along the coast. Then he noticed something else. The vessel had slowed down and was running at only half speed.

What did this mean? Duke wondered as he sauntered out onto the deck. As he did so, the yacht's turbines stopped entirely. The ship swung broadside to the point of land.

Duke walked to the rail and stood there while the other guests crowded up to peer down into the darkness. Then Duke heard the muffled beat of a motor boat and the sound of a sharp bow cutting the water. In a minute the yacht's searchlight swung down and outlined a small launch that was almost at the *Dolphin's* side. Several men were in it.

And as the launch drew alongside and a rope ladder was lowered, Duke could see one of the men's faces. He started violently as he recognized the bull-dog features of Detective Garr.

This was the private sleuth who on more than one occasion had shadowed Duke and tried to get evidence to convict him. It looked now as though Stanhope had summoned him by wireless because of Duke's presence on the ship.

CHAPTER V.

ORDERED TO SHOOT.

GARR came scrambling up the rope ladder. Another man followed at his heels. He looked like a detective, too. Duke's face was momentarily grim as he watched. Then he relaxed, and assumed the expression of complete nonchalance and indifference which he usually wore.

The motor launch sputtered away into the darkness, and presently the *Dolphin* commenced forging through the water again.

Stanhope explained matters to his guests now. He gestured toward Garr and his colleague.

"Just a couple of friends of mine," he said. "A—er—business crisis arose and they got in touch with me by radio, asked to join me here. Allow me to present Mr. Garr and Mr. Scully—they are always watching out for my interests. And now I shall have to ask you all to excuse me while I go into conference for a few moments."

Stanhope looked meaningfully at Duke as he said this. There was a sneering smile on the tricky lawyer's bland, pink face. He apparently thought it was a clever move to have his two private detectives join the yacht and thus check-mate whatever it was that Duke was up to.

Garr glared in unconcealed dislike at Duke. The detective's heavy face wore an expression of grim purpose. He was only living for the day when he could lay his hands on Duke and arrest him with enough evidence to put him behind bars. His pride still smarted from the times that Duke had outwitted him and made a fool of him before his employer.

Duke bowed now and smiled sardonically into the menacing countenances of Garr and his companion.

"I'm pleased to meet you both," he said. "Our good host, Mr. Stanhope,

always shows wisdom in the choice of his friends."

No one knew exactly what Duke meant by this; none, that is, except Stanhope and Garr. Stanhope's face turned red with irritation. Without another word he turned and walked toward his cabin, nodding for Garr and Scully to follow.

Duke drew out his cigarette case and passed it among the guests. He cut quite a dashing figure as he stood there in his blue coat and white duck trousers. But he seemed like a harmless enough young society man.

Down in the large master's cabin, however, Stanhope seemed to feel otherwise. He locked the door on the inside and drew up three chairs before the small table in the center of the room. Then the three of them, Stanhope, Garr and Scully, sat down and put their heads close together.

"Pierson thinks he's smart," said Stanhope in a harsh voice. "He came on board the yacht at the last minute and without any invitation from me. That fool Browning told him to join the party—he probably got himself invited somehow."

"Is there any reason why he should have?" asked Garr. "Have you got anything valuable on board?"

For a moment Stanhope didn't answer. He tapped the top of the table nervously and his small, mean eyes roved restlessly. Then he seemed to come to a decision. His gaze came to rest on Garr.

"It doesn't seem possible," said Stanhope, "that Pierson could have got wind of a little—er—venture of mine. I have nothing valuable on board in the sense that you mean, except for a few thousand locked up in the captain's safe and the jewels that the ladies are wearing. But I have a prisoner."

"A prisoner?" said Garr, looking at his boss sharply.

"Yes—a fellow who tried to hold out on me in a business deal and whom I'm teaching a lesson."

A look of understanding overspread Garr's heavy face. He grinned knowingly.

"I see," he said. "And you think Pierson may know the guy is somewhere on board."

"I don't see how he could," answered Stanhope. "But there's a bare possibility. He's as smart as a steel trap; but I'll get him one of these days. My prisoner is in a storeroom in the bow of the ship beyond the forecastle. The steward has the keys. He'll tell you just where the storeroom is. Stay up forward and see that Pierson doesn't go near that room. If you see him prowling around where he doesn't belong—shoot him."

"Shoot him!"

"Yes," snapped Stanhope savagely. "You've got a good alibi—you can say you mistook him in the dark for a stowaway. If anything like that should happen, I'll see that you come out scot-free. It would be worth a hundred thousand to get him out of the way."

Garr nodded understandingly.

"I'll post Scully outside the storeroom door," he said. "But I think, boss, it would be a good thing if I shadowed Pierson. We might get something else on him."

"All right," agreed Stanhope, "but get busy."

All three men then rose. Garr led Scully toward the front of the ship and the crew's quarters where the storeroom was. He planned to find the steward, question him, and post Scully outside Carter's door.

Stanhope went up on deck. He was as smiling and bland as ever. He felt considerably relieved, now that his two private detectives were on board. He knew they were as crooked as he was himself and could be hired to do his every bidding. They wouldn't question

his keeping Carter prisoner. They would merely see to it that no one got on to his being there.

"Where's Pierson?" asked Stanhope as he came up on deck and made the discovery that Duke was not among his other guests.

"He stepped down to his stateroom a few minutes ago," said Browning. "He wanted to get a pair of night glasses from his grip so that we could watch the vessels that are passing."

"Is that so?" said Stanhope. "We have some night glasses in the main saloon. He could just as well have used those. I'll send one of the stewards after them."

He turned to press an electric button which would summon the steward; but at that moment there came a shout from the opposite side of the ship. The guests craned their necks curiously. Then Duke Pierson appeared suddenly around the corner of the after shelter. He was gesticulating excitedly, and did not seem his usual calm self. His dramatic appearance and agitated manner held their attention riveted. Then they heard what he said, and jumped to their feet.

"Man overboard!" shouted Duke. "Quick—on the port side!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SEA'S VICTIMS.

THE cry of "Man overboard!" was repeated by a half dozen voices. The crew took it up. One of the ship's officer's bawled orders. The captain came out on the bridge; then shouted for the second mate to swing the engine-room telegraph to the stop signal. The yacht's turbines ceased to revolve, and the ship slowed down.

All the guests, including Duke Pierson, were now crowding to the rear rail.

"I saw him go over the railing on the port side," said Duke. "Don't know just where he came from and couldn't

get a look at his face. But he was dressed in a dark-gray suit and he must have been one of the passengers, I should say."

This caused consternation until it was found that all the passengers were present.

"Maybe it was a stowaway," cried some one.

Then another voice broke in. It was Browning's.

"Look!" he cried. "I see him—back there in the ship's wash. His head's above water—now it's gone under. He's about two hundred feet astern. Can't you see him?"

They all peered where Browning was pointing and could all distinctly see a dark splotch against the track of creamy foam in the vessel's wake. Then a searchlight on the top of the pilot house flashed into dazzling brilliance as the vessel swung about. At first the smoke-stacks and masts blocked its rearward path. Then, as the ship turned more, it fell into the water and came to focus on that object in the yacht's wake. They could all see the figure of a man now. But he seemed to be lying face down on the surface with arms and legs spread out, and he disappeared from sight every few seconds as a wave broke over his head.

"He's drowning," said a passenger in an hysterical voice. "Do something, somebody."

The captain was shouting orders again. A boat was being got ready on the davits, and would soon be lowered. Two sailors came running up to the rear deck of the yacht with life preservers on long coiled ropes. But it was apparent that the man in the water was too far astern to be reached by them. And it seemed that the man might be beyond help by the time that the boat got to him.

Then suddenly Duke Pierson began tugging at his coat and unlacing his shoes. In a fever of energy he worked

and had soon stripped to his trousers and shirt.

And, while the passengers looked on, hardly able in the first moment to grasp what he was doing, he leaped up to the top of the stern rail.

For a moment he stood there crouched, estimating the distance to the water below. Then his body swung outward in a broad arc, and arms straight out before him, he plunged into the sea. There was hardly a splash as his hands cleft the water and he slipped beneath the surface in that dive.

The searchlight was still focused on the drowning man. The captain didn't dare swing around because the man was so nearly out of sight now that he was afraid he might not be able to pick him up with the beam again. But the brilliant and blinding shaft of the searchlight made it impossible for any of the guests to follow Duke Pierson as he swam to the rescue.

Cries of admiration went up, however. Shouts of encouragement and hope that he would get there in time.

Then groans followed, for the man in the water seemed to be sinking lower and lower. He was hardly visible now above the wash of the waves. The dinghy with four sailors in it had been launched now. The sailors turned her bow around and rowed for all they were worth toward the spot two hundred feet away where the ship's searchlight made a bright circle on the sea's surface.

The sound of their oars came up to the watchers on deck. But Browning voiced the sentiment of the rest.

"They'll never make it," he said sadly. "The only hope for that poor fellow out there is Duke Pierson. He must be ahead of the boat—but I don't see him—and look! The man's gone under now."

It was true. The figure floating in the water had sunk out of sight while the dinghy was still a good hundred

feet away. The ship's searchlight was illuminating an empty patch of water now where the soapy bubbles kicked up by the yacht's forward progress were slowly dissolving from sight.

Then the dinghy broke into the circle of light. Those on deck could see the sailors bending frantically to the oars as the light craft raced forward. They saw the sailor stand up in the bow and scan the water on all sides. For breathless seconds that seemed eternities the small boat nosed about. But nothing seemed to come of it. The sailors did not even throw a life preserver over. They could see no one to throw it to.

Then a thought occurred to Browning.

"Where's Pierson?" he said. "I wonder why they haven't picked him up? He should be out there by this time."

A ripple of uneasiness passed over the group of guests.

"He was a good swimmer," Browning volunteered. "I can't understand it."

They craned their necks and watched the dinghy closely. They hoped at any moment to see Pierson swim into that circle of light.

Then some one voiced the terrible thought that was in every mind.

"It can't be that Pierson's gone, too? That would be too awful—a double drowning."

"Maybe he was taken with cramps," said Browning huskily. "Even the best swimmers sometimes get them. That would be ghastly."

He shouted across the water to the dinghy. "Where's Pierson? Look for him, too."

The captain on the bridge ordered the searchlight swung about. They thought surely it would bring into relief the head of Pierson swimming in the water. But if he was there and still alive, why didn't he call out? The light showed nothing but an empty expanse of sea.

In stunned silence now the passen-

gers waited while the sailors in the dinghy searched the ocean near the spot two hundred feet away where the first figure had gone down.

The minutes dragged by. At last, after nearly a half hour's search, the sailors pulled slowly up to the side of the ship. They shook their heads at the anxious faces lining the rail. One of them stood up and cupped his hands.

"Both of 'em must have gone down," he said.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

THE news of this terrible double tragedy was received in mournful silence by the guests. It cast a pall of sadness over the whole group.

There was only one man there who was not sad—Judson Stanhope. He could hardly believe his ears. There was a cruel glint in his hard, close-set eyes. Pierson gone—the man he had been trying to get for months. It was the best news he had heard for many weeks.

Then a thought occurred to him—that other man who had gone down! Who was he? And the question seemed to answer itself in Stanhope's mind. Malcolm Carter! The man must somehow have broken loose and foolishly jumped overboard. Who else could it have been?

"Pardon me," said Stanhope, "I'm going to have a talk with the captain."

He hurried off, but not to speak to the captain. He wanted to confirm his belief that Carter had escaped. He walked the length of the vessel, gloating in his heart.

If both Carter and Pierson had drowned, he could count this cruise as the most successful the yacht had ever been on. There might be some speculation as to the identity of the man who had drowned; but he could explain that it was a mad stowaway. His own paid men would never dare talk, and even if

they did, what of it? The man had jumped into the water of his own free will.

Stanhope ran across Garr, just coming back from the bow. The detective was trembling with excitement; but Stanhope held up his hand.

"I know," he said. "I've guessed it—you don't need to tell me. Carter has escaped. It was he who jumped overboard and was drowned. The poor fool did it himself, Garr. I had no hand in it. See that none of the guests hear about this. Tell my crew that if any one of them talks he'll be put in irons."

Garr was relieved that his boss already knew about Carter's escape. He started to go into details.

"He'd somehow managed to smash the handcuffs where they were fastened to the bunk. There was a belaying pin in there. He'd used that. Wonder how he got hold of it."

"I don't know," said Stanhope. "I'd suspect Pierson of having a hand in this, but it doesn't seem possible that he had time, or that he knew about Carter's being here. Anyway, we all saw Carter go down. There can't be any doubt about that. Neither can there be any about Pierson. I saw him go over the rail myself, heard him strike the water. He must have got cramps and gone down."

"It's a good thing," said Garr, looking at his boss narrowly. "Now you won't be pestered by him any more."

"Don't I know it?" said Stanhope. His voice was almost gay. He felt more relieved than he had at any time for weeks. Pierson, the man he had robbed was on his way to the bottom of the sea. No man is feared and hated so much by another as the one he has wronged.

To make sure that all chance of picking Pierson up would be done away with, Stanhope went up to see the captain now. There was a lingering fear in Stanhope's mind that Duke might

have lost his way and swam in the wrong direction, and that he might still be out there in the water.

"There's no use hanging around here," he told the captain. "Both those men went down and stayed down. Start your engines and swing around on your course; then go full speed ahead."

The captain, a grizzled, piratical-looking man with cold, fishy eyes, nodded. He was accustomed to obey Stanhope without asking questions. He believed, too, that there was no use hanging about here, since both men were beyond help. In the lore of the sea, drownings had to be accepted whether you liked them or not. So he touched his cap and turned to the pilot house to carry out Stanhope's order.

Stanhope descended to the passenger deck again. He rubbed his hands and smiled as he heard the turbines pur into life and felt the yacht moving ahead. Back there in the dark sea two men had gone down, and their deaths had effectively concealed a dark portion of his criminal life. He was as light-hearted as though he were on a picnic. But then he recollected that he must not appear so before his guests. He pulled a long face as he came out on deck.

"Too bad, too bad," he said. "Pierson was a fine young chap. This is a great tragedy. We shall all miss him."

"And who was the other man?" asked a guest. "Have you found out?"

"I haven't found out his name," lied Stanhope. "But my crew tell me that he was a stowaway who hid behind the oil tanks down in the fuel room. He must have come aboard when we were refueling yesterday in Whitehorse harbor. I don't know how he came to fall into the sea."

The guests shivered and drew closer, as though the two drownings had depressed them.

"Come on into the main cabin," said Stanhope. "We'll have some hot coffee and sandwiches. It will be cheerful and

light in there. We'll try to get over the effects of this terrible thing that has happened, since our depression can't help those poor fellows. I'll get my wireless operator to get in touch with the shore and try to locate Pierson's relatives."

The passengers settled themselves around the huge and brightly-lighted main cabin. This was more like a big luxurious drawing-room in a house on shore. There were tables and chairs about; a soft carpet on the floor and draperies and pictures on the walls. The guests gathered around the large center table. The smiles had left their faces. They were talking in low tones about the events of the last hour.

Then the steward brought in a heaping plate of sandwiches and a pot of coffee; but no one seemed very hungry except Stanhope. He managed to keep a mournful expression on his face; but he couldn't down the keen appetite that the excitement and the deaths of Pierson and Carter had given him. He ate greedily.

He had just raised a large cheese-and-olive sandwich to his mouth when the lights in the main cabin went out. Startled cries went up from the guests. Stanhope balanced his sandwich in mid-air.

Then a thing happened which brought gasps of horror from every one present. A strange muffled voice sounded from the head of the stairway that led down to the staterooms. The bright beam of an electric torch suddenly flashed out. The holder of the torch was a dark, hooded figure. There was something gleaming dully in his other hand—his right hand.

A dark cloak was about the man's shoulders. A strangely sinister mask covered his face. It was shaped like the fierce head of some predatory bird.

"The Hawk!" gasped Stanhope, and in his words was all the terror of a man who thinks he is looking at a ghost.

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CHAPTER VIII.

GHOST OR MAN?

YES, the Hawk," came the low voice from behind the mask. "The sea-hawk this time—and it's you I've come to see, Stanhope. I have a gun here, but your guests are in no danger so long as they don't interfere. My reckoning is with you alone."

Stanhope was shaking like a leaf now. It was seldom in his life that anything had unnerved him quite like this. He had always believed that the Hawk and Duke Pierson were one and the same. With his own eyes he had seen Duke Pierson dive overboard into the black night sea to return no more. Yet here was the Hawk in their very midst. What did it mean? Was this the ghost of Duke Pierson, come back to haunt him in the form of this sinister Hawk?

"What do you want?" he asked in a trembling voice. "I have nothing on board of value."

"That's a lie," said the Hawk. "You have something on board which belongs to a man whom you wronged outrageously. It is a paper—a will—and it is of great value to him. Go get it and bring it to me—lest you have to settle with the ghosts of those drowned at sea!"

The harsh note of accusation in the Hawk's voice and the dramatic effect of his words held the guests spellbound. Stanhope was like a man in a daze as he walked toward the cabin's exit to do the Hawk's bidding.

But once in the corridor his cunning asserted itself. A look of fury took the place of fear on his face. This must be some trick. The man behind the Hawk's mask must be of flesh and blood. It must be Duke Pierson.

Carter had drowned. He had seen that with his own eyes. But Duke in some mysterious way was still here on the boat. Stanhope had the fellow trapped at last, in his hawk costume and

with the damning evidence of the gun in his hand.

So instead of going directly to his cabin, Stanhope went in search of Garr, who was not in the main saloon with the other passengers. He ran across the detective just starting up the stairway.

"The Hawk!" hissed Stanhope. "He's upstairs in the cabin."

Garr's face went white. He stammered as he spoke.

"It can't be, boss," he said. "We saw Duke Pierson drown."

"He couldn't have drowned, you fool! He must have tricked us somehow. That is Pierson upstairs. We've got him now. He can't escape. Take him alive if you can. But shoot if you have to. He'll never get away now. Sneak up on deck and take him from the rear by surprise."

Garr, with a gloating expression on his heavy face, moved off to carry out Stanhope's orders. Stanhope hesitated a moment. Then he pulled an envelope out of his pocket. It was nothing but an old bill; but he would make the Hawk think it was Carter's will; for before the Hawk had discovered the truth, Garr would have nabbed him.

Then, hardly able to conceal his smile of anticipation at the Hawk's capture, he ascended the stairway again that led from the corridor running between the staterooms up to the main cabin where the passengers were.

The cabin was still in semidarkness. The Hawk still stood there, his flashlight in his hand, a tall and menacing figure. The open door of the cabin, leading to the deck outside was just behind him. Stanhope knew that Garr would come through that any minute with his gun in his hand.

"Well," said the Hawk sternly, "where is the paper?"

"Here it is," lied Stanhope glibly. "I wouldn't disappoint the Hawk for anything."

His voice was a bit too gay in tone, his manner too easy.

Even some among the guests were surprised. Stanhope walked forward, and as he did so, he saw the stealthy form of Garr come through the door from the deck and creep toward the Hawk. Stanhope grinned craftily. For once Duke Pierson had overreached himself.

Garr raised his hand with a gun in it. "Hands up, there," he cried. "I——"

But before he could finish the sentence commanding the Hawk to surrender himself as a prisoner, another figure came in through the door.

The guests shrieked in terror. Stanhope's lower jaw dropped, and his eyes grew staring. He began trembling again violently. The figure was draped in white from head to foot—a ghostly pale figure that seemed to sway in the wind that whipped off the dark sea.

And even the massive bulk of Garr shook as that white-garbed figure spoke so closely behind him.

"Don't move," said the voice. "I have you covered. Drop your gun and leave the Hawk alone."

"It's Carter!" cried Stanhope, his voice hardly more than a croak. "The man who drowned!"

This was the first the guests had heard the name of Carter mentioned. They didn't understand what Stanhope meant by it, or what the Hawk meant by his strange request. But the terror in Stanhope's voice was apparent to all, and he had said that this ghostly figure spoke with the voice of the man they had seen drown. A deathly hush fell over the room, while hearts almost stopped beating.

"Now," said the Hawk, "give me the paper."

"Wait," said Stanhope brokenly. "I haven't it. I tried to trick you—but I'll get it this time—I promise."

He turned and ran down the stairs

again, his face a mask of terror. He fumbled through the things in his stateroom and found Carter's will exactly where he had placed it after the sailor had stolen it from Carter's person.

When he next entered the cabin, he had the real will in his hand. He gave it to the Hawk without a word. But even then the Hawk didn't trust him. He read the paper in the light of his flashlight for a few seconds and then nodded.

"All right, Stanhope," the Hawk said in the same muffled voice. "Think twice before you try this sort of thing again. Remember that the Hawk is watching you. And now—good night—and let no one come on deck for five minutes. If this order is disobeyed, beware of the Hawk's talons!"

Garr had dropped his gun at the command of that ghostly figure behind him. The white-sheeted form backed through the doorway and disappeared now.

The Hawk followed after him, turned on the threshold to flash his light once more around the cabin at the white, staring faces, then shut the cabin door.

Through the cabin windows, the guests could see the two forms disappear from sight near the yacht's rail. A minute afterward it seemed to those huddled in the cabin that they heard the muffled beat of a powerful engine. The sound swelled in volume, then slowly diminished.

Five minutes later, when they dared go out on deck, there was no one to be seen. But a rope ladder was dangling over the port rail and trailing in the water. It did not belong to the *Dolphin's* equipment. And nearly a half mile away, in the direction of the low black coast line, a tiny red light gleamed in the darkness. It looked like the running light on a vessel's stern.

Crouched in the forward cockpit of a throbbing and powerful speed boat,

Duke Pierson was laughing grimly to himself. Beside him lay the Hawk's head mask and the black cloak he had worn. Across the way, facing him, was young Malcolm Carter, a look of happiness on his face.

Over his knees was draped a white bed sheet torn from one of the bunks of the *Dolphin* without the owner's permission.

And at the wheel of the speed boat, was none other than Limey Lewin. He was handling the powerful craft with the hand of an expert. While not as large or as seaworthy by any means, it was even faster than the *Dolphin*, and with the under-water muffler turned on, it could slip over the surface of the sea like a gray shadow.

Carter grinned now, too, and leaned forward to speak to Duke above the powerful purring of the engine.

"That dummy idea of yours was great," he said. "I didn't think it would work at first—but it must have fooled everybody on board."

"Yes," said Duke, "it was one of my best gray suits stuffed with feathers from the pillows. I figured it would float till the feathers got saturated and the two small weights I put in it pulled it down. That happened all right as soon as a few waves broke over it. But I was on pins and needles for fear the boat would reach it first."

"Did you have any trouble getting back on board after you had dived over to save me?" asked Carter, laughing.

"Not a bit," said Duke. "I just dog-paddled around till the boat had got away and then climbed up one of the ropes hanging from the davits."

Limey turned his head and broke into the conversation now.

"I told you anybody could 'andle these tin tubs," he said. "I didn't 'ave any trouble keeping the yacht in sight all evening. I got your flash signal and came in beside the old tin-can of a yacht as easy as eatin' a piece of pie,

sir. But it tykes a real man to 'andle a boat what 'as only sails, sir."

Duke chuckled and patted Limey on the back.

"You're being too modest," he said. "You did a good piece of work keeping up with us hour after hour. I was gambling on an uncertainty so far as Carter here was concerned; but I'm glad it all worked out so well."

It was some hours later that the guests on board Stanhope's yacht were amazed and relieved to hear that Duke Pierson had been picked up by another boat. The radio message gave no details other than the bare facts.

The ghostly appearance of the man called Carter and who was the same

person they had seen drown, was never explained to them. Neither was the strange appearance on board of that master criminal known as the "Hawk."

They questioned Stanhope about both incidents; but he seemed reluctant to talk. The truth was that he was not quite able to figure it all out himself. Once again the Hawk had been too smart for him.

The Hawk believes in taking long chances. For the man who takes long chances, and wins—wins big stakes. But when he loses—— Read the next startling adventure of The Hawk, to be published in an early issue of Street & Smith's Top-Notch Magazine.

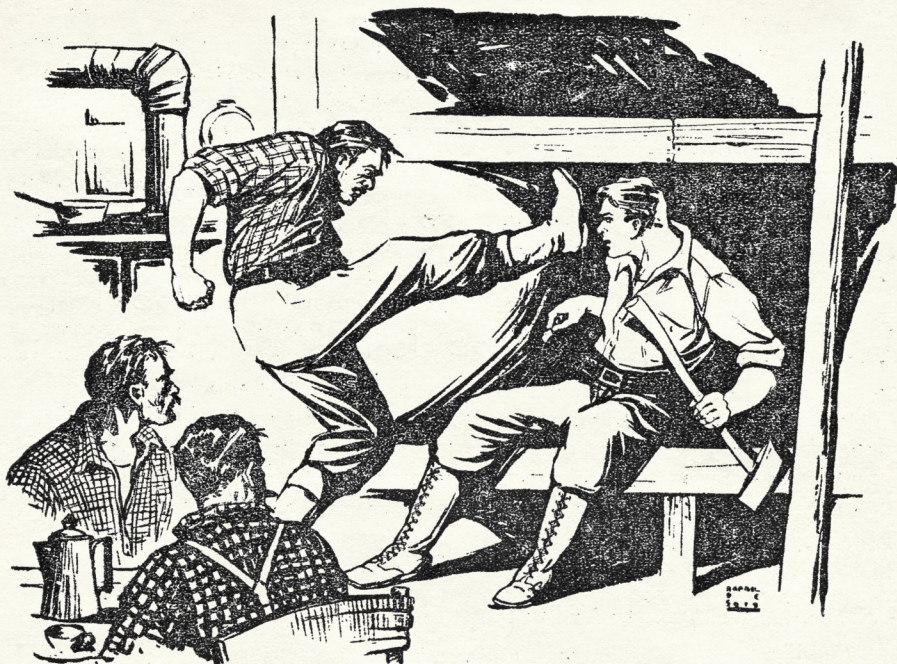
WIND ON THE RANGE

By FLOYD T. WOOD

THAT stranger he's one dang wise punch,
The smartest on the range.
There ain't a waddy in the bunch
What packs so many brains.
He's traveled round most everywhere,
An' scen a heap of things;
The sort of chap who wouldn't bare
His head fer queens an' kings.

He sez as how he's goin' to make
Us mossback ranchers sick.
He'll buy some land, an' some he'll take,
To populate 'em thick
With white-face cows an' race-hoss stock
Imported from Kentucky.
Jest pipe that fortune in his sock;
It's clever folks who's lucky.

Us boys is asked to stick around
An' watch the show commence.
These rural acres that he's found
Will soon be under fence.
That's what the pilgrim sez to us,
An' them's. no doubt, his wishes,
But, last I knew, the windy cuss
Was washin' Sam Ling's dishes!



The Bully Of Camp Three

By Vance Richardson

Author of "Timber Beast," etc.

A "Zip" Sawyer Story

IN the Camp Three bunk house of the McLeod & Johnson Lumber Company, Bill Sawyer, otherwise known as "Zip," was seated on the deacon seat in front of his bunk. In one hand he held a double-bitted ax, in the other a piece of glass, with which he was scraping off the pine resin which had adhered to the ax handle.

It was Saturday night, and thirty stalwart, woolen-shirted giants were smoking and yarning in the long bunk house. Behind a red-hot, pot-bellied stove, two timber beasts were sharpening an ax on a grindstone. Above the

stove, drying socks, mackinaws and pants hung from a wooden rack. A lamp with a smoky chimney cast a dim light over unshaven countenances. And of all the faces there, the most savage-looking was that of "Black Ed" Burns, the bully of Camp Three.

"When I get through with this ax I'll be able to shave with it," said Zip suddenly. He grinned at the black-bearded little French-Canadian logger who was industriously patching a shirt. "How about it, Marie? Want me to try it on your whiskers?"

Pierre Marie Cavignon shrugged his

thick shoulders, and parted his hairy lips in a white-toothed smile.

"You wait until you grow dose whisker for yourself, m'sieu'," he chuckled. "I, Pierre Marie Cavignon, need my beard to wipe my mout'."

Black Ed Burns glanced up with fierce black eyes gleaming beneath bushy brows. His huge hands doubled into knotted fists as he glared at Zip Sawyer.

"Whiskers!" he growled. "Zip ain't dry behind the ears yet, Marie, and I ain't never see a baby with whiskers."

One could have heard a feather drop as men removed their pipes from their lips and looked from the two-hundred-pound bully to the lanky figure of Zip Sawyer. Would he accept the taunt, or would he fight? That was the question in each man's eyes as he glanced at his neighbor. And in each rough heart was a hope that the bully of Camp Three would meet his match in the gray-eyed, red-haired young timber faller sitting alone.

"Yah!" exclaimed Black Ed suddenly. "You ain't nothin' but a damn coward, without the guts to fight."

The word had been spoken, the word that is taboo in every logging camp in the land. And still Zip sat quietly scraping the resin off the handle of his ax.

Zip Sawyer was tall; so tall that as he sat on the deacon seat, a split log bench in front of the bunks, he could rest the back of his head against the board which formed the outside of the upper tier of bunks which were built against the walls of the bunk house. Resting his head against the board, he looked at Black Ed with puzzlement in his gray eyes.

"I'm not lookin' for any trouble with you, Burns," he said mildly.

"You bet your life you ain't!" snarled the bully. Then with almost incredible agility for a man of his weight, he leaped to his feet.

Whirling in his tracks so that his back was toward the seated man, he lifted his right leg upward and outward until his foot was at an acute angle to his body. Then he drew his leg back and drove the steel calks of his logging shoe with terrific force into the board against which Zip's head was resting.

The *coup de savate* is a back kick from a steel-calked shoe; it is used by French-Canadian lumberjacks in their free-for-all fights.

And, just for variety, Burns now whirled and, facing Zip, fanned his face with a forward kick, also. Then Pierre Marie Cavignon spoke in a hushed voice:

"Ah, zat Black Ed Burns, he is ver' bad man. He make pincushion of M'sieu' Zip's head."

Zip arose to his feet. Holding his ax in his hand he stared curiously at the splintered pine board, all pock-marked with little round holes where the bully's steel calks had driven deep.

"That was sure some kick," said Zip with a grin. "I'm glad you missed my head."

"You are glad!" mimicked Black Ed. "The next time I'll drive my calks plumb through your ugly, freckled face, you——"

Zip looked the bully over from head to foot, as though in wonder that such an ungainly brute of a man should possess such remarkable agility. Then, once more Zip's gray eyes dwelt on the marks of the calks which so narrowly had missed his head.

"You'll try that once too often, Burns," he said.

Paying no more attention to the bully, Zip turned his back. Ax in hand he strode across the bunk house, followed by the howl of Black Ed.

"Yah, you dirty yellow coward, you ain't got the guts to fight."

As the door closed behind Zip, the bully swaggered back to his seat. Grimly he looked from face to face as

though hoping to find a sneer that he could wipe out with a smash of his ham-sized fist. But every man there knew himself to be no match for the great, black-haired, ungainly brute who sat glowering. So Black Ed grinned ferociously.

"If I don't make that freckle-faced pup fight, my name ain't Black Ed Burns," he growled. "I'll calk his face until his own mother wouldn't recognize it."

He turned and addressed a bald-headed elderly man with a gray walrus mustache. Too broken down in health to perform really hard work, "Baldy" Harris did odd jobs of carpenter work around the camp.

"How about gettin' a file from you?" asked Black Ed.

"What for?" asked Baldy.

"None o' your business," snapped the bully. "Do I get one, or don't I?"

"Sure, sure, you can have a file," said Baldy hurriedly. "I ain't huntin' no trouble with you, Burns."

"Zat Black Ed go for to file his calk sharp," said Pierre Marie Cavignon, "to make ze fight with M'sieu' Zip."

"Arrgh!" growled the bully. "Shut your face, Marie, or I'll smash you. You bet your life I'm goin' to file my calks. I'll drive 'em plumb through that freckle-faced kid's skull."

One or two of the men growled their disapproval, but they subsided quickly when Black Ed turned on them with a savage scowl.

"I'll calk the first man that opens his yap," he threatened. "I can whip any man in camp."

They knew he could do just what he said, for at one time or another every man there except Baldy Harris, who was too old to be picked upon, had been thrashed by the bully of Camp Three.

So, although to a man they were against the brute, who ruled the camp by the weight of his iron fists, they ceased to protest audibly. But each

in his own heart was hoping that sooner or later some one would lick the bully to a frazzle.

II.

When Zip returned from his stroll it was past midnight, but that did not bother him. The next day was Sunday. Zip knew that the cook would be an hour late with the breakfast, thus affording him an extra hour's sleep.

Zip laid his ax beneath the deacon seat, and turned in; but for a long time he did not sleep. He was wondering how much longer he could stand the sneers and taunts of the powerful bully, the rough-and-tumble fighter who had whipped nearly every man who had ever stood up to him in the logging camps of the Misabe Range.

Zip was strong, but his frame had not yet filled out, and Black Ed outweighed him forty pounds. The young timber beast knew that he had not one chance in a thousand to avoid being badly marked, and perhaps crippled for life, in a conflict with the foul-fighting bully.

Tossing from side to side in his bunk, Zip listened to the snoring of Black Ed. If there was one thing above another that got on Zip's nerves it was the sound of a man snoring. Had it been any other man in camp who was snoring, Zip might have gone and shaken him by the shoulder and asked him to turn over. But he knew better than disturb the slumbers of the bully of Camp Three.

For an hour Black Ed snored steadily, then at last he emitted a snort so loud the he woke himself up, growled out something about "that cowardly freckle-faced kid," and immediately fell asleep again.

Zip, too, at last fell asleep, and dreamed that Black Ed had him down, and was about to grind steel calks into his face.

So vivid was the dream that it still

persisted in Zip's mind when at last he awoke and saw the bright sunshine streaming in at the bunk house windows.

As he flung his legs over the edge of his bunk, he saw that the other bunks were empty. The only other man in the bunk house was the thick-shouldered, black-bearded little French Canadian, Pierre Marie Cavignon.

"I sure overslept," Zip said, running a hand through his tousled red hair. "Where's the rest of the boys, Marie?"

Pierre Marie looked up from a sock he was darning. He shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands in a characteristic gesture.

"How should I know, me?" he asked. "All week dose boys she work. Sunday come, she play, wash cloe's, cut ze 'air, shave ze face. Is zat not so?"

Zip drew a red woolen sock over a white foot, and wiggled his toes reflectively.

"Seen anything of Black Ed Burns?" he asked. "I dreamed that he was calkin' my face."

Cavignon dropped a black-bearded jaw, and stared at the tall, lanky figure of the young timber beast who was facing him across the bunk house.

"Zat Black Ed, she is bad actor, m'sieu'," he said. "You fight him?"

Zip laughed good-naturedly, but his brows came together in a thoughtful frown. His gray eyes were like steel gimlet points.

"Maybe I will, but not before I am good and ready, Marie," he said. "Meanwhile, I'm going to see if the cook can find me something to eat."

Pierre Marie watched Zip leave the bunk house. "Sometime I think Zip make ze monkey out of Black Ed Burns," he said to himself.

When Zip returned from the cook shack, he strode across the bunk house. Stooping, he took his ax from beneath the deacon seat, where he had placed it the night before.

For a moment he stood in silence looking at the ax; then he dropped it. In three strides he crossed the bunk house and grasped Pierre Marie by the shoulder. His fingers bit like steel timber tongs into the muscles beneath the French Canadian's shirt.

Pierre Marie Cavignon was no coward, but he quailed beneath the deadly anger shining out of the gray eyes within a foot of his face.

In vain he strove to wrench free from the hand that clutched his shoulder; he might as well have been a log trying to free itself from the grip of a steel "choker."

For a moment the French Canadian writhed, then suddenly he leaped to his feet and lashed out with one foot. Like the fangs of a striking snake the steel calks of his logging shoe sank into Zip's leg just above the knee.

With a yell of anguish Zip released his hold, and clapped both hands to his thigh.

"I spoil your face!" snarled the little French Canadian. "W'at for you make ze trouble with Pierre Marie Cavignon?"

Zip released his hold on his injured leg. He limped across the bunk house, picked up his ax, and held it out for Pierre Marie to examine.

"If I find out who did that," said Zip tensely, "I'll beat him within an inch of his life."

At first Pierre Marie did not understand the reason for Zip's anger; then, as the red-headed young timber beast pointed to the blade of the ax, the excitable French Canadian swore.

"Name of a pig! If man done zat to my ax, I calk him in ze face until his own mother never know him!"

A dozen tiny notches had been filed into the edge of the ax blade, and the three-foot hickory handle, which Zip had worked over for hours to smooth, was scored and scratched with marks left by a file.

Much more had Pierre Marie Cavi-

gnon to say regarding what Zip should do to the vandal who had just about ruined his ax. Zip made no reply. He just stood there with the ax in his hand, and anger seething in his gray eyes.

Suddenly the little French Canadian ceased his chatter and over his black-bearded face crept a look of awe. For Pierre Marie Cavignon was seeing something he had never seen in all his wild life. Something so unusual that it filled his excitable soul with a sympathy it was beyond his power to express in his limited vocabulary.

Tears of anger were slowly rolling down Zip's freckled cheeks.

"By gar!" exclaimed Pierre Marie at last. "Zat M'sieu' Zip she is ver' mad. One beeg, strong man zat he is, she cry like leetle baby."

Like a great tree crashing through the tangled underbrush of a mountain-side, the words swept away the storm of anger that was seething in Zip's brain. With set face, and smoldering eyes he looked down at Pierre Marie.

"Did Black Ed Burns ruin my ax?" asked Zip. "Come clean, Marie."

But the French Canadian was not one to tell tales on his fellow workers; not even Black Ed, who once had thrashed him until he couldn't speak.

"How should I know, m'sieu'?" he asked with a shrug. "Black Ed was gone before I woke up. But if he file your ax, he will tell you if you ask her."

Black eyes met gray eyes without wavering, and Zip knew that, by his answer, Pierre Marie would judge him for a man or a mouse.

"Help me grind my ax, Marie," requested Zip. "Then I'm goin' for a walk. I want to think things over."

For two hours Pierre Marie turned the grindstone while Zip ground the blade of his ax to razor sharpness. When he had finished whetting the edge of the ax, Zip turned to the little French Canadian.

"Got your ax in the bunk house, Marie?" he asked.

"My ax is under my mattress," replied Pierre Marie. "For why do you wish to know?"

"Get it," said Zip shortly, "and come with me. Maybe I can show you a thing or two about using an ax."

Beneath the calked shoes of the two timber beasts the ground was hard and black as only a week's severe frost could have made it, for the freeze-up had come early. It promised to be what the woodsmen call a "black winter," that is, a winter when the snow does not arrive until the middle of December, or, sometimes, even late in January.

Pierre Marie Cavignon followed Zip up a twisty trail left by the snaking of logs through the slashings. Here and there the huge churn-butted stumps of fallen tamaracks loomed above the tangle. Now and again the two men had to step over a steel cable, lying like a dead serpent half buried in the frozen ground.

"Where do we go?" asked Pierre Marie after they had traveled nearly a mile. "Me, I walk too much all week, on Sunday I like to rest."

"Don't get excited, Marie," said Zip. "We haven't much farther to go."

III.

They left the slashings behind, and entered the standing timber. On each side of them and in front and behind, huge tamaracks towered to heights of a hundred feet and more. Presently Zip stopped.

"See that dead snag over there, Marie?" he asked. "Do you see that red spot on the trunk where the bark has slipped?"

Following the direction indicated by Zip's pointing hand, Pierre Marie saw the dead tree. Ten feet above the ground there was a barkless spot about the size of a plate.

Pierre Marie stared at the spot on the trunk of the tamarack as if he expected to see it move. Then he shook his head until his black beard waggled like a goat's.

"For why do you bring me to see ze dead snag, m'sieu'?" he asked. "It is dead, and her heart is rotten as ze heart of—of zat Black Ed Burns."

Zip lowered the head of his ax to the ground and stood leaning on the handle. He stared at the spot on the dead snag with the smoldering eyes of a man who has a definite object in view.

"Listen, Marie," he said after a minute. "All my life I have wanted to be an axman. And ever since I was a little boy on my dad's farm I have used an ax."

Not understanding in the least what Zip was driving at, Pierre Marie stared at the dead tree. Then suddenly he laughed.

"You would chop down ze snag!" he exclaimed. "But for why? All ze week you fall ze green timber."

"Look," said Zip. "Can you do this, Marie?"

Grasping the ax handle by its end, Zip whirled the tool three times around his head. Then the ax left his hand.

Gleaming like ice in the cold sunshine, the keen steel blade hurtled across a hundred feet of space and brought up with a thud squarely in the center of the spot on the tamarack.

"Name of a pig!" exclaimed Pierre Marie. "I thought you nevaire use ze ax before you come to Camp Three."

The excitable little French Canadian ran up to the snag. The blade of the ax was buried two inches in the hard dry wood; the hickory helve was still quivering.

Zip wrenched the ax out of the wood, and turned to his companion.

"Try it," he said. "But you'll use your own ax. I don't want the handle of mine broken."

The ghost of a smile gleamed in

Pierre Marie's black eyes as he stepped back to the place from which Zip hurled his ax. Then the French Canadian's ax left his hand.

Three times it turned in the air, then it struck the snag with a hollow thud. When Zip examined the tree he found Pierre Marie's ax sticking fairly in the cleft made by his own.

"I, too, can throw ze ax, m'sieu'," said the little Canuck. "I have throw ze ax since I was a leetle boy. What for you bring Pierre Marie Cavignon to see so simple a trick like dose?"

"Darned if I know," admitted Zip. "Guess I just had to do something to get over my mad spell. I was afraid if I stayed in the bunk house I might kill Black Ed Burns when he got back. And I mean just that."

"I know just how you felt, m'sieu'," said Pierre Marie. "Now I show you how I, too, can use ze ax."

For three hours Pierre Marie Cavignon coached Zip in the art of doing tricks with a woodsman's ax. With a pencil the French Canadian made a tiny spot on top of a stump. Whirling his ax around his head, he split the black spot squarely in two. And he showed Zip how to "kiss the ax," by grasping the end of the handle and bringing the blade down with a stiff arm to the level of his lips. These and many more tricks did Pierre Marie Cavignon show Zip.

"You have ze good eye and ze strong arm, m'sieu'," said the little French Canadian. "With practice, some day you savvy ze ax like Pierre Marie Cavignon."

The supper gong was clanging when they returned to camp, but only a few men were in the bunk house. Most of the crew had gone to Lone River Landing, where, at a place called "The Big Eddy," run by a pug-nosed individual named "Cockeye" Shanahan, they could obtain the refreshment dear to a timber beast's heart.

Among those who did not return to camp until late was Black Ed Burns.

Most of the crew were in bed when the bully lurched into the bunk house. Swaying on his legs, and with the neck of a black bottle sticking out of his hip pocket, the huge timber beast glared around with bloodshot eyes.

Suddenly he saw Zip, who, seated on the edge of his bunk, was bandaging the leg which had been calked by Pierre Marie Cavignon.

"Yip, yip, yip, yahoo!" yelled Black Ed. "You low-down cowardly cross between a whistle punk and a loggin' chain. Get up on your hind feet and fight. I'm all wool an' a yard wide, I am! I'm the man that threw Paul Bunyan's blue ox, an' I can bite a chunk out of an ax. Yip, yip, yip, yahoo! I'm achin' for a fight, an' it's my night to howl!"

Staggering across the bunk house, the huge brute grabbed Zip by the shoulder and hurled him to the floor. He was aiming a kick at Zip with his calked boot, when suddenly he was dealt a blow behind the ear which sent him staggering.

Roaring oaths, the bully turned. Facing him stood Pierre Marie Cavignon with an ax raised above his head.

"You are drunk, m'sieu'," said the little French Canadian, "but of a surety I shall split your 'ead if you do not go to bed. Zip, he fought with me and I have cripple her with my calks. You, so beeg and strong, you would fight with ze cripple, eh."

Swaying to and fro, the giant bully glared at the shining blade of the ax above Pierre Marie's head.

"All right," he snarled. "I won't fight with a blasted cripple. But you just wait till later, lad. You'll either fight me or I'll run you out o' camp, sure as my name's Black Ed Burns."

He stood a moment glaring with bloodshot eyes, then he took the bottle from his pocket and swallowed noisily.

Suddenly he spun around and hurled the empty bottle straight at Cavignon.

Crash! The bottle struck the French Canadian's ax. Shattered glass flew in every direction. Roaring with foolish laughter, the bully staggered across the bunk house and tumbled into his bunk.

Black eyes a-gleam in his bearded face, Pierre Marie thrust his ax beneath his mattress. Then he crossed the bunk house and examined the calk marks in Zip's leg. The limb was swollen, and a little blue ring was around each pitted mark in the muscle.

"It is too bad zat you fight with Pierre Marie Cavignon," said the little French Canadian. "If your leg was not cripple, you could have licked Black Ed while he was drunk."

Then Pierre Marie Cavignon sat down on the deacon seat and put an arm around Zip's shoulder.

"If Black Ed call me ze name he call you, I smash her face with my ax," said Pierre Marie. "I think, m'sieu', you are scare of zat beeg bully, yes?"

A powerfully built logger wearing a red-and-black woolen shirt, removed his pipe from his lips, and spat at the hot stove.

"Lay off, Marie," he growled. "It'll take a real he-man, with hair on his chest, to whip Black Ed Burns."

IV.

Zip's calked leg pained him that night so that he hardly got any sleep. Next morning when the bull cook roused the men for their day's work, Zip's right leg wouldn't support his weight.

Sober now, but ugly-tempered from his debauch, Black Ed vented his ill humor on the red-headed young timber beast sitting on the deacon seat with his chin resting on his hand.

"Did the deah boy get hurted?" snickered the bully. "Nasty man hurt him leg. Poor little Zippy!"

Zip raised his head, and his clear gray eyes met the savage scowl of the big timber beast.

"Did you file notches in the blade of my ax, Burns?" he asked quietly.

Conversation ceased as every man awaited the bully's answer.

"Axes ain't for little boys to play with," sneered Black Ed. "I was afraid you might cut your poor little fingers."

"Know much about usin' an ax?" drawled Zip, with his lips twisted in a half smile.

The bully's lower jaw dropped in astonishment, and he passed the tip of his tongue over his thick lips. A red spot of rage flamed dangerously in each black-stubbed cheek. To think that his ability as an axman should be questioned by a comparatively green hand, who was only a little past twenty, filled Black Ed with anger so great that he found himself stammering.

"Me, know anything about an ax. Why, say——"

Clang, clang, clang!

The gong ringing for breakfast interrupted the bully, and the crew rushed for the cook shack. All but Zip, who was too badly crippled to walk.

Half an hour later the men returned and began to don their mackinaws. The door was thrown open, and "Bull" Corrigan, the woods boss, shouted:

"All out!"

One by one the men filed past Corrigan until only Zip was left in the bunk house. The woods boss, seeing him sitting on the deacon seat, roared at him to get to work.

"Guess I'll have to lay off a couple of days, Bull," said Zip. "I got a bum leg."

"Huh? What's that?" The burly woods boss crossed the bunk house. Hands resting on his hips, he stood looking down at Zip with a frown creasing the flesh between his steel-colored eyes. "What's the matter with you?" he growled.

"Got calked in a scrap," said Zip shortly. "I'll be all right in a day or two."

"Black Ed Burns calk you?" growled Corrigan.

"No," said Zip shortly, "he didn't."

Corrigan's steely eyes bored into Zip's gray ones.

"I believe you're lyin'," said the woods boss bluntly. "I've a notion to fire Burns anyway. He does nothin' but make trouble around camp."

"You'll be shy two men instead of one if you fire Black Ed," said Zip. "He didn't calk me. That's all I got to say."

Bull Corrigan fingered his heavy chin, and glared.

"Yeah, that's all you *would* say!" he snorted. "Black Ed has got you buffaloed, just like the rest o' the men. All right, you can lay off a couple of days. I'll give Black Ed Burns your job fallin' timber, and put you to firin' a donkey engine until your leg heals."

Corrigan stalked out of the bunk house and slammed the door, and Zip crawled into his bunk. Hands clasped behind his red head, he tried to forget the throbbing of his injured leg.

Presently the door opened, and a thin-faced cook's helper came in. In his hands he carried a tray containing Zip's breakfast.

"Corrigan said you were knocked out," he grunted. "Here's some grub."

For three days Zip lay in his bunk during which Black Ed spoke no word to him. Pierre Marie Cavignon told Zip that the woods boss had threatened to discharge the bully.

"Black Ed knew better than to try and lick Bull Corrigan," said the little French Canadian. "He tried it once, an' Corrigan, he stomped on her face."

A week later Zip was firing a donkey engine for a surly woods engineer, who went by the name of "Grumpy" Hitchcock.

Zip had enjoyed falling green timber.

Later, bucking trees into logs had not been so bad, but he found himself hating his new job, for Zip was new to the work, and the engineer was a mighty hard man to please.

The first hour was easy, the second hour was not so good, and by eleven o'clock the steam dropped so suddenly that the engineer had to shut down. This delayed the work of bringing the logs in and did not improve his temper.

So Grumpy Hitchcock, a burly man of middle age and medium height, came around to where Zip was trying to ram sticks of cordwood into an already jammed fire box.

The engineer glanced at the fire box. Then he caught Zip by one shoulder.

"Get out o' here!" he bawled. "I'll tell Corrigan to send me another man."

With the whites of his eyes shining out of his smoke-blackened, sweaty face, Zip turned and grinned. It was the white-toothed, snarling grin of a thoroughbred dog baited by a vicious cur. Without a word, he leaped onto the engine sled and drove his gloved fist into the engineer's stomach.

"Tough, are you?" growled Zip, catching Grumpy Hitchcock's short beard with his right hand as he drove his left to the stomach again. "Hard-boiled, are you? Get back to your throttle and levers, or I'll shove you in the fire box and close the door!"

The engineer was no coward, but there was something in the face of his new fireman that told him it would be useless to fight back. Yet to run his engine without sufficient steam was impossible.

Slowly the whipped man removed his gloves and tossed them aside.

"You go run the donkey yourself," he growled. "I'm through."

"Why quit?" asked Zip. "Just give me a few pointers on how to fire and I guess we'll make her jump."

The grimy engineer hesitated, then sullenly agreed.

"All right, kid," he said. "I'll give you another chance."

During the noon hour, while the engineer and Zip were seated in the shade eating their lunch, Grumpy Hitchcock suddenly turned to Zip.

"Black Ed Burns has been tellin' it around camp that you're scared to death of him," he said. "That so?"

Zip bit a huge mouthful out of a sandwich, and stared across the canyon. Then he felt the muscles of his injured leg.

"Corrigan gave Black Ed my job of falling timber," he said. "I wish I had it back."

The engineer rose to his feet, and walked over to his donkey engine. Munching his sandwich, he stood looking at the steam dial.

"Pierre Marie Cayignon says you're one of the best axmen he ever saw," said Grumpy Hitchcock. "He said, too, that you cried like a kid when Black Ed ruined your pet ax."

When Zip did not reply, the engineer spoke in a lower tone.

"I've got an extry file in my tool kit, lad, if you happen to need one."

"Some of the boys file their axes, I know," said Zip, "but I always grind mine."

"So does Black Ed Burns," said the engineer. "Brings in his ax every night and grinds it in the bunk house. After he gets it razor sharp, he lays it beneath the deacon seat in front of his bunk."

He looked Zip in the eye, then slowly he turned and opened his tool kit. Taking out a three-cornered file, he offered it to Zip.

"Yeah," he drawled. "Black Ed Burns keeps his ax beneath the deacon seat in front of his bunk."

Zip glanced at the file, then suddenly his gray eyes flamed with anger and he struck the tool from the engineer's hand.

"If you're suggestin' that I ruin

Black Ed's ax in order to get even with him, just forget it," he said angrily. "I don't do things that way."

The engineer picked up the file and thrust it into his hip pocket; then he pulled the whistle cord of the steam valve. The one-o'clock blast, calling the men back to work, rolled from hill to hill.

During the afternoon Grumpy Hitchcock spoke little, but now and again Zip caught the engineer watching him with a black scowl.

"Sore 'cause I wouldn't stand for being bulldozed," muttered Zip. "He'll get over it after a while."

That evening, after supper, most of the men left for Cockeye Shanahan's place; for once again it was Saturday night. Among those who went to Lone River was Black Ed Burns.

Tired from his week's work, Zip decided to go to bed early. Before he lay down he suddenly remembered that he had failed to turn in his ax to the commissary when he had been transferred to work on the donkey engine.

Taking his ax from beneath the deacon seat, where it had lain all week, Zip put it under his mattress. He had no intention of having it ruined again by Black Ed Burns.

During the week past, the bully had left Zip strictly alone, for Bull Corriگان had made it plain to Black Ed that he would have to behave himself, or lose his job.

Asleep almost as soon as he lay down, Zip did not see the engineer he had whipped take Black Ed's ax from beneath the deacon seat. Zip did not hear Grumpy Hitchcock sneak out of the bunk house with the ax beneath his arm.

V.

Most of the men returned from Lone River that night, and the next day being Sunday, of course, there was no work in the woods.

After breakfast, the men gathered in the bunk house. Some of them lay in their bunks reading, others were washing clothes. Black Ed Burns was seated on the edge of his bunk. His curly head was between his hands, and he was scowling at the floor.

"Ooh!" he exclaimed. "I wish I had a drink."

He rose, drew his ax from beneath the deacon seat, and turned to the little French-Canadian logger, who was sitting near at hand.

"You turn the grindstone for me, Marie," growled Black Ed. "Guess I'll touch up my ax."

He glanced sneeringly at Zip, and added:

"I'd like to see any one ruin *my* ax without gettin' his face smashed."

The talk of axes caused Zip to remember that he had better return his own to the commissary so that it wouldn't be charged against his wages. He took it from beneath his mattress, and was halfway to the door when a roar of anger caused him to turn swiftly.

Black Ed Burns was standing near the grindstone glaring at the blade of his ax. Then suddenly he raised his head and saw Zip.

"So you filed notches in my ax to get even with me, huh?" said the giant in a voice which had dropped to a husky whisper. "You waited until I was out o' camp, eh? You low-down, cowardly, red-headed pup!"

"Zat is a lie, m'sieu'," said Pierre Marie Cavignon. "Zip would not do trick like zat."

"Shut up, you dirty French frog," snarled Black Ed. Doubling his left fist, he smashed Pierre Marie squarely in the mouth and knocked him head over heels. Then, grasping his ax by the handle with both hands, the giant logger stepped slowly toward Zip.

"I'm goin' to split your red head, kid," he roared. "Fight, damn you!"

He swung the ax around his head in a glittering arc, and charged forward. Instinctively, Zip raised his own ax to parry the giant logger's down-sweeping blade. The axes met with a crash in mid-air, and the clang of steel meeting steel echoed through the long bunk house.

Dancing backward, Zip tried to knock the ax from Black Ed's hands, but the bully was too quick. Suddenly changing his method of attack, he made a sweeping slash at Zip's legs, but once again steel met steel with a resounding clang.

Roaring his rage, Black Ed danced to one side on his caked soles, and shifted his ax to his left hand.

Dropping to one knee, he brought the keen blade upward in a stroke which, had it landed, would have split the younger man from waist to chin. But Zip dodged, and the bully's ax swished through thin air with such violence that Black Ed almost fell on his face.

Leaping to his feet, he grasped the ax with both hands. To right and left of Zip's head, the keen blade swung, but each time it was met by Zip's ax. White sparks flew in every direction and the clanging of the steel blades drowned out the shouts of the watching timber beasts.

Faster and faster the axes whirled around the heads of the combatants as they circled each other in deadly conflict. Fighting for his life, Zip was slowly forced backward by the enormous strength of the giant timber beast, who, almost insane with rage, was trying to split Zip's skull.

At first Zip had only tried to disarm his opponent, but suddenly realizing that Black Ed meant to kill him, Zip took the offensive. Lighter on his feet than the bully, Zip was here, there, and everywhere. Parrying and slashing, he danced in and out with speed which Black Ed found it hopeless to try to match.

Changing hands with the speed of light, Zip swung his ax to right and left as he parried the terrific swings of the bully's weapon. Then, suddenly, the blades of the axes locked in mid-air, and Zip felt himself drawn forward by the bull strength of the giant logger.

Breast to breast the two men stood panting. Their upraised axes were locked together three feet above their heads.

"Arrgh!" growled the bully. "I got you now!"

Raising his foot, he drove a kick at Zip's stomach with the steel-caked sole. To save himself, Zip released his ax handle and fell flat on his back. On his feet in an instant, he grabbed his ax, leaped aside and swung a split second before Black Ed's ax came down.

Smack! Sheered off the handle by Zip's terrific blow, the bully's ax dropped to his feet, and he leaped backward in sudden fear.

"I quit!" yelled Black Ed.

The swish of Zip's ax around his head caused him to drop to his knees. Convinced that Zip meant to kill him, the bully begged for mercy, as Zip stood above him with upraised ax.

"Did you file notches in my ax?" asked Zip.

"Uh, uh," grunted Black Ed. "I thought I could run you out of camp. I wanted your job at fallin' timber."

"Get down on your stomach," said Zip.

"What—what you——" gasped the frightened bully.

Then at the swish of Zip's ax past his ear, he dropped prone, hiding his face between his hands. A low growl of protest arose from the watching loggers as Zip raised his ax above the neck of Black Ed Burns.

"Cut it out!" barked a logger.

"Zat is murder, m'sieu'," chattered Pierre Marie Cavignon.

Grumpy Hitchcock covered his bearded face with his hands.

"I spoiled your ax, Burns," he muttered, "to get even with that red-headed kid."

Tall and erect, Zip stood with his ax upraised. Three times he whirled the keen blade around his head, then it shot downward with the speed of light.

Thud!

Grazing the bully's jaw, the blade of the ax sank into the floor, leaving Black Ed Burns pinned face downward by the ax handle across his neck!

Leaping to his feet, Pierre Marie Cavignon clicked his heels together and hit the floor with a yell.

"I show Zip zat trick," he chattered. "Ze best axman in Camp Three is Pierre Marie Cavignon!"

Zip wrenched his ax out of the floor, and touched Black Ed with the toe of his caked shoe.

"Get up on your hind legs and go fix

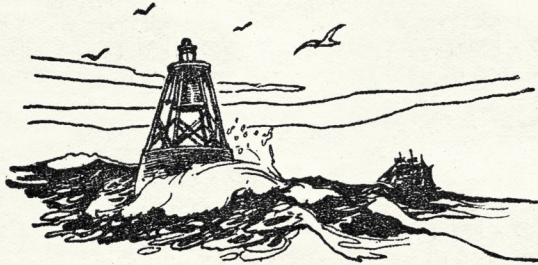
your ax so as to be ready for work tomorrow, Burns," he said.

The fallen giant did not answer, and Zip felt his heart rise into his mouth with fear.

Stooping, he turned over the huge body of the prone logger, and placed his hand over the bully's heart.

"Somebody get a bucket of water," said Zip sharply. "Black Ed Burns has fainted. And I guess Camp Three has got rid of its bully."

Have you been following the Big Woods career of "Zip" Sawyer, the young timber beast? Zip is getting to be quite a favorite with Top-Notch readers. One Top-Notcher writes: "Just reading about him is next best to a season in the woods." Watch for a new story of this new series by Vance Richardson, who knows more about the Big Woods than he may ever be able to write.



CONFLICT

By ANTON ROMATKA

I FEEL like an object out of its place:

Convention may sneer and call it dis-grace,
But, oh, for a life untrammelled and free,
The spray of the waves; the tang of the sea;
A mountain to climb, a broncho to bust,
An auto to race and scatter the dust;
Or roam through the wood with shotgun and ax,
And sleep out at nights in haymows, or stacks;
A baseball to bat all clean out of sight;
A river to swim; a peach of a fight. . . .
But fate decreed by a strange little kink
My battle with moods, and paper and ink.



Brick And Boots on the Coast

By Burt L. Standish

Author of "Hot Bunts!" etc.

CHAPTER I.

BOUND WEST.

CALIFORNIA, here we come! Hot bunts!"

Several passengers on the rather stuffy day coach looked around and smiled at the fat youth who had made that ecstatic outburst. A slow grin spread across the gaunt, sun-bronzed features of the taller, leaner young man seated beside him.

"California, we're *here*!" the fleshy one's traveling companion corrected.

TN-5B

"Two more stops, Boots, and we'll be at San Feliz."

"Where the green waves roll on the silver strand—or somethin' like that, Brick, like it said in the book that bozo, Hilton, sent us," added the chunky "Boots." "Sizzlin' homers! I had an idea that swell special from the East would run right past San Feliz, that we wouldn't have to change to no two-cent local like this one."

"Brick" Day made no answer, but reached into his hip pocket and tossed a few salted peanuts into his mouth. He

had removed the coat of his neatly pressed dark-blue suit, and sat in shirt sleeves, bare-headed. His copper-colored hair, combed straight back, glistened in the bright sunlight. His eyes, under level, reddish brows, were blue and large, and had a steely glint. With a prominent, straight thin nose and determined chin, his long features had a look that was almost too solemn for a fellow in the early twenties.

Though he was tall, with long arms and legs and a thin waist, his wide square shoulders saved him from having a gangling appearance. Most noticeable was the development of his hands and wrists, like those of farmers' sons who are accustomed to the twice-daily milking of cows. But there was nothing suggestive of the farm about his bright-polished low tan shoes and his yellow-and-black four-in-hand necktie and immaculate white shirt. Brick Day was an athlete; almost any one could have read that after one glance at him.

He munched his salted peanuts reflectively. "I hope we weren't stung, Boots," he said at last, "when we made that down payment on that bungalow at San Feliz Beach. It took about all the money we could scrape up together, and now if we can't get jobs when we get there——"

"Hot bunts!" Boots Tobin interrupted. "Didn't the paper say there was plenty o' work in San Feliz? Didn't that book Hilton sent us show us a picture o' one o' them bungalows right there on the beach? Say, while folks back in Ohio are freezin' to death this winter, we'll be kickin' up our heels in the briny ocean an' frolickin' on the warm sands—like that book said, too."

Boots inflated his thick chest with an important air. His sleek, round head was topped by bristly, short, dark-brown hair, and his cheeks were chubby.

With his little brown eyes, upturned saucy nose, and slanting chin, there was

something about his countenance that reminded one of a contented, well-nourished young pig.

And his chunky neck and short, flabby-appearing body were also suggestive of a barnyard porker—in appetite, at least. His arms were thick-fleshed and stubby, and his stumpy, slightly bowed legs might have been built for a piano. His feet, in their scuffed black low shoes, were enormous—and it was evident that they were the source of his nickname. He wore a baggy old brown suit that had not been in the hands of a tailor for months, and one section of his loosely tied four-in-hand blue necktie, against a lighter-blue snug shirt, was fully four inches longer than the other.

Like Brick, his hands and wrists were abnormally developed. And, as a matter of fact, there was a whole lot more muscle than fat in that chunky body of his with its bulging waistline. But even so, Boots Tobin looked more like a desirable anchor man for a tug of war than a participant in any other form of athletics.

"If everything turns out to be like the book says," Brick commented, "it's goin' to be the life, all right, Boots. It was gettin' to be pretty cold back in Ohio after the baseball season there was over."

"Yeah," agreed Boots, "an' what made me sore was havin' 'em take our jobs in the machine shop away from us, after we'd won the championship for Bainston in the semipro league. After that deal, I don't care if I never see a baseball again."

"Still, we can't kick on the way they used us, Boots," the copper-haired youth held out. "From your catchin' and my pitchin', we salted away enough money so's we didn't have to go back to our old home town, Galesville, broke. We've got that bungalow at San Feliz Beach to show for it—or will have, when we get it all paid for."

Boots extracted a gaudily covered booklet from his hip pocket.

"'Golden sunshine the year round. Broad beaches, where the gentle surf plays, and water sports reign supreme,'" he read from its pages, his fat face wreathed with a jubilant smile. "An' here's the best of all, Brick," he went on from another section of the pamphlet. "'There is plenty of work and good wages for every one who comes to San Feliz. Hard times are unknown in that bustling young community.'"

"It looks like we made a wise move, all right," agreed Brick. "That bird, Hilton, that we did the letter-writin' to wouldn't dare to print that kind of stuff if it wasn't so, and send it out all over the country. Gee whillikens, Boots! Summer and fair weather and fun the year round! It seems too good to be true!"

While they continued to talk, they had not noticed that the train had stopped at two stations, and that the dark outlines of the southern California mountains bulked far away on the clear blue horizon. A little while before, those mountains had looked much closer. The locomotive whistled; the train was slowing down, coming to another station.

"Hot bunts! Here we are!" whooped Boots, jumping up and tugging on his wrinkled brown coat. Brick, munching salted peanuts, also rose and put on his well-pressed blue coat.

Gripping brown-leather hand bags which the citizens of Bainston, Ohio, had presented to them in appreciation of their value to the baseball team as a battery, Brick and Boots stepped out onto the day-coach platform.

The train came to a grinding stop, and they swung down onto the platform that stretched out from the little yellow-stucco station. And there they stood, looking around, while the train pulled out. They were the only passengers who had alighted at San Feliz.

"Hot bunts!" exclaimed Boots disappointedly, gazing at the single-story stores and office buildings on the dusty street across from the station. "I don't see no beach or ocean or anything!"

"You wouldn't expect to see the beach on the main street," said Brick. "San Feliz is just what I expected it to be—just the business section of a beach resort that's just buildin' up. There's Hilton's office, across the street."

He pointed to a small white-stucco building with red-painted trimmings, over the front door of which hung a sign:

**SAN FELIZ DEVELOPMENT
CORPORATION.**

J. B. Hilton, President.

"Come on. Let's go over," said Boots, grinning widely. "Hot bunts! I bet he'll give us the glad hand!"

In long strides, Brick crossed the street, Boots waddling along beside him. Into the office of the San Feliz Development Corporation they walked with important swaggers. A sallow-faced man with horn-rimmed spectacles looked up at them from a shiny glass-topped desk.

"Are you Mr. Hilton?" Brick asked him.

Boots seemed to have forgotten what he was there for. The former catcher of the Bainston, Ohio, baseball team had spotted a framed photograph of a baseball nine hanging on the wall, and was staring at it intently.

"A-hem!" The sallow-faced man coughed nervously. "Mr. Hilton is not in to-day," he replied. "I'm his assistant. What can I do for you?"

"My name's Day, and my pal's name's Tobin," explained the copper-haired youth. "We're the ones who—"

"Oh, yes—the two young men from Ohio who bought one of our bungalows." The sallow-faced assistant grinned thinly and stood up. "I suppose you'd like to go out to your new property."

"We're goin' to settle right down there," replied Brick, a worried little frown leveling his reddish eyebrows. He didn't like the looks of that sallow-faced assistant, and he thought it queer that the fellow had not even shaken hands with Boots and himself, strangers as they were in southern California.

"All right." The lean assistant nodded, and strode toward the door. "I'll take you out to your bungalow. I'm sure you'll be delighted with it."

Boots nudged Brick and giggled gleefully as they followed the assistant to a battered old flivver and crowded into its single seat beside him. It was a snug fit, but the sallow-faced man wasn't much wider than a shingle, so although he didn't have much elbow room, they managed to sandwich themselves in.

Over a new concrete road the rattly old car sped, then branched off on a dirt road that took them into what looked like a vast desert. There were no houses in sight; there was nothing but sand, with a solitary tall cactus rising from it here and there. But in the distance, Brick glimpsed the blue of water. That must be the ocean, he thought.

But Boots was too busy talking to the driver to notice the scenery.

"Who's goin' to give us jobs?" the fat youth queried. "Mr. Hilton?"

The sallow-faced man coughed nervously. "Mr. Hilton can use a few men in building construction," he answered. "Are you carpenters or——"

"Hot bunts, no!" Boots burst out. "Ain't there any jobs for a couple o' darned good machinists?"

The sallow-faced assistant shook his head. "Nothing but jobs in building construction," he replied.

Bricks and Boots stared bewilderedly at each other.

"Gee whillikens!" the copper-haired youth exclaimed. "That book Hilton sent us said there was work for *all* in San Feliz. We——"

"There is—if you're in the building trades." The sallow-faced man grinned annoyingly, while the flivver rattled over the sandy ruts. "San Feliz, you know, is too new a town to have any other kind of work yet. That will come later."

"Heck of a lot o' good that'll do us if we starve to death in the meantime," growled Boots. "If I'd known that was the layout, I'd never gone into this thing."

"Well, there's a house, anyhow." Brick pointed to a solitary bungalow perched in the middle of the desert. "That must be where some bird has squatted to wait for business in San Feliz to pick up."

"One thing's sure—his neighbors will never bother him," grumbled Boots. "Gosh! What a place! I'd rather freeze to death in Ohio than have to spend a winter there."

The sallow-faced driver put on the brake, and the flivver came to a slow stop.

"That," explained the driver, pointing to the lonely building in the midst of that dreary waste of sand, "is the bungalow you've bought!"

CHAPTER II.

STUNG!

TWO bitter, dejected youths rose from sleepless beds the next morning. The bungalow in which they had invested their hard-earned savings was furnished with cheap beds, tables, and chairs, and a small cook stove, which was according to the contract. But there was nothing in the contract about the fleas which had bitten them all night, or the voracious rat that had industriously gnawed in the wall close to Boots Tobin's ear.

The fat youth came out of bed, scratching.

"Hot bunts!" he groaned. "These fleas must 'a' been fastin' a whole month,

waitin' for us. How in heck are we ever goin' to get rid of 'em?"

"By spendin' all of our time in the water—if we can find the ocean," growled Brick, likewise clawing his broad shoulders and long legs. "Boots, we've been stung, and stung proper!"

"You wait till I get my hooks on that bozo, Hilton!" roared the wrathful fat youth. "I'll sting him—with this!" He doubled up his big fist and shook it spitefully.

Brick dismally shook his head. "It's our own fault, Boots," he gloomed. "We should have looked into that San Feliz Development Corporation more thoroughly before sinkin' our money in this place. The chances are they're within the law. That's what they thrive on—suckers like us, who fall for that hot air in their book."

"Even at that, it wouldn't be so bad, if we could only git jobs," said Boots, cheerfully pinching the life out of a particularly explorative flea. "That skinny bozo who brought us out says the beach is two miles and a half from here. The only way we'll ever get a swim is to wait for a tidal wave."

"Before we take a swim or anything else, we're going to hoof it back to San Feliz and have a powwow with that bird, Hilton," declared the copper-haired youth, starting to dress. "If there's any way we can get our money back and return to Bainston, we're goin' to do it."

"You said it," agreed Boots. "An' I wish we could collect all these fleas an' take 'em back to him."

But even more distress awaited them before they started their long hike back to the mushroom town of San Feliz. In their haste to get a look at their new bungalow, they had neglected to bring out any provisions with them.

Their new home was piped with running water, and lots staked out on the desert near by indicated that the development corporation intended to erect

more bungalows and lure more suckers from the East to them.

While Brick was washing up at the kitchen sink, Boots took a walk around the premises. Suddenly, a few yards from the kitchen door, the fat youth let out a yell and came bolting back.

"What in heck's the matter now?" exclaimed his copper-haired pal, looking up over the piece of canvas he had found and was making use of as a towel.

"Snake! Rattlesnake!" panted Boots, flopping down limply on a kitchen chair. "Hot bunts! I darned near stepped on him!"

"Where was he?" asked Brick, dropping the piece of canvas.

"Right out there in our back yard." Boots pointed. "I heard a buzzin' noise—an' there he was, all coiled up an' lookin' right at me! Sizzlin' homers! What next?"

"Didn't you kill him?" inquired Brick, a humorous twinkle in his blue eyes.

"Kill him? Hot bunts! You think I want to die so young?" wailed Boots. "If you're so brave, Brick, you go out an' kill him yourself. He's still there, waitin' for you."

Brick shook his head. "I guess we'd better use the front door, Boots," he said, with a sigh. "And I move we use it right away, to start our trip to San Feliz. I'm gettin' darned hungry."

"Hungry! I could eat the plaster off the wall!" groaned the fat youth. "I bet I've lost twenty pounds since yesterday. Oh, what would I give to be back in Bainston right this minute!"

With empty stomachs and boiling tempers, the two pals walked over the sandy road back to San Feliz, following the tire tracks of the flivver that had brought them there the previous day. Once Boots stopped short and grabbed Brick's arm.

"Listen! There's another o' them darned rattlesnakes!" he gasped.

Brick heard the buzzing sound, but

located it and the glistening coils of the basking rattler well to one side of the roadway. So they kept on, glancing over their shoulders at the snake to make sure it wasn't following them.

Though the sun was warm, it was comfortably so, their exertions raising no perspiration even on the waddling Boots, who made the hardest work of walking.

Soon the town of San Feliz came into view, and in another half hour, they were on the main street.

Carpenters were banging hammers in some of the new stores under construction. And men in overalls were spreading stucco on the outside of one of the single-story structures.

Brick inquired of one of those men where he could find a restaurant, but was told that there was none. So he and Boots took themselves to a grocery store that had just opened, and there they ate a hearty though not very appetizing cold meal of canned meat and boxed crackers, washing it down with ginger ale.

After Brick had finished, he sat on a soap box and watched his fat pal gorge himself on more canned corned beef and another full box of soda crackers.

"Now for that bozo, Hilton," grated Boots, wiping his mouth on the back of a broad hand.

With grim determination in their eyes, they walked boldly into the office of the San Feliz Development Corporation. The sallow-faced assistant was absent from his desk, but at another desk sat a tall, broad-shouldered man, poring over papers. He looked up as Brick and Boots entered.

"Are you Mr. Hilton?" the copper-haired youth asked.

The man at the desk nodded. "I am," he answered.

For a moment, the two purchasers of the bungalow stared at him in surprise. They had expected to see a man well

past middle age, with a cigar in his mouth and a corpulent stature, like real-estate promoters whose pictures they had seen in Ohio newspapers.

But J. B. Hilton looked more like a track athlete. As he rose from his desk, his body was tall and lithe, much along the lines of Brick's figure, but better proportioned, especially in legs and arms. His forehead sloped to a dark-haired crown that was getting bald. His pale-blue eyes were cold, calculating; his nose was a thick knob that was somewhat askew, as if it had been broken in his younger days, and not set very well. Brick judged that he was in the late thirties.

The copper-haired youth took a determined step forward. As he did so, he glanced at the picture of the baseball team on the wall. He noticed that the players wore uniforms with the lettering "San Feliz" on their shirts; also that Hilton was in uniform in the picture and seated in the center, his square face wrinkled with a smile that was almost a sneer.

"Mr. Hilton," Brick began, "we're disappointed in that bungalow you sold us. But we're more disappointed in the work we counted on gettin'. You advertised that there were plenty of jobs."

Hilton nodded. "There are," he declared, "for the right men. I can put you right to work now if you're carpenters, and have the right credentials.

"Then why didn't you put that in your book?" the lanky youth retorted.

"Yeah, an' you misrepresented the beach where you said the bungalow was at," piped up Boots. "Hot bunts! It's two miles an' a half from that bungalow!"

Hilton shrugged. "If you read the book carefully," he said, "you'll find that it didn't state that our new development is on the beach. The lots on the beach front were sold long ago. It's all built up there now."

Boots glanced at his copper-haired pal, his fat face turning bright red. Then before Brick could get in a word, the fleshy youth whirled on Hilton.

"Sizzlin' homers!" he yelled, brandishing a big clenched fist. "You gypped us, you swindler! We're goin' to have you arrested! We——"

"Just a minute!" Hilton held up a warning hand. "Your deal with me in buying that bungalow is air-tight, every point in it according to the written word of the law. Why, men, you've got a bargain in that bungalow! When the whole new development builds up——"

"The beach will still be two miles an' a half away, an' we'll be in the poor-house," groaned Boots. "An' that rattlesnake I darned near trod on this mornin' will be dead of old age."

"I don't care what the wordin' of that book was, Mr. Hilton," Brick put in. "You stung us, and you know you did. And you're plannin' to sting a whole lot of folks from the East by sellin' 'em those other lots you've got staked out near ours."

Again Hilton shrugged, a shrewd smile on his square face.

"Well, men, you're wasting time tellin' me all this," he said. "If you don't like your bungalow, that's your funeral, not mine. I might be able to sell it for you, with the usual commission."

"Hot bunts!" blazed Boots, advancing furiously on the real-estate promoter. "Commission be hanged! You give me back that money we put into that flea-infested shack, or I'll knock your block off! You come across quick, or——"

"Boots! Cut it out!" Brick grabbed his fat pal's muscle-tensed arm. "This is gettin' us nowhere. Hilton's within the law; he's slick enough to have seen to that. He——"

"Let that fat slob hit me," snarled Hilton, bringing up his fists in a defensive boxing attitude. "Let him try it, that's all!"

"Arr-um!" roared Boots. He tore his arm loose from Brick's hold and charged into Hilton like a bull.

The lithe real-estate man struck out at him, but his fist sailed over Boots's lowered head. Rushing him against the wall, the fat youth pommeled him with both flailing fists, landing on face and body indiscriminately.

Hilton struck out at him again and again, but Boots was in under his longer-range arms. With visions of an assault-and-battery charge complicating their entry into southern California all the more, Brick dashed in to prevent a massacre.

But at that moment, several stalwart young men rushed in from the street. Bouncing on Boots, with Brick helping them, they dragged him off his victim and flung him, panting and wild-eyed, against Hilton's desk. And there they held him.

"What'll we do with him, Hilton?" asked one of the men who had burst into the fray.

Brick recognized him and his companions as members of the San Feliz baseball team shown in the picture on the real-estate-office wall.

Hilton wiped the crimson away from his battered nose and hesitated before replying. A savage, almost murderous light was in his pale-blue eyes as he glared at the breathless Boots. Brick held his breath, expecting Hilton to summon the police at once.

But the lithe-bodied real-estate promoter forced a wrinkly smile on his square-jawed face.

"Just kick the fat boob out and let him go," he ordered his fellow members of the San Feliz baseball team.

Seizing Boots by the nape of the neck and the seat of his slack brown trousers, they gave him a flying bum's rush out through the door. Brick followed him, and helped his fat pal rise from the dust of the sun-baked street.

"Yah!" howled Boots, shaking a spite-

ful fist at the members of the San Feliz baseball team, who were retreating grinningly back into the office. "Took six o' yuh to do it, though, didn't it? Give me a fair show, an' I'll lick the whole bunch o' yuh!"

Despite the distressing circumstances in which he and his fat pal had been placed, Brick couldn't help smiling. He wasn't so sure that he and Boots couldn't get back at Hilton, but not with fists.

CHAPTER III.

THE GRAND OLD GAME.

BBRICK, after the set-to in Hilton's office, was in favor of laying in provisions, returning to their bungalow, and planning what their next move should be. But Boots was all for getting into the water for one good swim, at least.

"We may be beatin' it to-morrow, if we can't get no work here," the fat youth argued. "Hot bunts! We can't git out o' here any too fast to suit me, bungalow or no bungalow!"

So Brick gave in, and they inquired of a stucco-spreader on one of the new Main Street buildings the way to San Feliz Beach.

The grimy workman laughed. "San Feliz Beach ain't much," he informed them. "It's so small it's crowded when all the folks that own places there get in the water. If I was you, I'd go over to Coral Beach. It's only two miles from town, and it's a swell beach; plenty o' room there."

Boots didn't care much about walking two miles. But he was so disgusted with everything that bore the name San Feliz, he urged Brick:

"Let's go over to Coral Beach, anyhow, an' see what it's like. I guess I can stand the hike if you can."

They followed the road which the stucco-spreader pointed out to them, and soon struck a fine concrete highway. Along its firm roadbed, they

made good time. Ahead, a number of stucco bungalows were scattered, with trim green lawns and shrubbery in front of them.

Then the bungalows were located closer together, all with a well-kept, prosperous appearance, in contrast to the boom beach settlement at San Feliz.

"Hot bunts!" exclaimed Boots, grinning as he trudged along at the lanky Brick's side. "This looks like a *real* joint. An' there's the ocean ahead—the whole broad Atlantic!" He pointed triumphantly to a vast blue expanse of water that showed beyond the trees and roofs of houses in the foreground.

"The Pacific," Brick corrected, tossing a few salted peanuts into his mouth and chewing them. "Boots, the longer I travel with you, the more I wonder why they ever had a geography class back in Galesville."

"To heck with Galesville!" grunted Boots, stopping short and pointing to a broad open space in the rear of two trim white bungalows and their garages. "Brick, do you see what I see?"

Brick looked. His blue eyes bulged, and a happy smile bloomed across his gaunt face.

"Gee whillikens!" he exclaimed. "It's a baseball game!"

"Sure as your grandmother lost her teeth!" chuckled Boots. "Come on! Let's go over an' watch 'em."

To the pair of baseball-hungry youths from Ohio, the sight of an honest-to-goodness baseball diamond was like an American flag to a friendless Yankee on foreign soil.

They lost no time in following the lane between the bungalows to the field in the rear. And there they joined the group of men and boys who were watching the game.

The players wore baseball shirts and caps. It was a contest between scrub teams, put on just for the sport of the thing. As Brick and Boots reached the side line, a batter slugged a long drive

into the outfield and sprinted for first. The onlookers cheered as he reached second and tore for third.

But there the fast work of the fielder and third baseman nailed him. His three-bagger was spoiled by his opponents' swift handling of the ball.

And as Brick and Boots watched the game progress, the pitchers of both teams were hit freely. But each time the basemen and fielders handled the ball so deftly, that what looked like sure runs were smeared at second or third.

"Hot bunts!" exclaimed Boots longingly. "I'd like to git into it. Say, with the support them pitchers are git-tin', what couldn't we do to them bozos when they come to the bat?"

A man in a Palm Beach suit overheard the fat youth's remark and stepped up to him. He was a fellow close to middle age, with sparse iron-gray hair, a pleasant smooth-shaven face and merry gray eyes.

"Do I understand that you are a baseball player?" he asked Boots, viewing his chunky stature and protuberant belt line skeptically.

Boots threw out his chest. "Am I a baseball player?" he blustered. "Hot bunts! Didn't you ever hear o' Tobin, the star ketcher on the Bainston, Ohio, nine? Well, I'm him!"

The Coral beacher looked at Boot's feet and grinned.

"I can't understand how any man can be a star baseball player with such a size shoe as you wear," he chuckled. "I don't see how you get out of your own way."

A red flush mounted to the fat youth's plump cheeks.

"You don't, eh?" he flared up. "Well, then, bozo, you've got a lot to learn about the ol' game. You've heard o' Babe Ruth, ain't yuh? Well, the reason *he's* the swell home-run hitter he is, his feet are so big he's planted firm as a rock when he wallops the ol'

apple. It ain't everybody who's blessed with big dogs like me an' him."

The bland-faced man in the Palm Beach suit turned to Brick. "Are you a baseball player, too?" he inquired.

Brick nodded, munching salted peanuts. "Pitch some," he replied modestly, but itching no less than Boots to get into the game.

The middle-aged man eyed Brick for a moment. "You look like a baseball player," he commented, "but that fellow"—he nodded toward Boots—"looks more like a Jap wrestler."

"I do, eh?" Boots bristled up. "Well, bozo, you jest try me out behind the bat, then watch me! That's all—jest watch me!"

The "bozo" in the Palm Beach suit laughed good-naturedly.

"I'll fix it up for you to get in," he said, and walked over to the third baseman of the team on the field, interrupting the play.

Boots began to dance like a trained bear. He peeled off his baggy brown coat and rolled up his sleeves. The man with the iron-gray hair returned, and nodded.

"All right," he told them. "You two go in as battery. It's only a practice game, but we're anxious to see what everybody who comes to Coral Beach has got to offer."

The pitcher and catcher of the scrub team walked off the diamond, and with a whoop of delight, Boots waddled behind the bat. Donning a mask and a big mitt, he crouched behind the plate.

Brick strode into the pitcher's box, sleeves rolled up, a glove borrowed from the retiring twirler on his left hand. Tossing a few salted peanuts into his mouth, he started to wind up. The batter stepped back to allow him a few practice pitches.

At first, the feel of the ball in his right hand seemed strangely unfamiliar. For not since the close of the baseball

season early the previous fall had he engaged in the game. And his first fast delivery to Boots shot wide of the plate. So did his second and third. Brick frowned. Had he lost his control? Would it take him time to get it back, if he ever did?

But his fourth pitch clipped across a corner of the plate, and he smiled with relief. Yes, the old control was still there. All he needed now was to get warmed into action. He nodded to the umpire that he was ready. The batter again stepped up to the plate.

The copper-haired twirler's first one zipped squarely across the plate, and the batter swung at it, but missed. For that fast ball of Brick's was a scorcher. It banged into Boots's mitt with a resounding thud.

Brick smiled, and munched salted peanuts. The old control was back with him as if he had never missed daily practice!

Now Brick cut loose. He sent over curves and straight balls that banged into Boots's mitt and struck out two men in one-two order. But on the third batter, the copper-haired twirler began to change his pace. He mixed in two slow ones, and the batter landed on the second one for a pop fly that the shortstop nabbed.

The onlookers clapped their hands as the side retired. But the man with the iron-gray hair made no comment. Boots bowed and grinned, and shouted to the applauding spectators:

"You ain't seen nothin' yet!"

That, however, was just what they did see when Boots went to the bat. For slugging mightily at everything the rival pitcher sent across, the fat youth went down on three consecutive strikes. But when Brick came up, he rapped out a two bagger. Holding his base, he waited for the next striker to whale out a single. And when it came, Brick lit out for the home plate, and scored a run.

In the next inning, Brick sent over mixed balls that held batters helpless. They couldn't any more connect with those inshoots, outshoots, and fast straight ones than they could flap their wings and fly.

It was only when Brick sent over slow balls skillfully covered up to resemble fast ones that batters got hits. And then the adroit fielding of shortstop and basemen resulted in speedy put-outs.

Then, when he and Boots had the game salted away by a score of 12—2 in the eighth, the fat catcher signaled his copper-haired battery mate for the most deceptive of all the latter's deliveries—what Brick called his "dead drop."

This was a ball that came straight for the plate, not too slow and not too fast, looking large enough for the batter to judge it an easy one to hit, but with speed enough for it to go for a long outfield hit if he landed on it.

But when the ball was almost over the plate, it suddenly dropped out of sight, to thud into Boots's waiting mitt. No batter had yet succeeded in connecting with it. In many respects it was like Christy Mathewson's famous old "fade-away." But it was a delivery that would tire Brick's arm if he used it too often. He reserved it for only special occasions where the most deceptive pitching was needed.

Now, however, Brick used it. As the old apple zinged toward the plate, the batter set himself—and swung with might and main. But he only swatted empty air. With a look of complete mystification on his face, he flung down his bat disgustedly and walked to the side line.

Grinning with satisfaction over a job well done, Brick and Boots trailed in with their teammates when the game was over. Amid the applause of the onlookers, the man with the iron-gray hair rushed out to meet the battery of the winning nine.

"Say, who are you two? What big-

league team are you from?" he shouted rapturously, as he grasped their hands. "I never saw any better pitching in my life. And that drop ball—say, old Bix Six in his palmiest days never had anything on that! How long are you two going to be at Coral Beach? What inducement can I make to you to *stay* here?"

"Hot bunts!" Boots burst out hopefully. "You git us a job, an'——"

But Brick cut in. He frankly told the man how he and Boots had played with the Bainston baseball team in the Ohio semipro league the past season, and then had invested their savings in the bungalow at San Feliz. He explained how they felt that they had been taken in on the deal, and how Hilton had given them no satisfaction when they complained that he had misrepresented the bungalow and the job situation to them.

The bland face of the man with the iron-gray hair clouded when the lanky pitcher had finished.

"Hilton ought to be behind the bars," he said. "You aren't the first ones he's taken in by his tricky schemes. But I hope you don't think all the folks out this way are like him. We folks here at Coral Beach have tried for the past two years to expose him and have him restrained. But he's a tricky one. He keeps just within the law, and we can't get anything on him."

"Hot bunts!" boasted Boots. "I got somethin' on him—my fist on his nose. I——"

"What's that San Feliz baseball team?" Brick broke in. "Is that Hilton's team?"

"That's just what I'm getting at," explained the man in the Palm Beach suit. "Hilton got that team up to help him advertise his San Feliz development scheme. He's trying to get that team in the winter baseball league that's made up of teams from prominent southern California winter resorts. If he suc-

ceeds, he will have his measly San Feliz development rated among the teams from exclusive places along the coast. That will make an impression on people in the East that San Feliz is numbered among such resorts. To get his team into that league would be a master stroke for Hilton."

"Then why don't Coral Beach get up a team and beat him to it?" suggested Brick.

"That's just what we hope to do—and that's why we're holding these try-out games," replied the man with the iron-gray hair. "My name is Arlis. I'm chairman of the Coral Beach Improvement Committee, and I'm in charge of getting up the team. At first, it looked as if we wouldn't have a chance, with our poor pitchers and catchers. But with you two——"

"Hot bunts! Jest git a game with Hilton's team an' watch us put a crimp in 'em!" blustered Boots.

"That's what we're hoping to do." Arlis smiled. "Hilton's team has won every game it's played so far. The league directors are waiting for them to win a few more games before granting him the franchise in the league. But we hope to get up a team at Coral Beach that would be a stumblingblock to his ambitions. We'd like to have that franchise ourselves."

"You'd ought to," agreed Brick. "Coral Beach is sure a swell place."

"Then can I count you in on the team?" asked Arlis hopefully. "Will you stand with us in going after that franchise in the winter league—and going after Hilton's scalp?" he added with a knowing smile.

"Hot Bunts!" cried Boots, dancing awkwardly in his glee over the prospect. "Will we? Say, we'll——"

"You can count us in, all right," Brick assured him. "But does Hilton play on the team?"

"I'll say he does!" replied Arlis. "He's their pitcher—and a darned good

one, too. If you two ever meet on the same diamond," he said to Brick, "you'll have a battle on your hands. You'll need that drop ball of yours then, and a whole lot more, besides!"

CHAPTER IV.

PITCHERS' BATTLE.

THE rapid development of the Coral Beach baseball team was a surprise to the colonists of that southern California winter resort, but not to Brick. For in that game between the scrub nines, he had been amazed at the work of the infielders and outfielders.

With a good battery, he could see that they could be whipped into a nine of more than ordinary caliber. There were good hitters among them. All they needed now was competition.

The delighted Coral Beachers chipped in and bought them attractive light-green uniforms, with the words "Coral Beach" lettered in black across the fronts of the shirts. Arlis was elected manager, and Blount, the first baseman, captain. Each day they sent a car to the bungalow in the cactus flat to pick up Brick and Boots. And Arlis, when he learned that their money was running low, told his new battery to buy all the provisions they needed and charge them to the team.

Arlis was a good manager, with a keen nose for baseball and a fair amount of coaching ability. But when it came to scheduling games, his eagerness to get a crack at Hilton's San Feliz nine ran away with him. No doubt he was egged on by Coral Beachers to drub Hilton's team and get it over with.

And Hilton, when he found out that Coral Beach had got up a baseball nine, was just as eager to smother their hopes of getting the winter-league franchise away from him. With the professionals he had hired to give him clear sailing to the winning of that franchise, he scoffed at the opposition Coral Beach

would give him. He had learned that the Coral Beach team was made up of residents in that section—college boys and school kids, he supposed.

So to Brick's amazement and dismay, Arlis announced at one of the Coral Beach team's practice sessions that he had scheduled two games with San Feliz. The first was to be played the following Friday afternoon; the second the next day, Saturday afternoon.

"Those are the only dates Hilton would give us," explained the Coral Beach manager. "And now it's up to you fellows to clean up in those two games. If we win one of them, the league officials will think twice before they give Hilton that franchise. But if we win both of them, the franchise is ours without question."

Friday afternoon came. Dressed in their green uniforms, Brick and Boots stepped into the big sedan that drove up to their bungalow, and were whisked to the scrubby diamond near tiny San Feliz Beach, where the game was to be played.

There was a good-sized crowd hemming in the playing field, most of them people of means, who were in the habit of taking any week-day afternoon off for recreation. Most of the men and boys and not a few girls from Coral Beach were there to cheer their warriors for the winter-league franchise.

The game started with Coral Beach at the bat. On the pitcher's mound stood Hilton, tall and lithe, his square jaw working on a sizable wad of gum. He seemed to be posing before the Coral Beach girls, grinning self-confidently. And in his gray uniform, he did present a graceful masculine figure.

And while Brick, munching salted peanuts, watched his every move closely, Hilton proved that he was not entirely a show-off. He had a sizzling-hot fast ball and a curve and a drop that were about as good as anything the copper-haired pitcher had ever seen put over.

The first Coral Beach batter went down on three strikes. The second landed on a cleverly disguised slow ball that he thought had steam behind it, but went down on a short fly caught by the second baseman. The third man landed on another slow ball, and hit a hot grounder to shortstop. A quick throw to first, and the side was retired.

Coral Beach took the field, and Brick went into the pitcher's box, with Boots behind the plate. The latter caught Hilton staring at him, and spitefully made a belittling gesture at the San Feliz captain.

Hilton's face paled with fury when he recognized Coral Beach's catcher as the bungalow purchaser who had so impressively started to beat him up that, stormy morning in his office.

With a fast ball, an inshoot, a waste ball, and then another inshoot, Brick struck out the first San Feliz batter. He let the second go down on a fly that popped up and settled down in the copper-haired twirler's own hands. The third man walked. But the fourth, waiting for a good one, was incautious enough to slug at a well-covered-up slow ball, and a high fly, nabbed by the left fielder, retired him.

As Arlis had predicted, the game then resolved itself into a pitchers' battle, with honors about equally divided. Both twirlers saved their arms, with plenty of change of pace, passing the burden of put-outs to the fielders. And the fielders of both teams lived fully up to what was expected of them.

Hilton's professionals were right on top of every hit that Coral Beach slugged out off his deliveries. And when Brick's slow balls were rapped out for flies or grounders, the Coral Beach infielders and outfielders were equally alert.

The start of the eighth inning found the scoreless tie, 0—0, proving the close matching of the rival nines. Arlis was

joyful, and the Coral Beach rooters went wild with surprise and delight. But Hilton looked savage enough to chew tacks.

Between innings, he lectured his men, and they talked back to him. It was evident that the surprise was not confined to the Coral Beach supporters. What cheering came from the San Feliz fans was listless. Their team was falling far short of what they had expected of it.

"Great work, boys!" Arlis cheered his players. "Just one run now—one run, and San Feliz held down to no score—and that franchise is in the bag for us!"

"Hot bunts!" Boots boasted. "Jest wait till I come up again. Jest watch that homer I'm goin' to take the wind out o' that bozo Hilton's sails with!"

But Brick was watching Hilton on the mound. As in the previous game, the American League ball was being used, with its lively core and almost concealed stitching. Brick was accustomed to using the National League ball, which has a less lively core and heavier stitching, the latter permitting the pitcher to get a firmer hold on it.

"That American League ball accounts for Hilton's speed," Brick commented to Boots. "I wonder that we've done so well with it ourselves, where we're not used to it."

"I ain't noticed no diff'rence in the ball," growled the fat catcher. "They're all alike to me. I can handle any of 'em O. K."

But whether or not the ball had anything to do with it, Hilton again held Coral Beach scoreless that inning. And not to be outdone, Brick struck out the first San Feliz man up the last of the eighth. But when the second batter came up, he gained first on a single. And then came the first Coral Beach error in the game.

With a man on first, the batter rapped out a hot grounder that went by the shortstop. The center fielder ran for

it, and, to all appearances, had it right in his hands. But with one of those tricky bounds which a ball sometimes takes, the lively American League apple bounced up and flew over his head. And before he could recover it and throw to third, the first San Feliz run came in.

Mad clean through, Brick quickly retired the side on strike-outs. And with Arlis imploring his men to whale the ball all over the lot, Coral Beach went to the bat for the first half of the ninth.

Brick was the first man up. By this time, he had Hilton's deliveries pretty well sized up, and he whanged his first fast ball out into left field for a neat two-bagger. Standing close to his base, he saw that Damon, one of Coral Beach's heaviest hitters, was coming up to the bat. And he grinned with satisfaction, for Damon was sure to land on Hilton for at least a single. And that single would bring Brick in, tying the score.

Hilton walked over toward the second baseman, who advanced to meet him. For a moment, they talked to each other, while the second baseman appeared to hand the San Feliz twirler the ball. Hilton returned to the mound, and the second baseman went back to his base.

The copper-haired Coral Beach twirler took a wide lead down the lane toward third. But to his amazement, the second baseman jumped over to him and tagged him. And the dumfounded Brick saw that the ball was in the grinning second baseman's hand!

Caught napping on second! As the umpire waved his arm and Brick disgustedly walked off the field, the copper-haired youth could not understand how he had ever been caught by that old, old hidden-ball trick.

He was sure that the second baseman had actually handed the ball to Hilton, not merely bluffed doing so. Yet there the ball was now, sailing through the air from the second baseman to Hilton. The latter grinned gloatingly as he

rubbed the ball into his glove and started to work on Damon.

Dejected, disgusted with himself for so dismally ruining Coral Beach's chance to tie the score, Brick sat on the bench and watched Damon go to first on that single for which the visitors had been praying. But there was no one on bases for that single to bring in. And after stealing to second, Damon died there, while Coral Beach's weaker hitters went down on Hilton's fast balls, drops, and curves.

Coral Beach's last chance was gone. The game was over, and San Feliz had won, 1—0.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST CHANCE.

THE sedan which carried Brick and Boots back to their cactus-flat bungalow that night couldn't make the trip fast enough to suit them. Never before had the solitary structure looked so good to Brick as it did when the car stopped before its front door. For if ever the lanky youth craved solitude as a partial cure for his misery, it was now. It seemed as if he could never show his face at Coral Beach again, or anywhere else, for that matter. Even Boots's company irked him in his moments of bitter despair.

And when they were inside, with the kerosene lamp lighted in the living room, Boots proved to be anything but consoling.

"Hot bunts!" his fat pal grunted disgustedly. "Brick, is that really you, or are you some bozo who's tryin' to pass himself off as you? Why, when that bozo threw that ball to Hilton, an' I seen he'd tagged you out, you could 'a' knocked me over with a feather. I jest couldn't believe it. I——"

"What's the use of rubbin' it in?" groaned the miserable Brick. "I admit I'm a boob. And after Arlis has been so white to us, grubstakin' us and everything."

Boots shrugged his broad shoulders. "That second baseman worked that trick pretty slick, though," he admitted. "I could 'a' swore he chucked that ball to Hilton after you made your base."

"Do you s'pose I'd taken my lead off the base if I hadn't been sure of it, too?" snapped Brick. "But there was the ball, right in his hand when he tagged me. Gosh! It makes me sick even to think of it."

"It makes me sick to think o' the razzin' we'll git if we ever show our heads in Coral Beach again," sighed the fat youth. "I reckon we might jest as well pack up now an' beat it. The heck of a lot o' grubstakin' Arlis will do for us now!"

They turned in early. But Brick tossed restlessly in his bed. Nor was it the fleas that kept him awake. All he could see was the disappointed faces of the Coral Beach fans that fatal ninth inning. And they seemed to be overshadowed by the leering, square face of the posing Hilton.

Boots, however, snored lustily, for he had bought a vile-smelling antiflea lotion with which he smeared himself from ears to toes. And in the morning, Brick, rising late, had to shake him for fully ten minutes before he woke up.

It was Brick's turn to cook breakfast, and he prepared a tasty meal of cereal and scrambled eggs. But Boots growled that he could eat it all and then some, so Brick stirred up a batch of pancakes for his fat pal. The latter was sloshing his twelfth one in corn sirup and wolfing it down, when a car drove up outside the bungalow.

"It's Arlis!" exclaimed Brick, glancing out of the window.

"Hot bunts!" groaned Boots, bustling up from the table. "Here's where we ketch it!"

Brick's courage rose as he opened the front door. Whatever Boots had checked against him in the matter of

dumbness, there was no more loyal pal anywhere than he. Through thick and thin, he would stick to Brick in adversity. And now Brick felt that although fair-weather friends had failed him, there was one on whom he could count to the finish.

But to Brick's surprise, Arlis's bland face wore its pleasantest smile as he walked into the living room.

"Hello, boys!" he greeted them affably. "All set for the game to-day?"

Brick and Boots stared at each other, speechless. Then Brick found his voice:

"Why, Mr. Arlis, I thought you'd be off us for life!"

Arlis's pleasant smile vanished, and an ominous scowl furrowed his high forehead.

"Well, frankly, I should be, after that dumb play you made yesterday, Day," he confessed. "The folks at Coral Beach are still razzing you plenty, and I don't wonder. But the truth of the matter is, we have no other battery for to-day's game, and it's too late to import one. So——"

"Hot bunts!" broke in Boots. "You put us in that game to-day, Mr. Arlis, an' we'll show them Coral Beachers we ain't no pikers! We'll knock that bozo Hilton all over the lot! We'll——"

"If you play the whole game the way you did yesterday up to that boner in the ninth, it's all we ask of you," said the Coral Beach manager. "Of course, it's too late for us now to hope to prevent San Feliz from getting the franchise, and for us to get it is out of the question. All we hope to do is to save ourselves from having San Feliz call us quitters. That's why we're anxious to go through with the game."

"Has San Feliz got the franchise?" inquired Brick anxiously.

"About as good as got it," replied Arlis. "After yesterday's game, Hilton lost no time getting in touch with the league officials. They're sending a com-

mittee to watch San Feliz in action in the game to-day. And if San Feliz makes the showing in the game that it did yesterday—well, they'll have the franchise on ice."

"But, sizzlin' homers!" exclaimed Boots. "Suppose we lick 'em. Will they git that franchise then?"

Arlis sighed. "I'm afraid the result of the game will make no difference now," he said. "Hilton, you see, has been dickering with the league officials for that franchise for some time. Their sending the committee to the game to-day is merely a formality to check up on the San Feliz team and put their O. K. on the deal."

Brick tossed a few salted peanuts into his mouth and chewed them vigorously.

"There's one thing you can bank on, Mr. Arlis," he declared, "and that is that I won't pull the boner I did yesterday. Gee whillikens! Do you mean to tell me that if we lick the stuffin' out of San Feliz to-day, they'll hand Hilton that franchise just the same?"

"Well, of course, if we give San Feliz a one-sided drubbing, that might change the committee's mind," conceded Arlis. "But that is too much to hope for, Day. No team in southern California can give Hilton and his pros a one-sided drubbing. Even if you hadn't pulled that boner and we'd tied the score, the chances are we'd have lost anyhow in the last of the ninth inning."

"We would like heck!" contradicted Boots. "The game would 'a' gone into an extry innin', an' then I'd whaled that bozo Hilton all over the lot. I'd——"

"Well," laughed Arlis, running a hand over his sparse iron-gray hair, "you two will get your chance for revenge to-day. And if you pull Coral Beach through to a crushing victory over San Feliz, the Coral Beachers will forgive that boner you pulled yesterday, Day."

"You can bet I'll do my darnedest,"

vowed Brick, a steely glint in his blue eyes.

"Hot bunts! You jest keep your eyes on *me*," boasted Boots, throwing out his chest. "When I git through with them San Feliz bozos, that league committee will git down on their knees an' beg Coral Beach to take that franchise!"

Arlis's bland face bloomed into an admiring smile. "That's the spirit, boys!" he applauded. "You've got the stuff, Day, that will make any team sit up and take notice. You pitch to-day as you did yesterday, and that's all any one can ask of you."

"Hot bunts!" exclaimed Boots. "An' how about *me*? Ain't you givin' me no credit for the game I played behind the bat?"

Arlis looked at him and stroked his smooth-shaven chin.

"Well, we don't expect any better catching than you did yesterday, Tobin," he answered. "But for Pete's sake, when you go to the bat, let something go by once in a while. If you have luck, you might get a base on balls."

The fat youth's chubby face reddened to the roots of his bristly hair.

"Hot bunts!" he growled. "That's the heck of a way to play baseball. I thought you wanted to win this game."

"I do," chuckled Arlis. "That's why I'm giving you that advice. But now get into your uniforms. We're off for the ball field!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECOND GAME.

BEFORE the Coral Beach team went to the San Feliz baseball field, however, Brick and Boots were transported in Arlis's sedan to the Coral Beach Country Club.

There they found the members of the team in uniform, lounging in the clubhouse living room. Leaving the copper-haired pitcher and his fat pal to talk the

game over with their fellow players, Arlis went away to attend to other matters.

But those other members of the team did not greet them with open arms. Indeed, they accorded Brick rather savage glances, and some of them drew off to one side and talked among themselves in lowered voices.

"Somethin's up," Boots whispered to Brick. "What you s'pose it is now?"

"I got a hunch I know," the lanky bungler in the previous game replied. "They're still sore over that boner I pulled yesterday."

And when they arrived at the San Feliz ball field, Arlis left no doubts in their minds that Brick's hunch was correct.

"I'm sorry, boys," he told them apologetically, "but I've decided to start the game with Cranston and Wills, not you two." Cranston was the pitcher and Willis the catcher of the weak Coral Beach second battery.

"Hot bunts!" exclaimed Boots. "You mean to tell us you got us here, an' now we ain't goin' to git into the game?"

"I didn't say you wouldn't get into the game," corrected Arlis. "I'm not going to *start* you." He gave Brick a meaning wink. "After talking it over with some of the Coral Beach Improvement Committee, I've found that Coral Beach sentiment is pretty strong against you. After your miserable showing at the bat, Tobin, and that boner you pulled, Day, the Coral Beach folks have even gone so far as to accuse you of throwing that game to San Feliz."

"Sizzlin' homers!" exclaimed Boots wrathfully. "Then why don't you take 'em out an' show 'em that bungalow Hilton stuck us with? Hot bunts! As if we'd——"

"Oh, of course I know there's nothing to that," laughed Arlis. "But Cranston and Willis are Coral Beach boys, with a lot of friends in the colony, so I think it's only right to give 'em the chance

their friends are begging for them. You get my idea?"

"Hanged if I do!" blustered Boots. "If you ain't goin' to let us git in, you might as well take us back to our bungalow. We——"

"I understand, Mr. Arlis," Brick broke in, "and I think you're doin' the right thing. Cranston and Willis should have a chance. But we'll be right here, ready to go in if you want us."

Boots stormed and vowed he wouldn't play, but Brick soon silenced him. Muttering and grumbling, he perched beside his copper-haired pal on the sideline bench and grumpily watched the rival nines go into action.

Before the huge crowd of Coral Beach and San Feliz colonists, San Feliz went to the bat. Hilton sat on the San Feliz bench, holding a bat, a sneering smile on his square face, a greedy light in his pale-blue eyes. Not far from him and his waiting teammates stood three important-looking, well-dressed men. Arlis went over and shook hands with them.

"The committee from the winter league," Brick overheard one of the Coral Beach substitutes on the bench beside him explain to another.

Cranston started off well on the mound. While his Coral Beach friends cheered, he struck out the first man up, walked the second, then baited the next batter with a slow ball that he rapped in a grounder to shortstop. With a throw to second, and from there, a quick throw to first, the shortstop and basemen worked a pretty double play.

Then San Feliz took the field, and Coral Beach went to the bat. Again Hilton posed before the girls in the crowd, then wound up and uncorked his fast ball. It was a strike, the batter not offering at it. Brick noticed that again the American League ball, with its lively core and almost hidden stitching, was being used.

The San Feliz twirler was in excellent form; like Brick, he seemed to have the stamina to go through with two games on successive days. Arlis had told Brick that Hilton thought nothing of such a feat—and Brick had been quick to respond that he thought nothing of it, either.

But Cranston, though he was hit freely, pulled through the first four innings nicely, due largely, however, to the excellent support he received from his teammates.

At the close of the fourth, neither side had scored. Hilton's twirling, with curves and fast balls interspersed with deceptive slow balls, had held Coral Beach down to only a few easily fielded infield hits.

The first of the fifth, Arlis walked over to Brick and Boots.

"You two had better be warming up," he told them. "Just to play safe, in case Cranston blows up."

He tossed Brick a ball, and the copper-haired twirler and his fat pal ran over to the space to one side of the home plate that was reserved for a bull pen. But before shooting his first delivery to Boots, Brick glanced at the ball, and he could not repress a gasp of surprise.

The ball which Arlis had picked up and handed him was a National League ball, with the less lively core and heavier stitching than the American League ball used in the game.

Brick, however, didn't call for another one. He liked that National League ball better, anyhow—was more accustomed to it. So he and Boots tossed it back and forth, unheeded by the fans, whose eyes were centered on the game itself.

But out on the diamond, a scene was being enacted which brought groans from the Coral Beach fans. For with two men out, Cranston suddenly found his best curves and straight fast balls fathomed by San Feliz batters. There

was a sharp crack of a bat banging horsehide. Brick and Boots looked up to see the San Feliz right fielder sprinting around the bases for a home run.

Then Cranston went to pieces. The next batter slugged out a two-bagger, and the next brought him in on a single. Walking one man after another, his control gone completely, Cranston then filled the bases. And while the Coral Beach fans groaned, he walked his fourth man, forcing in another run.

Arlis beckoned to the warmers-up in the bull pen. They ran over to him.

"For Pete's sake, go in!" Arlis excitedly ordered them. "We're as good as sunk already!"

With a whoop of glee, Boots waddled up to the plate, mask and mitt donned, while Cranston and Willis came in to the bench. Munching salted peanuts, Brick strode into the pitcher's box.

Oh, what a howl of derision went up from the retiring battery's friends in the crowd!

"Give 'em a chance!" they cried. "Give Cranston a fair show to come through!"

"Keep that redhead out of it!" others yelled. "Want him to throw this game, too?"

For a moment, it looked as if a riot would break out. Some of the Coral Beachers went over to Arlis and vehemently protested against his change of batteries. But the gray-haired manager shook his head. He waved his arm to Brick, in a gesture for him to stay in.

The copper-haired twirler's nerves were a little shaky under the storm of jeers and threats that came from the crowd. He glanced at Boots, and saw that his fat pal was casting frightened looks at the gibing throng, as if he feared that guns might be pointing at him.

Hilton was now stepping up to the bat. He turned to Boots, and sneered at him:

"Come on, you fat boob—play ball! Look out that your feet don't get on the plate; I can't see it if they do."

The color came back to the catcher's round face with a rush. Crouching behind the plate, he pounded his mitt with a vengeance.

Brick smiled. That taunt from Hilton had done more to bring Boots back to earth than any pleas Brick could have made. And Boots's infuriated return to the business of the game gave his lanky pal on the mound fresh confidence, too. With three men on bases, two out, the score 3--0 in San Feliz's favor, he took Hilton's measure—and pitched.

His first one was a scorcher that clipped a corner of the plate, and the grinning San Feliz captain let it go by. But the umpire called it a strike, and the smile dwindled from Hilton's square face.

Then Brick sent over a slow one, but Hilton let it ride. It was a ball. Hilton also waited out the next, but it was an inshoot that bent over a corner of the plate. Two strikes.

Boots signaled for the dead drop, and Brick threw it. The San Feliz captain gauged it, slugged at it. But with a thud, the old apple tumbled into Boots's mitt, while Hilton fanned the air over the plate. He slammed down his bat, the side was retired, and he went into the pitcher's box.

A cheer went up from the Coral Beach fans, as Brick returned to the bench. Forgotten for the time was his bungle in the previous game. He had pulled his team out of a tight place, and they gave him all the credit due him.

But Brick realized that a lot could happen before that game was over. And he was still a little mystified as to why Arlis had given him a National League ball to warm up with, when the game was being played with American League balls. But it might have been a ball

which Arlis had brought with him, not noticing what kind it was. Still—

Out on the diamond, however, things were beginning to happen. Damon, at the bat, slugged out a three-bagger. And the next batter brought him in with a single.

Was Hilton beginning to weaken? Had he bitten off more than he could chew in taking on the second game?

The lithe-bodied San Feliz captain, however, pulled himself together. He struck Boots out easily, and the next two batters went down on short infield flies.

Once more the pitchers' battle was resumed, with honors about equally divided. But in the eighth, the Coral Beach batters again got to Hilton, and two more runs dribbled in, tying the score. The Coral Beach fans went wild. The comeback of their nine had taken them as much by surprise as it did the San Feliz team and its supporters.

In the first of the ninth, Brick extended himself. With curves and his never-failing dead drop, he struck out the San Feliz batters in one-two-three order. The Coral Beach fans yelled themselves hoarse as their team again went to the bat. Here was their chance to put the game away on ice! Their chance to prevent the game from going into an extra inning.

Hilton looked nervous, his square face darkened with a savage scowl, as he faced the first Coral Beach batter. Imitating Brick in the previous half inning, he threw change of pace to the winds, and sent over three hot strikes. The next batter also went down on a foul caught by the third baseman. And then Brick went to the bat.

Hilton's scowl darkened his square face even more when the copper-haired youth hefted the bat and stepped up to the plate. For each time Brick had come up, he had connected with Hilton's deliveries. Although he had rapped out only short hits, San Feliz

regarded him as dangerous, and the outfielders backed off deeper into the pasture.

Brick let the first two offerings go by for a ball and a strike, but he swung at the next.

Crack! The old willow landed on it, and out into the orchard it sailed.

Sprinting at the top speed of his long legs, the copper-haired youth skipped over first and put for second. But there he held his base, for the left fielder had picked up the ball and was hurling it in to the second baseman. The latter caught it, but Brick was still holding his base. He was safe. He kept his foot on the base as he noticed Hilton, the pitcher, who had run down to back up the second baseman on the throw-in, mumble some remark and then extend his hand and get the ball from the second baseman. Then Hilton walked back into the box, and Brick took the usual lead off the base toward third.

Then he remembered how he had been trapped the day before, when the baseman had appeared to hand the ball to Hilton. With a grunt and a leap, Brick shot back to his base. But the second baseman jumped to meet him—and Brick felt something hard and round jab him in the ribs. And his heart sank as he looked down and saw that it was the ball.

But suddenly his eyes widened as he stubbornly held his base and stared at that ball in the grinning second baseman's hand. He held up his hand to the umpire as a signal—beckoned for him to come over. The umpire, however, was waving for him to go in, for the grinning second baseman triumphantly held up the ball with which he had made his put-out.

Stubbornly shaking his head, however, Brick held his base. The umpire exasperately blew his whistle for time out, and walked over.

The San Feliz fans were hissing and boosing the obstinate base holder. The

Coral Beach rooters were silent, wondering what it was all about.

Hilton and some of the San Feliz players also came over. And Arlis walked onto the field to enter the argument and discover why one of his men was holding up the game.

But Brick's eyes were on a bulge that showed faintly under Hilton's shirt. Then he pointed at the ball which the San Feliz second baseman still held.

"Take a look at that ball," Brick ordered the umpire. "How come this fellow tags me out with a National League ball when we're playin' the game with the American League ball?"

The umpire took the ball and examined its heavy stitches.

"It probably-got in by accident," he grunted. "Go on. Off the field!"

"Nothin' doin'!" The copper-haired twirler shook his head. He pointed to the bulge under Hilton's shirt. "See what *that* is," he ordered the umpire.

The official of the game scowled as he saw that round bulge.

"Take that out," he ordered the San Feliz captain. "Let's have a look at it."

Hilton grinned sheepishly, and drew out a baseball from the loose part of his shirt.

"It's only an extra ball I was carrying there," he lamely tried to explain.

"Yeah—just as I thought—an American League ball!" exclaimed Brick, observing the finer stitching on it, in contrast to the coarse stitching of the ball in the second baseman's hand. "Now do you see through San Feliz's game?" he asked the umpire. "Just take a look under the belts o' the other San Feliz basemen, and you'll get the idea."

The umpire did. And under the belt of each of them, in a little pocket made especially to hold it, he found a baseball—a National League baseball!

The umpire glared at the wilting, bewildered Hilton. "Yeah, I get the idea now, you crook!" he blazed at the un-

happy San Feliz captain. "The second baseman *did* hand the ball back to you, then tagged Day out with the ball he had hidden under his belt—the ball you had hidden on each of your basemen for just such an emergency. But *you* made just one mistake, as all crooks do. The balls you hid on your men were National League balls, when the game was being played with American League bills."

"They did it because they knew that Damon followed Day in the batting order, and was sure to bring Day in for the winning run!" exclaimed Arlis. "Come on, now. Let's finish the game, and see if Damon can do it!"

But the San Feliz professionals were walking off the diamond. They were not only forfeiting the game, it looked more as if the San Feliz nine was going to smash in one glorious row.

Out onto the field strutted the committee from the winter league.

"Well, gentlemen," Arlis laughingly sang out to them, "does San Feliz get that franchise?"

"That bunch of crooks? I should say not!" replied the pompous man who was evidently chairman of that committee. "Mr. Arlis, that franchise goes to Coral Beach. We'll close the matter with you at your convenience."

The jubilant Arlis turned to Brick and warmly clasped his hand.

"Day, Coral Beach owes this happy outcome of the game to you," he declared. "But what gets me is how you ever got wise to that hidden-ball stunt Hilton pulled. How on earth did you ever do it? Did you see Hilton tuck that ball under his shirt after the second baseman threw it back to him?"

Brick tossed a few salted peanuts into his mouth, blushed, and shook his head.

"It was the stitchin' on that ball the second baseman tagged me out with," he explained. "That, and my wonderin' how a National League ball got mixed in with the American League ones

when Boots and me worked out in the bull pen. I guess that's where Hilton fell down. He forgot that only American League balls were used in the game when he handed them balls to his men to hide on 'em. He didn't notice it was National League balls he was givin' 'em."

"Hot bunts!" Boots spoke up at his copper-haired pal's side. "Coral Beach gets that franchise, but what good does that do Brick an' me? Even if Hilton's name will be mud in San Feliz after this, he's still stuck me an' Brick with that bungalow."

"Don't you worry about that bungalow," laughed the bland-faced Coral Beach manager. "You come over to Coral Beach and pick out any vacant bungalow you want, and we'll swap it for yours in an even exchange. And I know the Coral Beach Improvement Committee will stand behind me in making this deal. We realize now that you didn't even pull that boner yesterday. You had a crooked trick worked on you, and had brains enough to trick the tricksters when they tried to repeat. Let you two get away from us, after this game? I guess not—not while we're conscious!"

"And that goes for a steady job for both of you, too," he went on. "By tomorrow morning, you'll have so many bids for work, you'll be stumped when you take your pick."

"Sizzlin' homers!" whooped Boots, dancing up and down like a trained bear. "You wait till we git into them winter-league games now, Mr. Arlis! We won the championship for Bainston back in Ohio. We'll do the same out here! Won't we, Brick?"

Do Brick and Boots remain on the Coast? Is Hilton going to take his licking without a comeback? Anyhow, the urge for the grand old game is as great on the Coast as it is anywhere in the world, so look for some hot innings. There'll be another novelette of this popular Burt L. Standish series in an early issue of *Top-Notch*.



The Kayo Clout

By Joseph B. Fox

THE "Barbary Coast Kid" took his stool at the end of the fourth canto with a broad grin on his strong, sun-tanned features.

Jimmy Paige, the Kid's manager, also smiled as he patted the Kid's shoulder, blood-smeared where "Rowdy" Terry had buried his battered face in a clinch.

The Kid and his manager were happy with good reason, for the Kid had proved conclusively that his right hand was still potent. He had also set a precedent by neatly flooring the granite-jawed Rowdy for a nine-count, something no other welter had ever accomplished.

It had been common gossip along Cauliflower Row that the Kid's right hand,

broken in a previous bout, would never again pack its once-dreaded kayo clout. And for the first three rounds to-night, as the Kid used nothing but a straight left, many of the aces shook wise heads.

Then, unexpected as a thunderbolt from a sunny sky, came the surprise. Rowdy, rocked off balance by a series of sharp-shooting lefts, gave the Kid the opening he sought. A sizzling right cross connected with the point of Rowdy's jaw.

Pow! Rowdy hit the ring floor.

Gameness alone brought him to shaky legs at nine. Only the circumstance that the round was almost over saved him.

"She's O. K., eh, Kid?" chuckled Jimmy squeezing the Kid's right mitt.

"Jimmy, I didn't even feel it."

Jimmy glanced across the ring where Rowdy's handlers worked frantically, trying to bring him out of the fog.

"He's yours, Kid," said Jimmy quietly. "But don't waste any."

"O. K., Jimmy," the lad said, as the warning ten-second whistle shrilled.

The bell!

Rowdy blasted out of his corner, pumping hot leather with pistoning arms. But the Kid, no longer afraid to use the wallop concealed in his powerful right triceps, met him halfway. The *smack-smack* of wet leather on tough flesh brought wild yelps of glee from the tense-faced mob of fight fans who packed the San Francisco Auditorium.

"Take 'im, Kid!"

"C'mon, Rowdy!"

Twice the Kid passed up possible chances for his kayo clout. Not that his snapping dark eyes did not see them, but Jimmy had said, "Don't waste any!" And the Kid, filled with grateful admiration for the man who had picked him off the street and taught him the game, obeyed. He intended his next right-handed punch to be tagged with a K. O.

Thick shoulders bunched, feet braced somewhat wide apart, Rowdy took three or four stiff-wristed jabs that bobbed his head far back, but did not halt his forward shuffle.

A glutton for punishment, Rowdy. That was why he had never been whipped. But to-night he was up against a type of fighter new in his experience. Months of exacting training under Jimmy Paige, once known as the "Fresno Flash," had produced in the Barbary Coast Kid, a game, clever battler, whose right-hand smash had the power of dynamite.

Right now Rowdy was flaming mad. Having a loose rein on his temper even at the best of times, to be unexpectedly flattened by a terrific right cross, had sent him berserker.

"Ride it out this time," his chief sec-

ond urged just before the bell that announced the beginning of the fifth.

"Ride? Yeah?" snarled Rowdy. "I'll bust this crumbo wide open. He couldn't hurt me with a sledge hammer."

But Rowdy was mistaken.

Again and yet again the Kid's streaking left stabbed against shredded lips.

"Stand an' fight, ya bum!" Rowdy raged, as the Kid cleverly gave way before another wild rush.

Almost before the words were finished, back went Rowdy's close-cropped head from another lightning left. And now the Kid prepared the sleeping position.

A jab—a clinch—break. Jab—clinch—break. Four times the Kid repeated this routine. Rowdy's shoulders rubbed hemp. Another jab. Automatically he reached for the expected clinch. Too late he made an attempt to duck as the Kid's terrible right flashed for his unprotected button!

Wham! The unmistakable sound of that solid punch jerked the crowd to its feet!

For a fraction of a second, the beaten battler swayed as the Kid slid in, right again cocked at his hip. But Rowdy was through for the night.

His arms drooped aimlessly, his knees played him false and pitched him forward to hit the canvas-covered floor.

II.

"Well, Kid," Jimmy Paige said, as he brought the roadster before his Powell Street gymnasium where the Kid slept, "I'll be seein' yuh later."

"O. K., Jimmy. Me for the hay. Gee, that was some steak we had!"

"Y' did a swell job t'-night, Kid," declared Jimmy as he meshed gears, "and I'm gonna start workin' on Harry Bewley t' give y' a shot at Battlin' Barry."

"That's great, Jimmy. Gee! D'you mean a title match?"

Jimmy smiled. "Nothin' else," he declared. "And I think y've earned it. Well, g'night."

"Swell guy, Jimmy," mused the Kid, half aloud, as he stood watching the tail light of his manager's car until it turned a corner. "One swell guy."

"Say, buddy, ya couldn't help a guy out with the price, couldja?"

The Kid whirled on his heel to meet the gaze of a rather hard-featured fellow, whose cap was pulled well down over his eyes.

"Breakin' kinda tough, eh?" said the Kid with a good-natured smile, reaching into a pocket and bringing to light some bills and loose silver.

On the instant, the fellow grabbed for the money. But the Kid's hand closed tight as he pulled back a step, his face hardening grimly.

"What's the idea?" he rasped, instinctively sliding his left foot forward as he dropped into his fighting crouch.

The fellow turned, as though to run. But before he could take a step the Kid's hand shot out and fastened on a coat sleeve.

The man tugged, then suddenly swung a vicious right. But the Kid had learned his street fighting as a newsy on San Francisco's Barbary Coast. Pulling his head aside enough to make the other miss, he socked a six-inch right to the other's midriff. The fellow collapsed with a groan.

The Kid opened the gym door, grasped the fallen man by the collar, hauled him inside and switched on a light.

"Well," barked the Kid, "whatta you got to say for yourself?"

"Aw," muttered the other, "what's th' usesa me sayin' anythin'? Ya wouldn't believe me nohow."

"All right," said the Kid grimly, moving toward the telephone on the wall, "you can tell it to a judge."

The fellow darted to the door, shook the knob fiercely.

"Locked," said the Kid.

"Awright." The man shrugged his shoulders with an air of resignation. "Go ahead, call the bulls. I might as well be in the can as anywhere else. The city'll haveta look after my wife an' sick kiddie then."

The Kid paused, replaced the receiver on the hook, regarding the other with appraising eyes.

"Got a wife and a sick kid?" he asked.

The man nodded, looking the lad straight in the eyes.

"Broke, eh?"

"Yes, and been outa work for months. Listen, lad," he went on earnestly, "I'm not a professional bum, or a crook either. I've never stole——"

"Here," interrupted the Kid, offering the man what money he had with him, "I guess I'm a fool. Anyhow, you've got a good story. Take this—it's for that wife and sick kid. No booze, understand."

"I don't drink. Gee, this's white o' you, lad. I'll sure never forget this. I'll pay you back some day, too. What's your name?"

"Kenny Grant, the Barbary Coast Kid. All right," opening the door, "beat it. Call around and see me some time."

"Gee! The Barbary Coast Kid!" said the fellow with a wry little grin. "I've heard o' you. No wonder you hit like the kick of a mule. But, I'll sure pay you back. I——"

The Kid waved a hand. "So long," he said and shut the door. He was tired.

III.

The Kid had already taken his shower after his usual five-mile run the next morning, when Jimmy Paige exactly entered the gym with:

"Mornin', Kid! Y' didn't hurt th' fin when y' popped 'at guy last night, didja?"

"No. I smacked him in the pantry, Jimmy. But who told you about it?"

"Pete, over in th' corner cigar store," returned his manager. Then, heaving a deep sigh, "Jumpin' Judas, I'm sure tickled about th' mitt. I just got Harry Bewley on the line a few minutes ago. Y'r gonna get y'r chance at the champ."

"Jimmy!" the Kid shouted, grasping the older man's shoulders and shaking him joyfully. "You don't mean you've signed me for a title match with Battling Barry?"

"I don't mean nothing else," returned Jimmy. "But," he continued seriously, "no more takin' chances with 'at fin in street brawls, understand."

"O. K., Jimmy. I won't," the Kid promised. "How soon do I fight?"

"Six weeks. And that suits us fine. It'll give us time t' toughen up 'at mauler still more with brine treatments. And that's jake, 'cause th' Battler's a rough, tough, dirty scrapper, and Bewley's just about as crooked as a corkscrew."

So, filled with that genuine love for the game which a ringman must have in order to get anywhere in the world of gloves and rosin, the Kid went into training wholeheartedly.

Two days before the date of the battle, Jimmy Paige called an abrupt halt to strenuous work.

"Y'r right on th' edge, Kid—one forty-six," he said, as the lad stepped from the gym scales after a stiff workout. "Another hard day, and y' might leave th' old fight right here in th' gymnasium. Feel like a million, dontcha?"

The Kid went into a fast routine of shadow boxing before answering.

"Jimmy," he burst out, with a last hook at his imaginary opponent, "if I felt any better I'd have to go out on the street and pick on a tough Irish cop."

"Save it," said Jimmy. "A little light bag work, a couple easy hikes, and lotsa sleep'll be th' ticket from now on. I gotta see a guy downtown. Take a nap this afternoon. Mebbe we'll take in a show t'-night, eh?"

"Whatever you say, Jimmy," the Kid agreed.

But try as he might, the Kid could not sleep. His healthy young body craved action. He wanted sunshine, air—Golden Gate Park, that's where he'd go.

So, all unconscious of the fact that three tough-looking fellows trailed him, he boarded a Beach car on Market Street. The three men stayed in the rear smoking compartment, talking in low tones, but keeping wary eyes on the Kid.

Arriving at the park, the Kid watched the tennis players for a time. Growing restless again, he struck off along a lonely path that led to the chess and checker tables. From a near-by seat, the three toughs nudged one another, rose and followed.

"Where's the Kid?" questioned Jimmy Paige, walking into the gym an hour or so after the Kid's departure.

"Said he was gonna ride out to the park," volunteered one of the Kid's stablemates.

"Alone?"

"Far's I know."

Jimmy frowned, and asked what time the Kid had left.

"M'mm," he mumbled upon receiving the other's reply. "Don't like that. Been feelin' queer about th' Kid since I left 'im. Guess I'll run out there. If he comes back first, tell 'im t' wait here f'r me."

Knowing of the Kid's interest in tennis, Jimmy parked his car near the courts, and looked around. But at this moment, the lad was feeding squirrels a hundred yards or so down the trail, unconscious of the fact that the three toughs were closing in upon him from different directions.

The Kid had no premonition of danger as a disreputable-looking fellow in sweater and gym shoes, slouched toward him.

Ever the gentleman, the Kid stepped

off the narrow path, waiting for the other to pass. But the fellow roughly shouldered into the Kid with, "Git outa th' way," and thrust out his heavy under jaw.

A twig snapped behind the Kid's back; there was a rustling in the bushes to his right. In an instant he felt that he was in danger. A quick glance over his shoulder confirmed his sudden suspicion. A broad-shouldered fellow, whose cauliflowered ears protruded fan-like, from the sides of a battered, evil face, barred retreat. Even as the Kid stepped lightly back to the solid footing the path afforded, the other member of the trio stepped into view. The Kid was trapped.

"Awri'," growled the fellow who had shouldered the Kid, "go *git* 'im," and swung a sudden vicious right for the Kid's body.

But the fellow had wasted too much time. The Kid was prepared. Weaving aside, he countered with a pile-driving right that took the other in the solar plexus and dropped him. The other two piled into the Kid, cursing foully. Punches took the Kid from all sides. Yet the Kid thought it strange none were aimed at his face.

Teeth bared, the Kid fought as he had never fought before. But these were no ordinary stew bums. They knew the rough-and-tumble game of the street fighter. No amateurs, these. The fellow on the ground got up and bored savagely to the attack.

A terrific sock under the ticker made the Kid gasp in sudden agony. Still he waded in, asking no quarter, game as a bulldog.

It was a loud groan from one of the thugs, as the Kid's right plowed deep in his guts that brought Jimmy Paige to an abrupt halt, with alert ears, as he turned from the trail he was following, and headed for the sounds of conflict. He burst upon the scene, just in time to see the Kid swing a wicked right

hook that was blocked by his opponent's forearm.

The impact of that blow sounded sharply, like the splintering of dry wood! The Kid's right fist fell to his side. Jimmy saw the Kid's face turn pasty-white!

The next split second Jimmy went into action! A trip-hammer right caught the man nearest him behind the ear, dropping him as though poleaxed!

Jimmy cursed vividly, and tore in. The Kid, backing up, jabbed with his left. The fellow Jimmy had dropped crawled into the bushes. The Kid's adversary suddenly turned tail and ran. With a savage oath, the last tough kicked Jimmy's feet from under him, dodged the Kid's clutching left hand, and raced down the path.

"Hurt, Kid?" were Jimmy's first words.

The Kid drew an arm across his eyes.

"My right, Jimmy," he said weakly.

"Aw, I guess it's nothing."

Jimmy swore between set teeth. "Let's see that fin."

"Gee, it's a good thing you came along, Jimmy," said the Kid gratefully. "I was having a tough time."

"I didn't come soon enough," said Jimmy, and swore again, as the Kid winced under searching fingers that located the injury. "Those rats were paid t' put this right fin outa business. We'll see Doc Fraser."

And Doctor Fraser, as he finished bandaging the Kid's hand, said: "If this is taken care of, I do not believe it will take long to heal. Luckily, no bones are broken this time. However, these," indicating the two middle knuckles, "are badly bruised again, and must not be subjected to rough usage for a time."

"And that's that," said Jimmy, when he and the Kid were outside. "Well, whoever hatched it up got fooled. The fight's off."

"Listen," rasped the Kid in a hard voice. "You're all wrong, Jimmy. I

tell yuh it's nothing. 'The fight's *on*! Those thugs were hired to cripple without marking me. They worked on my body, trying to get me to lead. When that guy blocked my last punch with his forearm, it felt like taking a sock at a plank."

"Yes, and prob'ly that thug's arm *was* protected with wood," Jimmy guessed. "And my next guess is that Harry Bewley, th' crooked rat, is behind th' whole thing."

"Yes, and that's why the fight's *on*," declared the Kid firmly. "If you call it off, you'll lose your appearance dough, and I'll get the old alibi razz from the reporters. No, Jimmy," he ended, "the fight's *on*!"

Nor could Jimmy Paige's most persuasive arguments budge the Kid's determination. So, being a wise manager, and a last-ditch fighter himself, Jimmy wasted no more words, but set about the task of working over the Kid's kayo clouter.

IV.

Down in their dressing room, below the main floor of Dreamland Auditorum, the Barbary Coast Kid, and Jimmy Paige waited for the call boy's summons.

A few doors away, the champion and his manager discussed their plans.

"It's a pipe," declared Bewley out of the corner of his thin-lipped mouth. "I got the straight dope. The Kid's right fin is on the bum. Madigan said he heard it go," Bewley snapped his fingers, "like that. All ya gotta do is wade in an' take this lollypop any time before the end o' the *fifth*. Remember, we're bettin' he don't come out for the sixth. That's how I got the big odds."

"I getcha," growled the champ. Then, after a moment of brooding silence: "Just the same I wisht ya hadn't pulled that stuff. I c'n take this Barbary Coast Kid even if he has *three* good hands. I c'n——"

"Lay off," snarled his manager. "Listen, guy, I'm the brains, see? I know what *I'm* doin'. What *you* gotta do is what I say, if ya wanta keep the title."

"Ring cleared for the main bout! All set for the main bout!"

The Kid slid from the rubbing table and stretched. Jimmy motioned one of the handlers to make ready for their ring entrance.

"Howzit, Kid?" he asked for perhaps the fourth time in half an hour.

The Kid showed his white, square teeth in a grin.

"Quit worrying," he said. "I tell yuh it's nothing. Everything'll be O. K."

A sharp rap on the door. Jimmy walked over and opened it, to confront a stranger.

"Well?" snapped Jimmy.

"I got somethin' awful important to tell the Barbary Coast Kid," said the visitor.

"I'm his manager. What is it?"

Something familiar in the man's voice brought the Kid peering over Jimmy's shoulder.

"Hello," said the Kid. Then: "Let 'im in, Jimmy. He's the guy I socked that night in front of the gym."

"So?" said Jimmy. "Come in, guy."

"Listen," burst out the man, addressing the Kid. "They've gotcha framed to-night."

"*How* framed?" cut in Jimmy, all attention.

"Well, I don't know just *how*. But I know they have," answered the other. "You see, I been workin' over in th' Battler's trainin' camp, doing odd chores. I heard 'em mention the Barbary Coast Kid. Said his hand was all busted again, and Bewley's bet the works the Kid never comes out for the sixth. I saw him pay off three guys that was all bunged up like they'd been in a fight."

"What else's Bewley got cooked up?" snapped Jimmy.

"Don't know, but I heard 'em talkin'

about it being a sure thing. That's why I got fired, for listenin'. Bewley threw me out on my ear. Wouldn't pay me my wages, either."

"Well, you've certainly put me in your debt, fellow," said the Kid. "We're due upstairs now, but see me afterward. Maybe Jimmy needs a man around the gym. How's the sick kiddie?"

"Lots better, thanks a lot," said the man. "Good luck. Beat those dirty chislers."

Ten thousand rabid fans greet the fighters with a mighty roar. The rivals shake hands and pose for the papers. The announcer introduces them from the ringside, and the champ makes his bow. Cheers mingle with the old army razz. The usual, useless inspection of bandages and gloves.

"Howzit feel?" Jimmy wanted to know again as he fitted the Kid's right hand with the glove he had just taken off his own hand.

"O. K., Jimmy," the Kid reported. "I'll just have to be careful until I get my chance, that's all."

Across the ring, "Battling" Barry in a bright-blue dressing gown, stood up and leaned over the ropes, laughing with a ringside friend.

The referee, once champ of the light-weights, called the fighters to the center for brief, but explicit, instructions.

Back to corners. Robes are jerked from bronzed shoulders, revealing the Kid's black trunks in sharp contrast to the Battler's loud purple ones, with the initials B. B. worked on the left leg in yellow. The warning whistle. The referee is alone in the ring with the two leather-slingers, who, eager for action, tug on top ropes, take a last dig in the rosin. There is hair-trigger suspense in the air.

Clang!

Out snap the house lights, leaving the soiled canvas of the ring floor, and the shuffling forms of the fighters the focal point for twenty thousand staring

eyes! Red exit lights gleam through the smoke like angry optics!

The gesture of touched gloves over the referee's outstretched arm. The distinct scrunch of resined elkhide soles, as the antagonists weave in. A medley of exclamations as the Kid's darting left opens the battle.

Following orders, the Battler plowed in recklessly, taking two for one, but always crowding. Twice in that first hectic round, the Kid was sorely tempted to blast a right to the Battler's outthrust jaw. But each time he curbed the impulse. "Not yet! Not yet!" he told himself. There must be no mistake when he made his big try.

Now the Kid was penned in his own corner. The Battler redoubled his efforts, swinging both hands for the body, despite the wicked left jabs that sought to stave him off. Abruptly the Kid threw himself back against the taut hemp to rebound out of danger.

"Nice work, Kid," murmured Jimmy Paige to himself between set jaws.

Wildly the Battler pivoted, to begin his stalking all over again. The Kid was like a will-o'-the-wisp. And always that lightning-fast left jab took steady toll.

Yet none knew better than the Kid, after the first two minutes of fighting, that he could never hope to stall off this tough ringman, much less win, with a mere left hand, no matter how clever it might be. As the round progressed, the Kid felt sure the champ knew about the crippled hand, otherwise he would never deliberately court disaster by leaving his jaw wide open time after time.

Head hunched between thick shoulders the Battler came on. Again the Kid's right leg touched hemp. A feint with the right that brought no attempted cover from the Battler—jab—jab, the Kid's left landed twice with such force that the Battler's blasting right swished over the Kid's ducking head by a foot! "Givum a pair o' glasses!" roared a facetious fan.

Around the ring. Boos and catcalls from all parts of the house, as the Kid repeatedly refused the champ's challenge to go trade.

And the Barbary Coast Kid, tortured by the crowd's insinuation that he was yellow, began to lose his temper. Anger, the emotion that has caused innumerable ring upsets, and crowned new champions in every line of sport, began to gnaw at his heart.

Abruptly he rushed, catching the Battler with a short hard left uppercut just below the wishbone. Then out flashed his right in a murderous hook that barely grazed the champ's stubble-covered chin.

"Nix!" bellowed Jimmy Paige. The Kid calmed on the instant, realizing that had his aim been true he might well have lost the fight then and there. The Battler was too rugged, too fresh, at this stage of the fight, to go out from a single wallop, even on the button.

"Jumpin' Judas!" broke from Jimmy, as the Kid sat down on the post stool at the bell. "Don't take chances with 'at mitt, Kid. If y'd landed then, it'd 'a' been just too bad."

"Sorry, Jimmy," said the Kid. "I lost my nanny for a second. It won't happen again."

"Sure set th' Battler thinkin', though," said Jimmy a moment later as he wiped the lad's face dry. "Might be a good idea t' keep 'im guessin'. Sorta feint with 'at right every so often. Get 'im believin' y'r timin' is bad, see?"

"I get you."

Over in the opposite corner, Bewley was saying:

"For Pete's sake, get goin'! What 're ya waltzing for? Ya didn't land one solid punch. He's making ya look like a crumbo. I've told ya he can't hit with his right. He——"

"Aw, pull in yer neck," growled the Battler. "I don't want any more tripe, see? How'm I gonna keep away from 'at left, smart guy?"

The bell!

Rushing out, the Kid cut loose with a slashing right hook, purposely missing by a good six inches. Wide open, the champ missed his chance to counter, and took a stiff-wristed left in the face as he covered before the two-fisted attack that did not materialize. Up rose the fans in a body, screeching encouragement.

More lefts, and a light right hook in the body made the Battler clinch. The Kid tied him up, and hooked three or four to the other's ribs, carefully avoiding a blocking elbow with his injured hand. Before the referee had a chance to part them, the Kid slipped away, stabbing the Battler twice in the mouth, cutting his lips badly. Down beside the corner post, Jimmy Paige grinned broadly.

Again the Kid anticipated the Battler's attack by blasting in before the other could set himself. A right uppercut that missed by a scant inch, caused the champ to pull sharply back and cover. The Kid feinted with his right again, shifted suddenly and cracked over a stinging left hook that must have jarred every tooth in the Battler's tough head.

It was the Kid's round by a wide margin, and Bewley raved as the champ, blood-smeared, and obviously worried, slumped to his seat.

"Ya sap," raged Bewley. "He's gotcha swingin' like a rusty gate. 'At right is on'y a barney. He's makin' a sucker outa ya. I tell ya he couldn't bust an egg with it. Get goin'."

"That's what *you* say," snarled the Battler, bristling. "If I wasn't out-smartin' 'im, he'd 'a' pinned one o' them rights on the button."

"Gee, but ain't ya dumb!" growled his manager impatiently. "I keep tellin' ya he's pullin' a stall with 'at right. Make 'im use it this next canto—if ya can. That is," he added with a sneer, "if ya got th' *guts*!"

"Whadda ya mean, *guts*!" gritted the

enraged fighter, half rising from his seat. "Lissen, I'll tell *you* sumpin——"

"Awright," growled Bewley, "let's go."

So, when the bell clanged the beginning of the third, the champ rushed in wide open. Out darted the Kid's left. Deliberately the Battler stuck out his square jaw.

"Go on, *hit* it, palooka," he invited.

Instinctively the Kid's right flashed for the tempting target. Too late the message of caution darted through his brain.

Bam! The wallop took the champ with staggering force on the jaw, but too high for a possible K. O. Yet the Battler's knees wobbled, for there was considerable dynamite in that one.

A zigzagging dart of agony raced up the Kid's arm, curbing his impulse to smash again! Bouncing off the taut ropes, the Battler plunged in, forcing the Kid to clinch and hang on as a violent nausea made him dizzy.

The referee struck free the Kid's clinging gloves. The champ drove in ruthlessly. A mighty roar came from the fans as the Kid vainly sought to stave off the attack with left jabs that had lost their power to hurt!

Nothing but his fighting heart, aided by the instinctive defense acquired through Jimmy Paige's tireless efforts, enabled him to weather the remainder of the third. Battered and punch-drunk, he reeled as Jimmy grasped him by an arm and led him to his corner.

V.

Jimmy, being a wise handler, wasted no precious seconds in useless argument. The thing now was to get the Kid ready for the next canto. Advice would come later.

"Take a deep breath. Relax."

The Kid obeyed, drawing deep breaths into his laboring lungs. He swung his wet head sharply aside as the

fumes of the dope bottle half strangled him.

"Bite," ordered Jimmy, pressing a cut lemon to his protégé's mouth.

"Rinse it out."

The fighter took a big swig at the water bottle.

"Work on 'is belly muscles," was Jimmy's curt order to his assistant. An ice-cold thermos bottle against the back of his neck brushed away the remaining fog from the Kid's brain.

"Hurt th' fin, didn't ya?" asked Jimmy.

"Aw, it's nothing," declared the Kid gamely.

The ten-second whistle!

"Take y'r time, and *watch f'r dirty work*," said Jimmy, as he stood just back of the Kid, outside the ropes, ready to pull the stool aside at the last possible second.

The Kid nodded without speaking, took a deep breath. His stomach had stopped churning. He was eager to go again.

Clang!

Across the canvas tore the wild-eyed champ, obeying last-second orders.

"Just what I said. His right is on the bum," had been Bewley's words. "Now it's busted, sure. He never tried to use it after that one shot. Another grand for ya if ya pop 'em *this* round!

Standing motionless until the champ swung a right from below the hip, the Kid rolled away and clinched hard, bringing a deep grunt from the overconfident one. In vain the Battler tried to reach the Kid's wind with short uppercuts. The Kid held him helpless.

Cries of admiration, instead of boos, greeted the clever Kid, as time after time he evaded the champ's mad rushes, or adroitly stepped in and held him powerless.

And, as the round wore on, the champ, doubtlessly realizing the Kid was growing stronger again, redoubled his frantic efforts to land a solid punch.

The Kid, glancing over his opponent's shoulder, met Jimmy's approving gray eyes. Breaking unexpectedly, he met the Battler's impetuous rush with a series of smashing lefts that dyed the tough one's face crimson. And as the bell clanged, he was effectively demonstrating how an educated left hand should be used.

"Kid, y're *great*," burst from Jimmy as the Kid lay back and hooked his wet mitts over the hemp. "Th' fin hurt much?"

There was no mistaking the admiration in Jimmy's voice, and the Kid's throat muscles contracted as he tried in vain to articulate his usual, "Aw, it's nothing, Jimmy." Deep in his heart the Kid felt that, even though he lost this fight, Jimmy would always know he had given his best.

"It's O. K., Jimmy. There's feeling coming back in it again. I've still got a kayo kiss there, and I won't *waste* it again, don't worry." He wasn't whipped yet, not by a long shot.

"Right. Be careful, this 's th' *fifth* comin' up. Bewley'll blow th' works now. Don't forget th' wise money says y' don't come out f'r th' sixth."

In the champion's corner, Bewley glanced nervously about the ringside, and spoke to his assistant.

"Stand over here in front so's nobody can get an eyeful." Then to the champ: "Give us that left mitt," as he quickly extracted a small bottle from his sweater pocket, and busied himself with the Battler's glove.

"Now keep that mitt away from your *own* mush. Get in *just one left jab* to his eyes. If ya don't tuck him away this canto, we're sunk."

The fighter regarded his manager with baleful eyes, but remained silent.

Bong!

This time the champ left his corner in a low crouch, left hand well forward. The Kid, cautious and mindful of Jimmy's earnest warning, let several fine

openings go to waste. The crowd began to dish out the razzberries in various keys.

"Throw 'em out!"

"Make 'em fight!"

Both boxers led lefts at the same moment. Both landed.

The Kid blinked rapidly. His eyes smarted, felt as though filled with fine dust. He slipped away, rubbing them with the backs of his gloves. The Battler piled into him, slinging leather recklessly. The Kid backed up amid the jeers of the crowd.

Through a curtain of water, the Kid dimly saw the champ start a man-killing right swing, misjudged it, and staggered off balance against the ropes as the punch took him a terrific clip on the jaw. He went under cover, head spinning like a top.

"What happened?" muttered Jimmy Paige, as he stared over the edge of the ring floor with eyes that threatened to pop from their sockets. "What happened?"

Caution thrown in the discard, the champ drove in, battering the challenger from rope to rope as he reeled blindly. But the Kid refused to go down under that blasting barrage of leather.

He shook the water from his aching eyes, and fought back as best he could. No thought of surrender in this ringman's fighting heart. Even as his knees buckled under a hard solar plexus wallop, two things stood out in his mind—he had been *fouled*, and he *must win*!

"Now! Now! Now!" bellowed Bewley with every drive of the Battler's mitts.

Sock! Down went the Kid from a right cross that sent his brain whirling like a merry-go-round. The champion grinned savagely through tattered lips, took a neutral corner as the referee began his count.

The Kid propped himself on an elbow and caught the referee's—seven." The faces around the ring ceased their wild

gyrations. He came slowly to his feet at "nine," evaded the Battler's pile-driving charge, and went into a clinch.

"Break! Break!"

The Kid's clinging gloves were abruptly slapped free. Too anxious to put over the finisher, the champ fired a hasty right, missed badly and found himself tied up again. Savagely he raked the Kid's face with his wirelike beard. But laboring lungs, and blistering eyeballs made the Kid oblivious to minor tortures.

"You yellow-backed rat!" he snarled in the Battler's cauliflower ear. "*You can't beat me!*"

And somehow he was still on his feet when the bell called a brief halt to the slaughter.

"What happened?" was Jimmy's first query.

"My eyes, Jimmy—my eyes. Something in them," panted the Kid.

"Gimme the olive oil," snapped Jimmy. The next moment he was applying it with lavish hand. "He prob'ly had cow itch on his glove. Y' know, that itching powder we kids used t' play tricks with. Th' dirty rat. I'm gonna let the ref know about this," and started across the ring.

But the Kid reached and grasped him by an arm.

"That's out," he grated, hard as a file. "I'm going to *take* this guy, if it's the last time I ever lace on a mitt!"

The bell for the sixth!

Across the ring the champ charged like a madman.

Still blinking from the moisture that made his vision tricky, the Kid managed to avoid the other's first two wild swings.

His sense of fair play outraged beyond endurance, a cold killing rage filled the Kid's every fiber. If the champ left another opening like that—

Crack! Rolling away from a left up-percut, the Kid stepped full into the champ's hooking right.

"One—two—three—four——" the Kid jerked his head from side to side, and climbed to his feet. The fight fans lost their last shreds of sanity as they paid tribute to such flaming courage!

The champ hurtled across the canvas, eyes blazing maniacally. But the Kid stopped him dead with a straight left that splattered the Battler's nose grotesquely to one side of his face!

"Kill 'im, Kid!" roared a fan with a foghorn voice, as the challenger tore in like a wild cat.

In vain the Battler tried by every known trick of the ring, fair and foul, to stem that avalanche of leather; the Kid was giving his everything in a last effort to win!

And now the champ, rushed off his feet, tried to cover. No use. The Kid's mitts clubbed him from both sides. Never mind with the injured hand. But one determination dominated the Kid now; he would *fight* and *keep on fighting* until he was either stretched, or champion!

And here was the Kid's chance, made to order! Thrown into the ropes by a rib-smashing left, the champ bounced out like an arrow from a longbow. The Kid, braced and waiting, knew it was now or never!

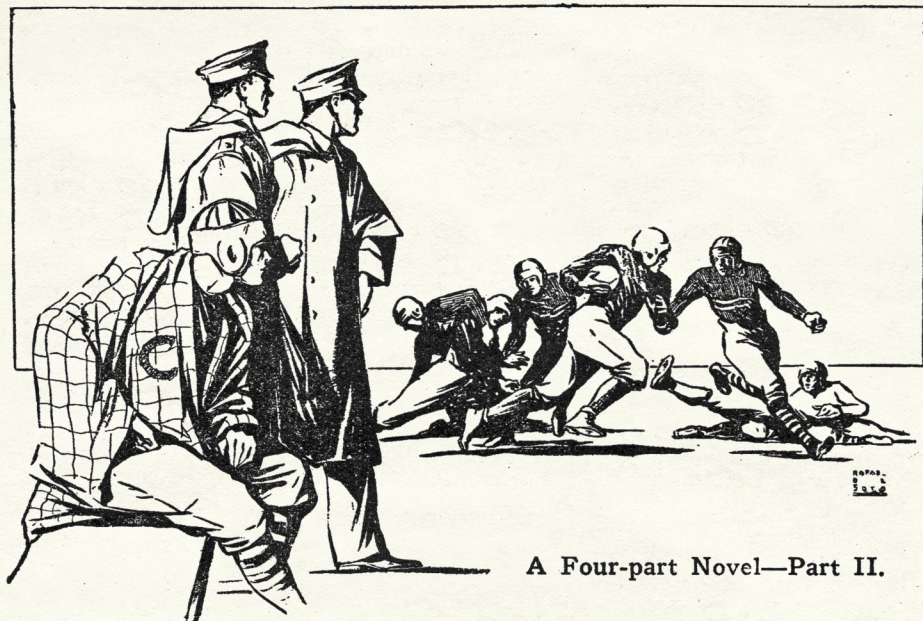
Smash! His mighty right exploded against the bewildered Battler's button, lifting him off his feet!

Thud! Sprawled on his back, gloves spread-eagled on the canvas in his own corner, the Battler never twitched an eyelid as the referee's "Ten, and out!" was lost in the roof-raising clamor of the wild-eyed ring worms.

"Gee! Y' didn't bust 'at right, didja?" were Jimmy's first anxious words, as he tore the Kid's gloves off.

The new champion grinned.

"No, Jimmy," the happy lad answered. "I didn't bust it, 'cause I can wiggle my fingers, see? It hurts like the very devil. But what's a sore hand when we've just won the welter title?"



A Four-part Novel—Part II.

The Last Down

By Lieut. John Hopper

Author of "The Bar Invisible," etc.

Read this condensed version of what happened in the opening installment of "The Last Down." Then you will be able to go right ahead and enjoy this thoroughly exciting football serial.

PHIL LOWELL couldn't be satisfied on the side lines. He had been taken out of the game with a badly-injured knee when his team was leading. But when Freeport High School, the opposing team, put over two touchdowns in rapid succession, Phil forgot all about his knee. He could only think of the score—Freeport, 18; Oakfield, 12—and of the fact that there was less than two minutes left to play.

Novak, the Oakfield coach, refused to listen to his pleadings.

"You don't want to win this game

any more than I do," Novak said. "It means a lot to me. But even if it meant my job as coach, I wouldn't put you in. No football game is worth making any man a cripple."

But Phil Lowell wanted Oakfield to win that game more than he wanted anything else in the world. He ran out onto the field.

"Lowell—in place of Spaulding, left half!" he called to the referee. And the Oakfield coach let it stand. It was poor discipline. But he *did* want to win that last game of the season with Oakfield's historic rival.

Phil Lowell came through. There was a little luck mixed up in it—but about four times as much fight as luck.

Lowell had to be taken home in the

big, yellow roadster of Roy Hammand. He didn't care so much about riding with Hammand, a snobbish young fellow with too much money in the family to be "regular," but Peggy Granum was sitting between Hammand and himself—and that was different.

Peggy was a slender girl, with a fresh, oval face and golden hair, and the merest dash of tiny freckles across the bridge of her saucy nose. She and Phil were classmates at Oakfield High, and school talk had always linked their names together approvingly.

"I'm having as much fun as I can these days," Hammand said casually. "Senator Hines was up to the bank to see dad the other day. I guess he owes dad's bank a lot of money. Anyhow, the old geezer offered to give me an appointment to West Point."

"To West Point!" Phil repeated. For as long as he could remember, he had wanted to go to West Point. He had taken a competitive examination for the congressional appointment from his district. His father's newspaper was doing poorly. If he didn't make West Point, there would be no college for him, he knew, unless he could work his way through.

He was doleful. It seemed hardly fair—Hammand getting the appointment so easily, while he himself, who was so keen on the idea, had to work so hard trying for it. And even then, he feared, he would probably lose out.

But his spirits hit a new high when, at the high-school dance in celebration of the victory over Freeport, Phil's mother telephoned him that he had won the appointment to the Military Academy. Despite his injured knee, and the fact that he could not dance with Peggy, and the fact that Peggy, for the first time since he had known her, seemed to be "acting up," he felt jubilant. He took a cab home, and, just as he was entering his home, was held up and attacked by ruffians.

CHAPTER V.

CRIES IN THE NIGHT.

MR. JAMES LOWELL, the editor of the *Oakfield Daily Herald*, ceased his nervous pacing of the living-room floor. His nickel-rimmed glasses turned questioningly toward the heavy-set man in the deep easy-chair beside the fireplace.

"Listen! Did you hear a cry just then?" Mr. Lowell asked.

Vincent Hammand, president of the Oakfield Loan & Trust Company, lifted his big head and listened for a moment. The flames flickering around the logs in the fireplace gleamed redly on his smooth, silvery hair.

"No," he said finally. "I didn't hear anything. It must have been the wind."

Lowell glanced at the mahogany clock on the white mantel above the fireplace.

"Midnight. I wonder what can be keeping Phil! He said he'd be home early from the country club. He has a pretty bad knee. Hurt it in the football game this afternoon, you know."

Hammand placed his pudgy fingers together over his paunchy middle.

"Yes," he smiled. "I saw the game this afternoon. Your son is a wonderful football player, Mr. Lowell."

A glow of pride spread across the editor's thin, tired-looking face. Behind his glasses, his pale-blue eyes brightened.

"He's a fine son, Mr. Hammand. I'm proud of him. Just to-night he received notification from Congressman Headway that he passed with highest grades the competitive examination for the appointment to West Point."

The banker had peculiar eyes. They protruded startlingly from under his massive forehead. They were brown and cold and noticeably calculating in their glance. Somehow they reminded an observer of a huge bullfrog sitting on a lily pad in a pond, patiently watch-

ing and waiting for unwary insects and flies. Now surprise flickered for an instant in their dark depths.

"West Point! Is that so? My son Roy has decided to go there, too. I got Senator Hines to give him an appointment."

It was Lowell's turn to be surprised. But his face surrendered to a congratulatory smile.

"Isn't that splendid, Mr. Hammand! Oakfield will be well represented at the Military Academy. Roy and Phil will have each other to depend on, too."

Hammand remained silent, frowning into the fireplace. So Lowell's son was going to West Point!

"There it is again!" said Lowell suddenly. "I'm almost certain that I heard something that sounded like a cry for help!"

He started for the curtained windows of the living room, but paused as Hammand's faintly derisive laugh followed him.

"Your nerves must be bothering you! That's only the wind through the trees."

"I guess you're right," Lowell laughed half-apologetically. "My nerves have been kind of jumpy lately."

Hammand studied Lowell closely from the shadowed depths of the easy-chair. The editor of the Oakfield *Daily Herald* was a small, frail-looking man, considerably different in physique from his husky, broad-shouldered son. However, the father, like the son, had thick, rather unruly hair above a high, intellectual forehead. The father's hair, once as black as Phil's, now was completely gray.

Hammand's gaze turned from the man and slowly swept around the neat and modestly-furnished living room. A thin smile curved the corners of the banker's lips as he thought of his own ornate, costly drawing-room and library. His gaze, colder and impenetrable, returned to Lowell.

"About the loan, Mr. Lowell——"

"Yes, the loan, Mr. Hammand."

Lowell's voice expressed eagerness and hope.

Hammand sighed.

"That's why I came over to see you to-night. I knew you were anxious. The board of directors of the bank considered your application this afternoon, and——"

"And——" said James Lowell in a low voice.

"I'm sorry, but I am quite sure that the request will not be granted. The *Herald*," Hammand shrugged his bulky shoulders, "is, after all, Mr. Lowell, in bad financial straits."

Lowell ran a thin hand nervously through his hair, making it bushy on his head.

"But—but, I *must* have the loan! Unless I get it, it will mean the end of the *Herald*." Appeal crept into Lowell's voice.

Hammand's gaze fell away to the fire. A pudgy forefinger tapped a smooth, fat knee. His face was soberly sympathetic, but there was triumph in his heart. The end of the *Herald* at last! Lowell's cursed paper had been a thorn in his side, always worrisome, and periodically threatening to become a poisoned thorn, fatal.

"The loan would save me, Mr. Hammand." The editor's hands trembled in his earnestness. "I'm on the track of something which will prove to be the biggest scoop Oakfield has ever known. It will take a little while longer before I can break it. But when I do, Oakfield will receive the most startling revelation in its history, the town will be rid of some unprincipled men who have been draining its very lifeblood, and the *Herald* will be a made newspaper."

Hammand leaned forward in his chair, narrowing his big eyes on Lowell's face.

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hammand, but I

don't feel that I can tell even you. A newspaper often has private information, which it must keep secret until the time is ripe to reveal it to the public. You understand? The danger of mistake, libel suits, and so on. But I am quite sure that I am on the trail of something big and startling in this city."

Hammand sat back in his chair. His words snapped out like whiplashes.

"The bank will not loan you the money."

For a moment Lowell was silent. His thin shoulders drooped.

"All right, Mr. Hammand," he smiled wearily. "I'm sorry. But it was very kind of you to come over here to-night and tell me."

"Humph!" grunted Hammand.

"I guess," the editor spoke again, "I shall have to sell out. There's one good thing, anyway. The *Herald* has a buyer ready to take it."

The editor turned away from the fireplace to walk toward the windows. His heart ached. It seemed that he had given his whole life to the *Herald*.

He did not feel the pain of his finger nails digging into the palms of his clenched fists. Within him, a rain of hot tears seemed slowly falling. Before he could bring about the scoop that would make the *Herald* the most eagerly read and most successful newspaper in Oakfield, he would lose it. A loan from Hammand's bank would have tided him over.

The banker's voice cut sharply across the room.

"What do you mean? Who wants to buy the *Herald*?"

"The All-Star Newspapers," replied Lowell dully. A country-wide chain of dailies—a big, powerful, wealthy organization."

If the lamps and dancing fire had not kept the room in partial gloom, Lowell would have seen Hammand's face grow more pasty in color, and his eyes protrude to more startling size.

"You mean," asked the banker tensely, "that they want to buy the *Herald* and run it?"

"What else? I can't keep it going without a loan."

Hammand's brain calculated with lightninglike rapidity. The All-Star Newspapers would be far more dangerous than Lowell. All that their newspapers wanted was news—startling, circulation-getting news. Little beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead.

"Listen, Lowell," he began, "maybe we've been a little hasty. I'm beginning to see——"

Somewhere in the house a doorbell rang, interrupting him.

"Just a minute, Mr. Hammand. Some one is at the front door. Perhaps it's Phil, though he usually carries a key."

Stepping from the living room to the hall, Mr. Lowell snapped on the hall light.

He started to open the door. His heart jumped suddenly when he realized that some one was leaning heavily against it. The unknown person's weight forced the door open wider. Mr. Lowell's eyes dilated with horror as the body of his son slumped into the hall.

"Phil!" he cried.

Phil's eyes were closed; his face and lips were pale. He was as one dead. The clothes, rent and twisted on his body, mutely told the story of a furious struggle.

Pinned to his chest was a large sheet of white paper.

The paper seemed to fascinate the editor, to draw his face down to it, so that his weak eyes, through the glasses, could read the letters it bore, crudely printed by hand:

"VOLTAGE IS DEADLY!"

Lowell whirled to find Hammand peering down over his shoulder. There was a strange light in the banker's protruding eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

"VOLTAGE IS DEADLY!"

THE doctor, hastily summoned, had come and gone. Down in the living room, James Lowell agitatedly paced the floor.

"It isn't so bad," he said, his voice shaking from the night's strain. "He got beat up considerably. The thing I'm most afraid of is his knee." He ran a hand through his hair, making it more bushy than before. "My son crippled for life. It would be horrible."

Vincent Hammand, once more in the chair beside the fireplace, placed the finger tips of his flabby hands together.

"Have you any idea who did it, Mr. Lowell?"

For a moment, the editor was silent.

"No," he said at last, "I don't know who did it, but I'm going to find out. I think that this is a case of a father's enemies striking at him through his son. Sometimes a newspaper can't avoid enemies."

Hammand studied the editor keenly.

"Mr. Lowell, if you will call at the bank in the morning, we can arrange the details of placing ten thousand dollars to the account of the *Herald*. I believe that the perpetrators of to-night's outrage should be caught and brought to justice. If you can accomplish that through your paper, then it should be kept going. Law and order must be maintained in the city."

Hammand stood up to go. The editor seized his hand with a fervent grasp.

"I—I don't know how to thank you! The *Herald* means so much to me."

The banker smiled suavely.

"Will a ninety-day note be all right, Mr. Lowell?"

Lines of worry reappeared on the editor's face.

"Ninety days, Mr. Hammand? That doesn't leave me much time to——"

"We'll make it something else then," interrupted the banker hastily. "Let us

say a demand note. It won't have to be repaid until you get on your feet."

Lowell shook his gray head dubiously.

"Demand notes are dangerous. They can be called at any time. I wouldn't like to take a chance like that with the *Herald*."

"Oh, don't worry about that!" said Hammand heartily. His protruding eyes appeared to be sheathed by transparent steel. "I'll see to it that it's not called until you are ready. You can depend on that."

The editor sighed reluctantly.

"I suppose there's nothing else I can do." His mouth twisted into a whimsical quirk. "I've got to have the money."

After the banker's departure, Lowell turned out the living-room light and made his way up the stairs. He paused on the threshold of his son's bedroom. He was always conscious of a curious feeling upon entering Phil's room. It reminded him poignantly of when he himself was a young man.

In furnishing, the room was distinctly masculine. It had a square, black mahogany, single bed, in which Phil now lay; a scarred writing desk and study table with a green-shade lamp; an austere chest of drawers.

Unlike many young men of his age, Phil was exceptionally neat, always keeping his room in perfect order—a trait, his father reflected, that would stand him well at West Point.

Mr. Lowell's glance fell upon the lithograph above the writing desk. It depicted a football player in the act of punting. Knotted in a bow above the picture were the colors of Oakfield, red and black.

The shadow of a frown flitted across the editor's thin features. Football was a dangerous game.

He crossed the room to where a plump, motherly woman sat in a chair beside the bed. Although her hair was

white, Mrs. Lowell's face looked as fresh and young as her son's. A smile nearly always was lurking in the corners of her mouth. Now, however, as she watched her son, the smile was miles away.

"You go and get some sleep, Ann," whispered Lowell to his wife. "I'll stay with Phil for a while."

Phil turned his face toward his father as his mother left the room.

"Hello, dad."

The editor nodded his head in reply and placed an affectionate hand on his son's shoulder.

"I'm going to send you away to school, Phil. You'll need some special instructions to help you pass those West Point entrance examinations in February. They're pretty hard."

Phil smiled and shook his head.

"Gee, it's kind of you, dad! But I know you can't afford it."

He moved in the bed and his face contracted with a sudden spasm of pain. His father watched him anxiously.

"I can afford it," said Mr. Lowell finally. "I'll be ten thousand dollars richer in the morning. Mr. Hammand, Roy's father, is going to arrange it with his bank. I don't know how I shall ever repay his kindness."

Phil failed to repress a start of surprise. Fate played queer tricks. His father owed a debt of gratitude to the father of the man who had captured Peggy Granum. He winced involuntarily at the thought.

James Lowell took a sheet of note paper from his coat and extended it to his son.

"Here is another reason why I'd like to have you away from Oakfield," he said quietly.

Phil's eyes widened as he read the neatly typewritten message:

TO THE EDITOR OF *The Daily Herald*:

You and your newspaper had better cut out sticking your noses into affairs that don't concern you. WE MEAN BUSINESS!

Now watch your step if you don't want to get hurt. Remember.

"VOLTAGE IS DEADLY."

"'Voltage Is Deadly'!" exclaimed Phil. "That was what was on the piece of paper pinned to my coat! What does it mean?"

Mr. Lowell folded the paper and returned it to his coat.

"I think it means the Oakfield Electric Light & Power Company."

"But I don't understand, dad!"

Mr. Lowell shook his head wearily.

"I wish I understood more than I do, Phil. All I know is that the electric company is floating in the city a stock issue larger than the company's assets warrant. It looks to me," he said soberly, "like an attempt to swindle. If it is, and I can find proof to publish in the *Herald*, we won't have to worry any more about money. The scoop will be the making of the paper."

"But," he concluded, "it seems that some one is mightily determined that I don't get any proof. This anonymous, threatening letter, and the cowardly attack on you——"

He broke off with a bitter laugh.

"I suppose if the *Herald* were like its worthy competitor, the Oakfield *Evening Eagle*, and published editorials urging people to be public-spirited and subscribe for the stock, these things wouldn't have happened. But," he finished in a grim, blunt tone, coming surprisingly from one with such a mild appearance, "I'm an editor, and not a politician. I try to publish the truth."

CHAPTER VII.

THE EAVESDROPPER.

MEANWHILE, in a more exclusive section of the city, Mr. Vincent Hammand entered the spacious library of his magnificent home. The lights had been turned low so that the room, with its walls of books and its massive furniture, was overlaid with shadows.

A short, swarthy figure rose out of a deep, leather chair.

"Ah, hello, Wilkins!" said Vincent Hammand. "Have I kept you waiting long?"

The man's dark eyes glittered and his lips parted with a smile that showed glistening white teeth.

"It would be news for Lowell and the *Herald* to know that the manager of the Oakfield Electric Light & Power Company visited the president of the Oakfield Loan & Trust Company at two in the morning, eh?"

Hammand glanced quickly around the library.

"Not so loud!" he cautioned.

"Well," asked Wilkins, sinking into the leather chair again, "what happened?"

A scowl drew down the corners of Hammand's heavy mouth.

"They got the son, all right."

"'Voltage Is Deadly'!" grinned Wilkins. "That was a swell idea of mine."

"Yes?" questioned the banker dubiously. "Well, it's not scaring Lowell any. He's going right on with the paper."

"Huh! Did you tell him about the loan?"

"I gave it to him."

Wilkins sprang to his feet, a snarl twisting his dark features.

"You fool! Were you crazy? Do you want to ruin us? Without that loan his meddling paper would have starved to death in another month."

"Shut up!" snapped Hammand. "And listen! I had to agree to let him have the money. If I hadn't, he would have sold the *Herald* to the All-Star Newspapers. They're angling to buy into this town."

Wilkins snapped his fingers in anger and dismay.

"That would be bad!" he exclaimed.

"But wait," smiled Hammand slyly. "Lowell took the money on a demand note."

An understanding grin spread across the face of Wilkins.

"I see-ee! Pretty foxy piece of work, Hammand. Now Mr. Nosy Editor Lowell *can't* sell out to the All-Star outfit. Phew! I had visions of our faces behind some nice, iron bars."

"Don't talk like that!" shuddered Hammand.

"But now," continued Wilkins, "we can close up the *Herald* any time we like. When it gets dangerous, you'll present your little demand note, and that's all there'll be to it."

Wilkins picked up his topcoat and hat. He started to leave, but turned suddenly toward the banker standing silently in the middle of the room.

"How about the *Evening Eagle*?" he demanded. "Is it still pushing the stock?"

"Don't worry about the *Eagle*," replied Hammand. "You know it's under my thumb."

After Wilkins was gone, Vincent Hammand walked slowly to a table, selected a cigar from the box reposing on it, and then sat down, with a grateful sigh, in a leather chair. The cigar remained unlighted between his lips. His mind was busy with thought.

Suddenly he took the cigar out of his mouth, and sat up straight. Some one was in the room! Deep in his fat chest, the banker's heart began to pound. He had heard a faint noise. It had come, apparently, from the large couch behind the long, low, massive, library table.

For all his bulk, the banker crossed the room as silently and swiftly as a cat. Gently he eased out a drawer from the table and took from it a revolver. The weapon gleamed in the dim light.

His temples throbbed. His nerves were shrieking silently. The room was again in dead silence, but he was positive that some one was behind the couch. That unknown some one had been listening to his conversation with Wilkins.

"Come out of there!" ordered Hammand thickly, leveling the gun over the couch. "Come out, you eavesdropping rat!"

A figure shot up suddenly from the couch.

"Don't——" cried a voice.

The report of the gun roared through the library. A scream followed it instantly.

Shaken by what he had done, but with his brain still functioning clearly, Hammand hurled himself across the room to snap a switch that would flood the library with additional light.

"I hope I killed him!" he muttered to himself. Curiously, his mind thought of an old maxim: "Dead men tell no tales."

His trembling fingers found the light switch at last. As he turned it, he thought, "I'll say I mistook him for a burglar. Certainly, no one could doubt that story."

He strode to the couch, in whose shadow the figure of a man lay crumpled.

Hammand dropped to his knees, his big eyes nearly jumping from his head.

"Oh!" he cried hoarsely. "Roy! My son!"

It took weeks for the city of Oakfield to digest the startling news that Banker Hammand had shot his son in the library of the Hammand home at two o'clock in the morning. However, the bank president's explanation—that he had thought his son was a burglar—was widely accepted.

Fortunately, the bullet had plowed through Roy's shoulder, and aside from keeping him home from school for several months, did no serious or lasting harm. It was remarked upon, but not considered so unusual in view of the circumstances, that now Roy evidently had a greater spending allowance than before, that he drove a new, more powerful, more rakish, and more expensive

roadster than the yellow one. It was noticed also that his attitude grew more arrogant, causing Oakfield to despise him as much as he professed to despise Oakfield.

What caused considerable surprise, however, was the fact that Peggy Granum gave him her company almost exclusively. Many who wished her well, shook their heads over it, and wondered why she preferred the insufferable Hammand to Phil Lowell. The more astute ones nodded their heads knowingly, and said that money did make a difference.

Phil Lowell himself came in for a share of the gossip and wonder. The rumor had gone about that he had been attacked at midnight outside of his own home and severely beaten by unknown assailants. But Phil was tight-mouthed about it, always replying enigmatically to prying questions.

Faced with two mysteries, the accidental shooting of Roy Hammand by his father, and the midnight attack on the popular Oakfield football star, the city buzzed for a while. With the departure of Phil for school, talk died away gradually, only flaming into life for a brief period when it became known that both he and Hammand had taken the West Point entrance examinations in February, and had passed them.

When July came, the two young men, the one whose right shoulder bore a puckered scar, the other whose left knee now carried him as strongly as his right, entrained for West Point to join the new plebe class entering the United States Military Academy. The city wondered for a while how they would get along—and then forgot them.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL FOR FOOTBALL.

PLEBE summer was nearly done when a notice appeared which set many minds to hoping and many hearts to throbbing excitedly:

**UNITED STATES CORPS OF
CADETS**

Daily Bulletin

August 15.

Par. 6. All new cadets desiring to try out for football report to Room 112 at 4:00 p. m. to-day.

As Cadet Phil Lowell stood in front of the bulletin board on the wall of the hall of the 4th Division of Old South Barracks, his heart was beating fast beneath the gray coat tight across his breast. For about the sixth time since, the mimeograph sheet of daily orders and notices had been posted at noon, he reread Paragraph 6.

It had come—the call for candidates for the Army team. Room 112, at four p. m.

Phil was alone in the gray, barren hall with its scrupulously clean, red composition floor. Essentially, he looked the same as when he had left Oakfield a month and a half before. Yet, a careful eye would have noted changes in his appearance; some obvious, like his neat, plain, dress uniform of gray, with its broad, black stripes down the trouser legs, and findings of black braid on the blouse.

Other changes were more subtle—a squarer set to his broad shoulders, a more alert poise of his head, a more graceful, straighter carriage of his body. The rigorous training of plebe summer had already set its mark on him.

He cast a glance through the open doorway of the hall. Outside, in the center of a large, level, graveled area, which was inclosed on three sides by four-story, graystone barrack buildings, and on the fourth side by the West Academic Building, he saw the Area clock, its big head atop a thin metal column. Nearly four. Time to report to Room 112.

He double-timed out of the hall to the covered porch of the north wing of old South Barracks. Plebes were allowed the more sedate pace of walking

only in the privacy of their rooms, and when they were in formations. Otherwise, they double-timed in their goings and comings.

Passing by the divisions of this oldest portion of the cadet barracks, Phil was more than ever conscious of shivery thrills within him. Fourth Division, Third, Second. Down those ancient halls, plebes of other days had gone, double-timing like himself. Their deeds were written forever on the pages of the nation's history. Robert E. Lee, the white-haired, loved general of the Confederacy; Ulysses S. Grant, Lee's dogged opponent and final conqueror; the fiery Stonewall Jackson; the Sherman, of "War is Hell!" fame! and, in more modern times, the bulldog of the A. E. F., "Black Jack" Pershing.

No wonder that thrills shot up and down Phil Lowell's spine every time he remembered that he was treading the very halls their feet had trod, occupying the same Spartan rooms they had occupied.

Down those halls, too, had gone the feet of Army's football heroes, formidable, legendary figures in these days of the sport—Daley, Gene Vidal, Oliphant, French, Eddie Garbisch, the most famous drop-kicker of his time, and "Light Horse" Harry Wilson.

Phil took a deep breath as he swerved into the 1st Division. He felt that he, too, was on the threshold of great things. His life and his future were before him, to make or mar. The heights he reached, depended upon himself.

He found ahead of him many other aspirants for places on the Army football squad. The line extended the length of the hall, and was like the gray tail of some beast whose lair was Room 112. Taking his place at the end, he started as he recognized the tall, yellow-haired man in front of him.

Roy Hammand, who had turned to see the new addition to the line, lifted

his eyebrows and his upper lip in a faint sneer, and pointedly turned away again.

Phil had seen little of his fellow townsman since the memorable second day of July, when they had entered the Academy.

Hammand, being taller, had been assigned to a different company, and lived in another division of the barracks. The swift days of plebe summer had been too crammed with drills, instruction, and adjustments to the new life, to allow much leisure for "the beasts" to visit outside their own particular companies.

Occasionally, however, he and Hammand had come upon each other in the Area. And always, they had passed by without a word. But Phil had not needed words to tell him the state of Hammand's feelings toward him. The hatred flaming openly in the greenish eyes had been enough.

The line of prospective candidates moved along quietly. New arrivals dropped in behind Phil.

Room 112 was the orderly room of the First Company of New Cadets. Behind an oak desk, sat Cadet Captain Dave Baxter, a rugged, gray mountain of a man in his dress uniform.

Each fourth classman who popped timidly into the room upon Baxter's roar of "Next!" surveyed him awesomely. For the mountain at the desk was *the* Baxter, captain of the Army team, whose name, on almost any football Saturday, was mentioned on the sporting pages of the country's newspapers more often than most.

Utterly unconscious of the havoc he wrought in the breasts of the plebes coming before him, he barked at them, grinned at them, and, after scribbling some entries in a notebook, dismissed them with a wave of his hand. He appeared to be thoroughly enjoying his task.

In a chair beside the desk sat a quiet

army officer, meditatively tapping his gleaming, cordovan boots with a neat riding crop as the plebes passed by in slow review—Lieutenant Garry Harding, whose name had been famous in football a few scant years previously. He had been summoned from his duties in the Regular Army to take charge of the coaching of the "C" squad, which was made up entirely of fourth classmen, ineligible for the varsity until they had completed their first year at the Academy.

Although Lieutenant Harding was a young man, hardly older than the first classman at the desk beside him, his dark hair was plentifully streaked with gray. In his dark, serious face, his brown eyes studied keenly each man who presented himself before Baxter.

"Next!" roared the football captain, in a voice that almost shook the walls of the room.

Roy Hammand stepped in.

"Name?"

"New Cadet Hammand, sir."

Baxter sat back in his chair and laced his hands in back of his big, brown head.

"Oh-ho! So you're Hammand, huh? Hammand of Auslem Prep?"

"Yes, sir!" said Hammand eagerly, surprised and gratified that his fame had evidently preceded him. "I also made the Inter-Preparatory eleven last year. Half back, sir."

The football captain glanced sideways at Coach Harding, whose sober expression remained unchanged.

"Hm-m-m!" said Baxter dryly. "That so!" Just a tinge of sarcasm edged his voice. However, it escaped the notice of Hammand, whose thoughts were concentrated on himself and the impression he was making.

"We need a good half back," the first classman continued. "Delaney, the All-American, is playing his last year. Think you could fill his shoes next season?"

Hammand's heart leaped.

"I've always played half back, sir. Left half."

Baxter lifted his eyebrows at the confidence in the plebe's tone.

"Yep!" he grinned at last. "That's the job—left half. But," he added grimly, "there'll probably be a lot of stiff opposition in your way, mister."

After he had waved Hammand through the door, Baxter turned to the officer.

"That's always the way," he snorted, "with these eggs who come here from prep school or high school with a little football success behind them."

Lieutenant Harding laughed silently.

"Come on, Baxter, get on with this business and stop your mumbling and snorting! If you upper classmen can't take down the swelled heads of these plebes, then West Point has changed since I was a cadet. Be glad Hammand came here at all. You can't get around the fact that he did some tall playing in prep school."

"Aw, he knows he's good," growled Baxter. "That kind of guy gives me a pain. Next!" he yelled.

The football captain eyed the respectful plebe who arrived before him.

"Name?"

"New Cadet Lowell, sir."

Baxter sniffed as he sat back in his chair again.

"You here to make the All-American, too?" he demanded.

"No, sir. To play football, sir."

A grin spread across Baxter's big face.

"Well, you've come to the right place, mister! By the way, how's that knee of yours?"

Phil was both surprised and puzzled that the Army football captain apparently knew about his injured knee.

"It's all right now, sir. I don't think—anyhow. I hope—it won't give me any more trouble."

Lieutenant Harding, fingering his

riding crop, intervened with an explanation.

"You seemed surprised, Mr. Lowell, that Mr. Baxter knew about your knee. We try to get a line on most promising football material before they report to the Academy. I received a very nice account of your helping to win the championship for your team despite the fact that you had a badly injured knee. That's the kind of grit we use on the Army team," the officer concluded.

Phil Lowell flushed to the roots of his black hair. Not knowing what else to say, he finally managed to stammer, "Thank you, sir!"

"You're a half back, aren't you, Lowell?" asked Baxter.

"Yes, sir. I played left half while in high school."

"Know a man by the name of Hammand? He comes from your podunk."

As brief as Phil's hesitation was, both the officer and the first classman caught it. They also noticed the lack of enthusiasm in the fourth classman's reply.

"Yes, sir. I know Mr. Hammand."

"Well," Baxter leaned forward, narrowing his eyes slightly, "he's decided he's going to fill Delaney's shoes at left half for the Army team. A little opposition for you, Mr. Lowell, to make the game more interesting."

The chance shot had found the mark. The wily captain of the Army team noted the sudden tightening of the fists that hung down at Lowell's trouser seams.

"Yes, sir," said Phil, his face emotionless.

"That's all." Baxter waved his big paw. "See you at practice next week, Mr. Lowell."

After Lowell's departure from the room, Lieutenant Harding frowned at the grinning Baxter.

"Do you realize that you're deliberately setting these two men at each other's throats?"

The football captain only grinned more.

"Lieutenant, we've just got to have a good man to take Delaney's place. And nothing makes a man fight harder and give all he's got in him than the knowledge that he's liable to lose out—especially to some one he doesn't particularly like. And, if I'm any good at reading signs, there's no love lost between this Hammand and Lowell. It's all for the Army team," he concluded righteously.

The coach of "C" squad shook his head, but he could not quite repress a smile.

"Baxter," he said, "you'd make a better diplomat than a soldier." Tapping his polished boot thoughtfully with the riding crop, he continued: "Heaven knows what kind of a war you've dumped in my lap—just to furnish your varsity with a good half back!"

CHAPTER IX.

YELLOW.

SEPTEMBER came quickly, and, with its arrival, West Point settled down to the routine of academic year. The new cadet companies were broken up, and the men were apportioned, according to height, among the twelve letter companies of the United States Corps of Cadets.

The first and third classes returned joyfully to barracks, glad to escape the discomforts of a summer under baking canvas. The second class returned dismally from furlough, bemoaning the freedom, the manifold pleasures of leave, the sweethearts left behind them on the great and glamorous "outside."

All three upper classes joined hands in falling unmercifully upon the bewildered plebes, who found themselves dizzily reporting from room to room, reciting their personal histories, undergoing various forms of ingenious, hereditary exercises, some rather painful,

but more merely ludicrous, devised by the upper class mind for the good of the plebe soul.

Phil Lowell found himself assigned to D Company, which occupied the 13th, 14th, and 15th Divisions of the newest wing of South Barracks. Roy Hammand, he rarely saw, except on the football practice field, or in the dressing rooms of the gymnasium after practice. The vagaries of officialdom and the fact that in size he was a "flanker" sent Roy to L Company, whose home was in the new North Barracks, across Diagonal Walk from South Barracks.

Phil was happier than he had ever been in his life. His greatest ambition was realized—he was a cadet at West Point. At times, he found it hard to believe, and asked himself: "Is it really so? Am I actually a West Pointer?"

Then he would look around at the grim, gray buildings, at the long, level Plain where parades were held, at the trim, straight, gray figures crossing the Area, and waves of emotion would shoot through him. A bugle call, brassy, commanding, stirring, would blare from a sally port, a drum would roll deafeningly—yes, he was at West Point.

His peace of mind was assured by the letters that arrived from home. His mother was fine, only she worried about the silly, little things mothers always worry about. Did he put on rubbers and raincoat in wet weather? Did he get the box of cakes she had sent by parcel post?

The editor, his father, was fine, too, and working hard on the *Herald*. No new developments in the Oakfield Electric Light & Power Company situation, except that the company was selling more stock every day.

One letter, Phil looked for in vain. His mind told him that it would never come. Yet, deep in his heart, there was a hope. He admitted to himself that he would give a lot to hear from Peggy Granum.

The football season proceeded apace. Army met the beginning of the season set-ups, and conquered them easily. Then came the grueling contests of mid-season. Harvard was downed; but Yale, after a heart-breaking game, proved the stronger in the final quarter.

As Phil sat with the "C" Squad, and watched the varsity battling in stadiums jammed with shouting thousands, his heart, at times, beat so suffocatingly that he could hardly breathe. Perspiration moistened the palms of his clenched hands, and delicious tremors coursed his spine when he thought that next year perhaps he would be out there on the turf-covered, white-lined rectangle, feeling the vast and sometimes terrifying loneliness a half back experienced, despite his knowledge that a hundred thousand pairs of eyes are focused on him.

The big games were the high spots in the "C" Squad's relentless, often monotonous, routine of practice. Football, according to a well-defined Army system, was learned from the ground up—tackling, blocking, running with the ball, passing, and kicking—day after day.

A rumor originated in the "C" Squad, spread to the "A" and "B" Squads, and then gradually diffused itself throughout the Corps of Cadets. Two plebes, Lowell and Hammand, were staging a continuous grim, relentless battle for the position of left half back. Both of them were good. One was sure to step into the famous Delaney's place next season. Which one would make it? The corps watched with interest this minor issue of the season.

Although Phil and Roy were thrown constantly together on the practice field, each seemed to ignore the other's presence. This curious fact, too, became known in the corps, and caused many to wonder about the reason. A football rivalry seemed insufficient grounds for such silent, earnest enmity.

After practice one brisk day in early November, an incident occurred in the dressing rooms of the gymnasium which set tongues to wagging and heads to speculating throughout the corps.

The football dressing rooms were in the basement. For the most part, they were filled with rows of green lockers, in front of which were long, low benches, on which the players sat while changing clothes. The air of the place, after a practice, was always hot and steamy, thick with the odors of the pungent ointments and compounds used by the rubbers in massaging bodies bruised and battered by scrimmage.

Phil had just come down from the showers upstairs, and was drying his muscular, naked body with a rough towel, when voices rising from behind a partition of clothes lockers, caught his attention.

"Say, Hammand, what's the trouble between you and Lowell, anyway?"

Phil smiled to himself. Evidently curiosity had got the better of some member of the squad. He was turning to take his dress uniform from the locker when his ears caught Hammand's reply.

"If you know what I know about him, you wouldn't notice him either." Hammand's drawl was contemptuous. "Nobody would," he added.

"Is that so?" Surprise was in the other's tone. "He's always seemed all right to me. What's the matter with him?"

"You don't know him," replied Hammand enigmatically.

"Go on, Hammand. Just what is the matter with me? Tell us!" The voice of Phil Lowell suddenly barked out.

Hammand, partially dressed, whirled to face Phil Lowell's blazing eyes. On the long bench were several men, all in the act of dressing. They had been listening attentively to Hammand. Now they looked up, startled at the two rivals.

For a moment, Hammand was disconcerted by Phil's sudden appearance. Then his mouth curled scornfully.

"I've told you before, Lowell, that you were a yellow dog. I, for one," he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, "don't care for the color. That's all."

Silence suddenly possessed the dressing rooms. Hammand's words had been loud and harsh. Curious faces appeared at the ends of the narrow corridor between lockers.

Phil's face whitened. Rage boiled within him. Then, suddenly, he remembered that, indirectly, he was indebted to Hammand. It had been Roy's father who had been responsible for the loan which had saved the *Herald*, and which had meant so much in the life of Phil's father.

That thought became like an invisible rope, keeping Phil back from hurling himself at Hammand's sneering face. It was one thing to try to outdo Hammand on the football field. But it was another to attack him physically. Phil found that he could not quite bring himself to do that.

Quite evidently, Hammand sensed his thoughts, for he turned away with an I-told-you-so shrug of his shoulders. The eyes of the crowd widened in amazement as they saw Lowell slowly drop his fists.

"Admirable self-control, Mr. Lowell," intervened an unperturbed voice smoothly.

All faces turned to see Lieutenant Garry Harding, coach of the "C" Squad, pass through a respectful division in the crowd and stride negligently down the locker room.

The lieutenant's keen gaze probed into Hammand's eyes, which finally wavered before it. The coach tapped his palm with his constant companion, the elegant, leather riding crop.

"There will be no grudge fights between members of my squad," he said

sharply. "Save your energies for the football field."

He turned to look at Lowell. What Phil saw in the depths of the officer's quiet gaze heightened his color. He was certain that he detected a faintly contemptuous glint. Harding, too, thought him yellow.

"A week from Friday," said the officer steadily, "the 'C' Squad plays its test game of the season. I have finally managed to arrange a game with the Notre Dame Freshmen. It will be a tough contest. You all know Notre Dame." He swept his gaze back and forth between Lowell and Hammand. "I think," he said with quiet emphasis, "that the question of who will play left half for the Army team next year, will be decided in this game. That's all, gentlemen."

CHAPTER X.

LOWELL FOR HAMMAND.

FRIDAY turned out to be gray and raw, with a hint of snow in the air. Because the varsity teams of Army and Notre Dame were playing in New York the next day, Michie Stadium was but partially filled.

The Corps of Cadets, however, about eleven hundred strong, turned out almost to the last man, to see the "C" Squad battle the Notre Dame Freshmen. They sought, perhaps, in this spectacle, some sign which might give a hint as to the result of the big game.

To the black-cowled figures, sitting in a silent row on the long bench at the Army side of the field, this game was the big game—perhaps one of the biggest in their football careers. The man who distinguished himself in this game was certain of a place on the Army varsity squad next season.

Phil Lowell sat at one end of the bench. Lieutenant Harding was starting Hammand at left half. Lowell was to have his try later in the game.

Phil's heart was heavy. Ever since

the incident in the gymnasium, he had been aware of a subtle change of attitude toward him by members of the squad. It even extended beyond football, spreading among his classmates and the upper classmen.

He knew the reason. They found it incomprehensible that a man should swallow the word "yellow"—unless he *was* yellow.

Many times since, Phil had argued the matter out with his soul. He was convinced that he had done right. The fact that Hammand possessed a disposition naturally mean, was not sufficient excuse for Phil to forget what Hammand's father had done for his father. If he and Roy battered each other with their fists, the news of it was most liable to get back to Oakfield, and there cause the editor of the *Herald* sorrow because his son fought with the son of the man who had aided him.

Phil sighed and shook his head regretfully. He admitted to himself that there was nothing he would like to do better than to come to blows with Hammand. Whether he could manage to win, or not, he did not know.

Hammand was taller, possessing the tremendous advantage of reach. The muscles of his rangy body were as hard and tough as Phil's own. Each had undergone approximately the same training.

But Phil knew he would like to try.

The Notre Dame Freshmen won the toss of the coin, and chose to receive the kick-off. Efficient-looking and grim, in their dark jerseys and light tan pants, they spread out in formation over the south half of the field. The "C" Squad eleven, wearing black jerseys, save that theirs carried bands of gold and gray around the middle, formed in line at the north end.

The scene, at that moment, printed itself indelibly on Phil's mind. The simple but beautiful white stadium,

open on one side revealing the gray waters of Lusk Reservoir. The barren woods beyond. The rugged hills, brown with leafless trees behind. The team, each figure distinct, poised, and ready, on the gridiron of dried, brown grass. And, over all, the gray November sky.

The referee's whistle shrilled.

Phil took a deep breath of the cold, raw air, as if that could quiet his thumping heart. The game was on. And out of the afternoon's play would come the man who would probably be the left half back of next year's Army team—Roy Hammand, or Phil Lowell.

The ball, impelled powerfully by the big, heavy toe of the "C" Squad's full back, sailed high in the air, a black oval against the gray sky.

A Notre Dame freshman half back dropped slowly backward, eager to make the catch and be away. He was oblivious to the hungry pack of the "C" Squad bearing down furiously upon him.

Unhurried, he received the ball. He ran a few steps, hesitated, and then grabbed frantically at the ball which had suddenly escaped from his arms.

The gray mass of the Cadet Corps in the middle of the stadium, and the handful of civilians who had come to watch the game, leaped to their feet with a roar. A fumbled ball!

The perverse pigskin bounded crazily toward the side line, with the freshman half back desperately pursuing it. Suddenly, a figure shot across in front of him. The uproar in the stands increased when it was seen that the newcomer's black jersey was encircled by bands of gold and gray.

Scooping up the ball in his swift stride, the "C" Squad player turned to face Notre Dame freshmen leaping at him from all directions.

Phil, on his feet and yelling like mad with the rest of the stadium, saw that the tall and rangy figure, twisting and

dodging among the Notre Dame players diving at him from all around, belonged to Hammand.

The freshman goal line was hardly twenty yards away. But a half dozen determined, desperate men in black jerseys barred the way.

To himself, Phil admitted that Hammand was making a superb effort, doing marvelous broken-field running. He side-stepped away from one pair of outstretched, black arms, straight-armed another player charging full into him, and avoided still another by a trick of shifty feet.

Then suddenly he was free. In another instant, he was across the goal line.

As the two teams lined up for the try-for-point after touchdown, the watchers of the game could hardly believe what had happened. A touchdown in the first minute of play. What a man this yellow-haired Hammand was! What a slippery, uncatchable, undownable demon he was, once he got loose with the ball!

Phil happened to look down the line of substitutes, and found Lieutenant Harding's eyes upon him. Were the officer's eyes slightly sardonic, or was it Phil's imagination?

The Notre Dame Freshmen took the kick-off again, and this time there was no fumble. And it was the long-limbed Hammand who finally downed the receiver in his tracks.

Now the freshmen, by furious line plunges, and sweeping end runs, managed to carry the ball to mid-field. They were desperate to recover the seven points lost by the fumble.

It seemed, too, that they were in a fair way of regaining them. Doggedly they pushed the "C" Squad eleven, but apparently outclassed, down the field.

Suddenly, the freshman full back took a pass from center, ran back a few steps, and then whipped his arm for-

ward. It was a beautiful forward pass, speeding straight as a cannon shell for a lone, uncovered black jersey waiting for it. Behind him were twenty-five deserted yards to the "C" Squad goal line.

To a man, the cadets in the stands groaned, and clenched their fists.

Then, out of nowhere, it seemed, a flying form materialized.

"Hammand! Hammand!" yelled the worried, excited stands.

Hammand it was. Almost from the very hands of the freshman, he snatched the ball.

He thudded back to earth again, the ball infolded in his arms. Dodging and shifting, he made thirty yards before the Notre Dame Freshmen, *en masse*, pulled him down.

The "C" Squad made only two line plunges, one by the right half back for a gain of a yard, and one by the smashing Hammand for a gain of six yards, when the time-keeper's deep-toned whistle announced the end of the first quarter.

"Lowell!"

Phil jumped at the command in the voice.

Lieutenant Harding's brown eyes snapped.

"Go in for Hammand. You've got," he added grimly, "some tall playing to do."

Phil's heart pounded like a trip hammer as he struggled out of his black, hooded sweater. His chance had come.

As Coach Harding had said, he had some "tall playing to do." Hammand had made one touchdown and had spectacularly averted another. His performance in the first quarter had been brilliant throughout.

Setting his lips grimly, Phil pulled his head helmet down over his ears and ran across the side line onto the field.

At one end of the stadium, the steel frame of a scoreboard extended above

the topmost row of seats and bore the result of the first quarter:

NOTRE DAME FRESHMEN—0
ARMY "C" SQUAD —7

The two teams were changing goals when Phil ran up to the referee and informed him that he had been sent into the game to substitute for Hammand.

The official nodded and raised his hand.

"Hammand out!" he called.

The rivals for the position of left half back on the Army varsity came face to face. Roy Hammand's gaze was full of hard triumph.

In another instant he was gone, trotting confidently toward the side line. From the gray mass of cadets in the center of the stadium, a rousing cheer lifted to greet him.

Hammand smiled to himself as he took a place on the substitutes' bench.

Out on the field, the referee sounded his whistle. It was time for the second quarter to begin.

Behind his team, which was crouched on the line of scrimmage waiting for the snap of the ball to hurl themselves at the weaving, waiting, Notre Dame Freshmen line, Phil leaned forward tensely. In the next fifteen minutes he had to show better playing than Hammand had in the first quarter.

The ball was on Notre Dame's forty-yard line, in the "C" Squad's possession. Third down—three yards to go.

Eberle, the "C" Squad's quarter back, a bullet of a man, short and compact, called signals in a clear, calm voice. A hush fell over the stadium.

Phil's heart leaped as his ears caught the staccato numbers. He was to carry the ball in a straight line buck.

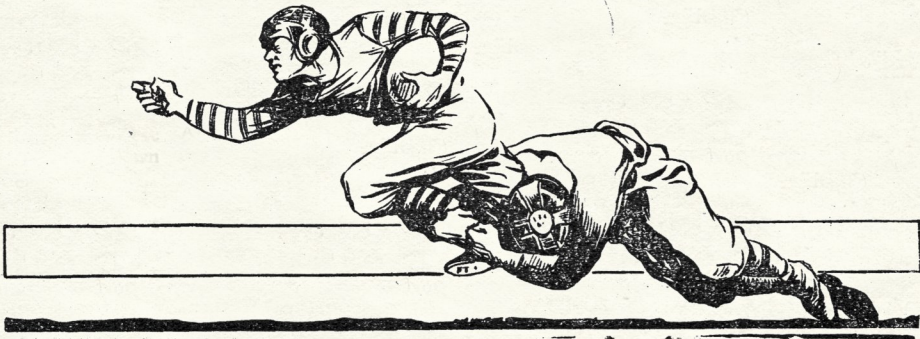
So much depended on what he did now—the chance to make half back on the Army team, his greatest ambition; the opportunity to even the score with Hammand on so many, many counts.

Almost as in a dream, he saw the ball come shooting back to him from center. It smacked against his hands, hard and round. The feel of it broke the spell that gripped him. The sense of fright fell away.

In front of him, the once orderly lines became a jumbled mass of struggling figures. Digging his cleats into the turf, he hurled himself forward.

Can grit beat luck? Does Phil Lowell win through or lose out? Which team wins the game—the West Point Plebes, or the Notre Dame Freshmen? Who gets the position of varsity half back?

You're going to get some real football and some real thrills in the next installment of "The Last Down," to be published in the December 1st issue of Street & Smith's Top-Notch Magazine. It'll be on the news stands November 1st. Remember that date—November 1st!



Bill Biff

By
Edgar
Daniel
Kramer



BILL BIFF was All-American,
The peaches and the cream,
The kind of husky football star
Of whom all coaches dream,
And when he hit a hostile line,
Or flitted 'round an end,
He was a juggernaut amuck
To smash and tear and rend.

Bill Biff wound up his college course
With laurels on his brow,
And, with his sheepskin tucked away,
He growled: "I'll cut loose now
With all the stuff that I possess,
And in this game called life
I'll show them all a thing or two
And conquer in the strife!"

Bill Biff set out to do his best,
But Failure cut him down,
While Competition met his buck
And dumped him on his crown;
Then Disappointment, Envy, Greed,
And Lust broke through to smear
A nifty pass and make him do
A waltz upon his ear.

Bill Biff saw red, and grit his teeth.
Then Coach Experience
Was saying: "Keep your head, old man,
And use a bit of sense;
Just concentrate on Failure, son;
Just pound him black and blue,
Until the yellow bozo quits
And you go crashing through!"

Bill Biff dug in his cleats, and yelled,
With fire in his eye:
"Just get my stuff and watch me make
A sucker of this guy!"
With Courage signaling the plays
That leaped up from his soul,
He hammered Failure to the earth
And smashed through to his goal.

The Bobble in the Plan

By
Owen
Clarke
Treleven

THE stage rolled to a stop in Valley Springs. A little man, dressed in a cheap, new suit, alighted, took a shiny suitcase from the driver, and stepped up to the board sidewalk, elevated a couple of feet above the roadbed. Then he set his baggage down, and mopped his perspiring face.

It was an odd face, wrinkled and seamed, but strangely youthful in mold. The eyes were small and black, and had a birdlike brightness.

"Warming up some, ain't it?"

The little stranger turned and saw that the speaker was a bearded man, a native of the place.

"Yes, sir, sure is," he returned cautiously. "Yes, sir, that's right." The small eyes took in every detail of the other man's attire. Evidently a mining man, the little fellow thought as he noted the light-colored Stetson, the woolen shirt and the corduroy trousers thrust into high, laced boots.

"Let's go in somewhere and have something cool to drink," the bearded one suggested and reached for the shiny, new suitcase.

"Look here, mister, you've made a mistake. You don't know me and——"

"Oh, I know you all right, Spike," the other returned. "I've been waitin' here for you according to agreement."



"Spike" Deming started and peered up into the bearded face.

"You—you're not Frank Fennell?" he ventured doubtfully. Then, as the other nodded, smiling confirmation, he continued. "But, gee, Frank, why all the scenery? What's the idea of all the whiskers in this hot weather?"

"Business reasons, Spike. Come on in where it's cooler, and I'll tell you all about it; I'll give you the layout."

When they had been served with soft drinks, Spike leaned across the table

and a perplexed look showed in his face.

"Frank," he said, "I figured from what you told me down there in the Big House on the bay, that as soon as you got out you'd go right back where they arrested you and start all over again. But you act kinda funny to me, and your letter was full of code words about a job you were figurin' on. The warden was suspicious of it. He called me in the office and gave it to me——"

Fennell interrupted.

"Spike, I wasn't sure of you until just the last talk I had with you before they turned me loose, down there. Remember I hinted then about needing a city man who could drive a team? Well, here's the layout in a nutshell. You remember I managed to get the Frisco papers pretty regular down there in stir? Do you recollect the clippings I had in a book in my cell? They told all about a guy named Adams and a new mine and stamp mill he'd started. Remember that?"

"Well, somethin' about it, Frank. Go on!"

Frank Fennell lit a cigarette and leaned closer across the table.

"J. P. Adams was the man whose testimony at my trial sent me to the Big House for grand larceny," he said evenly. "We both worked for the same company, eleven years ago. It was a big outfit, Spike. And he could have forgotten one thing I'd said in his hearing and one little thing he'd seen me do, mighty easy. But he didn't—and I went to the pen!"

"Wait a minute," he urged, as Spike attempted an interruption. "I'll make it short and sweet. Well, I collected every bit of news about this Adams I could get my hands on while I was doin' time. I knew when he leased this ground he's mining; I followed his financing through all the stages; knew when he went broke and when he re-financed. Learned all about his labor

troubles. I know how much he's milling now, how much he owes and I know how to break him flatter than a pancake and more than that. That's the job I wanted you for, Spike. I need you to help put it over."

Spike Deming's small eyes were troubled, and he drummed nervously on the table.

"Frank," he began with a worried air, "I kinda figured you might try and go straight just like I want to——"

"Spike," Fennell interrupted, "can that! I know what's the matter with you; the warden's parting advice got under your soft skin. It's old stuff; he tells everybody the same old hokum. Listen! I did come right back here—after a few weeks in Oakland to get this bunch of whiskers started. I went right up to Adams and found he was just starting out to try and find an assayer and mill superintendent. After eleven years, and with the beard, he didn't know me. I gave him a fancy line, showed him what I could do, and landed the job. I'm right where I wanted to be and working on the same plan I doped out down there in the Big House. It's a plan without a bobble, Spike. Not one bobble in the whole layout, if I know my onions."

Spike Deming had attempted to speak several times and desisted. Now, as Fennell's voice ceased he fidgeted in his chair and frowned doubtfully. His lean fingers drummed on the table, and after a minute's silence, he raised his eyes and looked soberly and fearlessly into the faintly mocking eyes of Frank Fennell.

"Get this!" he said earnestly. "I've been a regular little devil in my time. And I never figured much on being any thing else until yesterday. But, as you say, the warden give me a talking to and—he talked to me like a father would to his son. Something come over me all of a sudden and I made up my mind. Yes, sir, I made her up—like that! So

if the job you wrote me about—driving this Mr. Adams's horses—ain't on the up and up, why, you can deal me out before the draw. That's flat. Me—I'm shootin' square from now on."

His voice trailed off into silence, and a wistful look came into his seamed little face. His small, black eyes, bright as a bird's eyes, lost their restlessness and gazed steadily out through the open door into the clean, hot sunshine.

Frank Fennell opened his lips to speak and closed them. He leaned back in his chair and toyed with the soda-water bottle. He had been on the point of deriding Spike, sneering at him and belittling the worth of his new resolutions when a sudden thought struck him.

All along, since his duties in the penitentiary had thrown him into contact with Spike Deming, he had planned on using the little ex-jockey in executing his plan for vengeance upon J. P. Adams.

But now a better way for using him flashed into his mind. Let him go straight, he thought—the straighter the better. Old Adams was no fool, and, if he came to trust Spike implicitly, the less danger there would be for a bobble in the plan. For he instantly realized that, instead of coaching Spike in the part he would have to play, he could trust to the city man's natural nervousness in the hills—a nervousness as certain as that of the hill-billy in the confusion of a large city.

Then, when the time came to pull the big stunt he had figured, Spike would act true to form and the stunt would be more natural than it would have been as it was originally planned. Go straight, will he? The poor little sap! Not so bad, he thought, and suddenly he smiled at Spike.

"Spike, you little, sawed-off shrimp," he said, "why, dog-gone your leathery hide, I was only assaying you. Even back there in the Big House, that was all I was doing. And I want to tell you

that you assay pretty near a thousand fine. But I wanted to be sure about you before I took you up to see old J. P. Why, he's the salt of the earth, Spike. He took me at my word when I came to him and gave the best job he had, and I'm for him from now on."

His voice seemed so frank, and he gripped Spike's hand with such apparent sincerity that the little fellow was deceived.

"Gee, I'm sure glad to hear you say that, Frank," he said. "You sure had me fooled for a while. And I don't hold anything against you for trying me out that way. I know how I'd feel about a man who gave me a chance to go straight."

The blast of an automobile horn interrupted him. Fennell sprang to his feet.

"That's the kid that brought me down this morning. He had to go on in to Stockton and said he'd pick us up on the way back. Come on."

II.

They spoke but little during the first few miles. Spike looked with quickening interest at the passing scenery.

He was having his first view of the distant Sierras, blue as delicately tinted steel. They seemed to be majestically retreating before the eye into the charmed distance.

Farther on they passed San Andreas, and the road began to go up short canyons and dip into momentary swales in which grew jack pines. Their gray-green foliage seemed surprisingly clean and beautiful in Spike's eyes. Clusters of manzanita with bark that looked, at a little distance, liked polished cherry and with tightly bunched branches and foliage surprised Spike.

"Gee, Frank, what is that stuff?" he asked.

"Huh? Oh, that stuff? Manzanita." Fennell roused from a reverie and

glanced indifferently about him. He frowned and gazed at the bent back of the driver. Then he slid over in the seat, close to Spike.

"Now, Spike," he began softly, "we didn't get a chance to finish our talk back in Valley Springs and we'll do that little thing in my shack up at the mine. But I wanted to caution you about one thing before I forget it—keep mum about where we've been.. Nobody knows about you and me doing time down in the Big House."

Spike frowned. "Don't you think, Frank," he asked dubiously, "it would be better to tell this Mr. Adams all about us, where we been and——"

"Never mind that noise!" Fennell cut in briskly and with an authoritative ring in his voice. "That stuff is all right for the warden to spout as you're choosing your exit but there's nothing to it. Tell 'em nothing, that's my motto. Of course," he glanced warily at Spike, "if you hadn't come out and declared yourself on the square, back there in Valley Springs, I wouldn't have hired you. And I hope you're not holding any grudge against me for trying you out the way I did. I felt any method was justified in the interests of my employer," he finished with a hypocritical air.

"Well, if he'll give me a chance to go straight, and—and—if he'll let me drive his horses and curry them and jus' fool around the stable"—Spike drew a long breath and his little black eyes grew strangely soft and he averted his gaze for a moment and then continued—"he'll never have the chance to be sorry he's got an ex-con working for him."

The country became more beautiful, and Spike fell silent again and feasted his eyes in the ever-changing vista that rolled up to meet them and slid swiftly by. From time to time Fennell shot quick, surreptitious glances at Spike.

The car rolled down the hill into

Fourth Crossing, passed over the Calaveras River bridge, sped by Angels Camp and bounced along the rocky road up over Saunders's hill, and Spike saw the mountains again, closer now and more stationary to the vision, more intimate and friendly.

Around the hairpin curve in Vallecito, and the car headed for Murphy's Camp. They were coming into the mountains now, and Spike's eyes were shining. He inhaled deep breaths into the cramped lungs of his stunted body; inhaled and exhaled like a swimmer before the plunge.

"Great! Great!" he ejaculated as the whitewashed trees and broad, red-graveled street of Murphy's Camp came into view. "Some air, eh, Frank?"

The road narrowed going up the French Gulch hill, and the driver drove more slowly now. A mile or so, a small road turned off at a sign that read: "Golden Treasure Mine."

A narrow, winding road led up to the top of the hill. Here they left the car after covering it with an old tarpaulin.

"We walk down the rest of the way," Fennell announced. "She's pretty steep, but it's only a short ways. Pretty bad for a car at any time and just about impassable in winter. That's one reason why the old man does all his hauling with teams. They can get in and out in any weather. Of course, the main reason is, he's stubborn about automobiles; won't ride in one, they say. Just goofy about horses."

They rounded a bend, and Spike, whose eyes were already wide with childlike interest, looked down and saw the cluster of buildings, built on the steep slope of the side hill, clinging precariously to the canyon wall. The small cabins, the cook shack, from which a calm, blue smoke drifted lazily upward; the blacksmith shop beside the narrow track which came out of the tunnel in the mountainside; the adjacent com-

pressor room, and beyond it the mill itself, built on the steep side of the mountain and extending far below to where the last section was hidden in a clump of black oak.

Spike looked wonderingly at all this and beyond it to the beautiful little San Domingo creek far below; then he raised his eyes to the steep wall of the opposite side of the canyon. Suddenly and without warning, his little black eyes were filled with moisture.

III.

They found J. P. Adams over at the stables, which were built on a sloping hillside, half of the buildings nestling into a cut made in the hill and half built out on stilts. The old man stood leaning on the half door of the stables. His kind, old face was crowned by a thick shock of snow-white hair.

"Here's the man I told you I'd bring, Mr. Adams," Fennell began. "This here's Spike Deming, and he knows more about horses than a couple o' veterinaries."

Old J. P. turned with a smile and extended his hand. But for a moment Spike did not see it. He had come close to Adams's side and was gazing with a rapt expression into the stable where stood four of the finest blacks he had ever seen. Chunky, well-set-up wheelers with arched necks stood feeding next to the door, their plump legs rippling with silky muscles as they stamped in their stalls. Beyond them stood two beautiful leaders, shiny black like the wheelers, but smaller, with slim necks and dainty heads and exquisitely turned legs.

Adams chuckled at Spike's absorption and grinned at Fennell.

"Guess the boy likes hosses," he remarked. And when Spike turned an enraptured face up to him he added: "Not such a boy at that, are you? Put 'er there, Spike. Anybody that looks

at my hosses like that can have the job of drivin' them without a try-out."

They stood talking a few minutes, and then Adams led Fennell away from the stables, leaving Spike to slip into the building and croon over the beautiful animals.

As they left, Adams looked back over his shoulder and saw one of the wheelers standing stock-still. Its ears were flicking forward and back, and little Spike was leaning his head on his folded arms which were pressed tightly against the horse's flank.

Adams led Fennell out of earshot and then turned a troubled face toward his superintendent.

"I don't mind telling you I've been watching you since you've been with me, Fennell, and you've convinced me you know your business, and I'm going to take you into my confidence a little. I haven't asked you any questions about who you've worked for, and I'm not going to now, but you must have had a lot of experience with mills, judging by your work here. Doubtless you're familiar with the troubles that bother a man that's doing what I have been trying to do—get along on a shoe string.

"That's what it amounts to," he continued. "And I've been fought, tooth and nail, every step of the way in this deal. The Morning Glory people lawed me for years over this ground, and I had to borrow every cent it took to open the mine up and put up the mill and get it going. I'm mortgaged up to the hilt, and I just had a letter this morning from my attorney telling me that the Morning Glory Mining Company have bought up all the mortgages against me and the Golden Treasure."

This was no news to Fennell. So thoroughly familiar had he made himself with the business of Adams, before his release from prison and after, that he could have foretold just such a happening as this. He held his tongue and Adams continued:

"The next interest falls due the thirty-first of this month. To-day is the eighteenth. Between this day and the last of the month we've got to make the biggest run the old mine and mill will ever have. I've started the four-o'clock shift working in both of those east drifts. There's rich stuff blocked out in there and I have been saving it for just such an emergency as this.

"Beginning to-night we'll run that ore. And, Fennell, I want you to watch the run closer than a hawk. Sample the mortars all day; get ahead and tail samples at least once an hour, and watch that pulp. If she begins to roll, take the top off and tell the mill man to keep the surface soft if he has to use all the quick there is in Calaveras County. We can't lose an ounce all this month. Assay everything, and let me know at least once a day how she's running. For, you see, if the worst comes to the worst and those east drifts fail me, I want to know it in time to make one more effort to raise money to tide me over. It will be hard to raise a cent but there's no harm trying."

He now dropped his voice and came closer to Fennell and laid a hand on the latter's shoulder.

"And, my boy," he continued, and his voice quavered just a little, "you've seen my daughter, Ann. You know how she suffers with that hip trouble and you know what I am afraid it is—tuberculosis. Doc Nash was out here two-three hours ago, and he says it means an immediate operation, an expensive operation. So you see what I'm up against. I *must* know every day or so what the mill is running and I *must* meet that interest on the thirty-first."

The old man turned away abruptly and, Fennell, who was unable to restrain his face from registering unholy glee, waited a moment and then followed him slowly. Before he had gone far, the supper bell rang.

Fennell looked around for Spike and

finally located him a few yards down the mountainside, perched on a rock and listening raptly to the song of a sickle-bill thrush. The bird swayed on the top of some buck brush, and Spike's small eyes danced as he watched it.

"Gee, Frank!" was all he said, as the superintendent led him away to supper.

All through the meal Fennell was unusually silent, paying no heed to any one and neglecting Spike Deming who, as a newcomer, should have been introduced to the men and included in their conversation. A smile played about the bearded lips of the silent superintendent—a bitter smile. His eyes were hard and bright with suppressed emotion. As soon as the meal was ended he rose silently and disappeared down the canyon. After he went a short distance, he stood on a little spur that ran out from the ridge. The place was concealed from accurate observation from the mine and mill, but through the network of trees Fennell could watch closely.

He sat smoking until the short dusk changed into darkness. Occasional strains of graphophone music came to him, wafted on the light gusts of night wind, just settling in to blow down the canyon.

He sat there until long after dark, and it seemed he was trying to lash himself into a rage. But when he rose to go, to prepare the first part of the plan he had concocted, he became calmer. He went down the trail cautiously, careful that he would not be seen, and circled the buildings until he came to the blacksmith shop.

The mill was lit up, and the stamps pounded steadily along, the vibration of their blows shaking the ground he stood on. He waited until a mucker dumped a car of ore in the bins and pushed the empty car back into the tunnel.

Then he swiftly tore some sacking from a box which lay in a corner and extracted a piece of babbitt, which is

like lead, used in babbitting bearings. This he carried quickly to the little assay room adjacent to the concentrator house and hid it away from casual eyes. Then, well content with himself and the assurance of success in the undertaking he had planned, he went to his cabin.

IV.

The days flew swiftly by and seemed uneventful. Spike was put to hauling supplies from Angels, blacksmith coal and tools; and from a near-by cutting, logs and lagging for the mine.

Adams carefully watched the little fellow handle his beloved blacks the first time they were driven down the steep, narrow road to the mill. His eyes gleamed approval as he noted how easily Spike learned to handle four-up; noticed how he threw the leaders up or downhill, as the case might be, around a sharp curve, and how gently but firmly he held the wheelers' weight back against the load.

It was a joy to the old man to watch Spike start them under a load; to see him imparting quiet confidence to the horses, waiting until just the right moment, and then causing each horse to settle into the collar at the same time.

Fennell was busy, apparently doing everything in his power to aid Adams. He assayed faithfully, and, more than the requested once a day, carried his balance sheets to his employer. As the mill ran good ore from the east drifts, the assay went higher and higher, and old J. P. began to be more cheerful.

It had been his practice to mold the amalgam into a brick once a month and send it down to the express office at Angels on the thirtieth. To this end the amalgam from the half-monthly clean-up had been retorted into buttons and kept in a small safe in the assay office. The safe was never locked and, according to directions, Fennell added the buttons made from the loose or roll-

ing pulp from the plates, to the others in the safe.

On the twenty-third of the month Adams hitched the leaders up to his old buckboard and drove over to Sheep-ranch to see about buying some second-hand machinery from the abandoned mill there. Spike had the wheelers out in Dragoni's woods, snaking logs and doing the work like an old hand.

Fennell then did a queer thing. He assured himself that all the mill men were busy, and then locked himself into the assay office and started the furnace which was heated by a force-feed gasoline burner. He worked feverishly for a while, and when he was through, he carefully hid what he had been making.

"Put me in the jute mill in the Big House, eh?" he muttered to himself and smiled a cold smile as he finally unlocked the door and went to collect his samples from the mortars.

The next day he sought Adams. After assuring the mine owner that unless everything failed, the total clean-up at the end of the month should run around nine thousand dollars, he casually led the conversation into details of the disposal of the gold.

"Now this is only an idea," he offered with a deprecatory air. "But I've been thinking. Of course it's ridiculous to conjure up trouble but it's always wise to be prepared. And, while there hasn't been an attempt made to stop a brick going out of here, why wouldn't it be a good idea to vary your program and send it down to Angels on, say, the twenty-ninth instead of the thirtieth, as you usually do?"

Adams considered this and assented at once.

"Yes, as you say, we'd be foolish to anticipate anything like a holdup in this day and age and this country, but it's well to be on the safe side. I think your suggestion is good. We'll do that." And, Fennell—his voice softened—"just as soon as I get the mint's receipt, I'll be

taking my daughter down below to the best surgeon in San Francisco or Oakland."

The next morning Fennell announced a terrible toothache and, as one of the men who owned a car was off shift, hired him to take him to the nearest dentist. After an hour in town, he sought his driver out and sent him back to the mine.

"Doc says he'll have to treat it today and fill it in the morning," he said. "Tell J. P. I'll hire a car to bring me back about noon to-morrow. Tell him to have the assay samples ready for me."

His tooth promptly ceased to bother him, and he spent the next few hours in a card game. After nightfall he sought out "Big Foot" Durgan's place.

The Calaveras Railroad was building into the Big Trees and, as usual, the construction work attracted rag dumps and their attendant personnel of pluggers, cappers, and strong-arm men—the whole motley crew that follow and prey upon the working "stiffs." Durgan's place was the rendezvous for most of them.

Fennell's subsequent actions were, apparently, without reason. He seemed to be trying to get beastly drunk this night. He began by treating the house, and, while he continued and drank and joked, he shrewdly studied the crowd assembled, and apparently proceeded to become very drunk.

As the evening progressed, he made new acquaintances and roared confidences to them. Over and over he told everybody who he was, and assured them he ran the richest mine in Calaveras County. He sobbed over the hard luck the Golden Treasure had suffered, and banged the bar with his fist as he told of the change of luck and the big clean-up it would have this month. But it was not until a soft-voiced man, who had inveigled him to drink in a back room, asked him when he was shipping

the brick, that he was satisfied with his night's work.

He peered at the fellow with eyes that seemed quite blurred with drink.

"You're a good fellow," he said. "You won't tell a soul—I know. Comin' down, twenty-ninth, last thing in the afternoon. I'll get her through all right—b'lieve me, fella. Goin' to sneak down the grade road; nobody much uses it, and y'see nobody's goin' to know. Pretty good, hey, fella?"

Soon after he went to the hotel, and, when he had gone a little way, his step lost its lurch and he straightened up.

"Oh, you'll be there, my friend," he said. "You and two or three others, with guns and masks, and you'll be after the brick. You'll get it, too, and I'll be left out—holdin' the sack. Oh, yeah! Sure! And Spike'll be driving and won't know what it's all about until it's over!"

The mill was shut down the twenty-ninth and the clean-up made. The stamps were hung and the mortars panned with a hose. Every vestige of amalgam was lifted from the plates, Fennell doing a lot of this work himself with sharp chisels. J. P. Adams was as happy as a boy, when he saw the retort filled with the pulp.

"Now, my boy," he stated cheerfully, "I'll clear out and leave you alone. You can work faster without me puttering around in the way. The whole crew is anxious about the brick, and excited, so you better lock the door to keep them from bothering around."

Spike Deming was flushed with the proud knowledge of the responsibility invested in him as he drove away a few hours later with Fennell at his side. Fennell was also flushed, but with excited assurance that he had won out; had won in the long-planned trick to avenge himself upon old J. P. Adams. And, he knew, the loss of the gold itself could not mean so much to the old man as would his inability to have his daugh-

ter taken care of, when his mine and mill should be lost to him.

"Now, Spike," Fennell began after they had made the turn at the bottom of the French Gulch road hill and started down the grade road. "I don't want to scare you or anything like that, but you want to remember we are carrying a lot of gold, and there is always a bare chance of getting stopped anywhere with so much wealth. Mind, I don't expect anything to happen, but if it should—if anything went wrong—you don't want to lose your head. If you should see anything suspicious it would be all right to get out the rifle that's between your feet, but if anything should happen and you see yourself covered, why, don't you make a move. It'd be foolish, Spike." Fennell leaned back satisfied, knowing well what would happen, and how suddenly it would happen.

The canyon, from which the sun had departed an hour ago, was cooling off. The air was sweet with the odor of sun-warmed pines. The little creek, below the road, swept along noisily in places and made happy music in proud Spike's ears.

They passed the Steinback place, which lay in a little clearing, and the road narrowed. Over and over in his mind Fennell rehearsed the scene he expected would happen. Then they approached a narrow place in the road, at the side of which an old, abandoned tunnel was cut into the cliff.

"Ah-h-h——"

Fennell began an exclamation but never finished it. Things happened so quickly, and when they were over he could not finish it.

Just as the horses approached the tunnel a man appeared in its narrow portal. Another sprang up the bank, on the other side of the road. They both carried guns in their hands, wore masks over their faces, and their coats were turned inside out. Fennell had time enough to see that.

Spike saw them, and his hand jerked as if to pick up the rifle. Then he recalled Fennell's words. But he remembered something else—the anxiety of old Adams over the funds for his daughter's operation.

And then he "bobbled" the carefully thought-out plan!

It all happened in a split second, but in that time Spike made up his mind. This was his opportunity to repay Adams for giving him his chance to go straight. Imperceptibly tightening the reins, he snatched the old buggy whip from its socket and lashed the startled horses into a breakneck gallop. The instant his hand moved, the guns in the hands of the highwaymen crackled and spit yellow fire, but in that same instant their target moved. Spike leaned low over the dash, but even as he did so, there came a smashing blow in his right arm and the whip dropped.

In the confusion of the moment he was aware of two things—his mad haste to get away with the brick and a peculiar sound at his side; such a sound as a man makes when the breath has been expelled with great force from his lungs.

He knew Fennell was hit, but he could not turn. It took all his skill to hold the swaying vehicle in the road.

A hot ache was creeping into his shoulder and neck, but he grimly hung on to the straining reins with his left hand. His right hung useless and jerked and swayed oddly at his knee.

V.

Spike stopped the heaving, trembling horses before the express office in Angels Camp and limply descended. He swayed as he stood on the sidewalk and looked down dully at the dark drops which fell from his useless arm. Some one quickly stepped to his side but he paid no heed. He reached in the seat and extracted the brick wrapped in a

canvas cover, and, hugging it to his side, he lurched into the express office.

Just how he kept his feet, no one knew. Probably Spike Deming himself didn't know.

It was the spirit of the man that was keeping him upright. It was sheer will power. Adams had been a good boss, a fair boss. Adams had depended upon Spike. Therefore, Spike would come through.

The brick fell to the floor just inside the door, and he looked down at it in dull surprise.

"Here's the brick from the Golden Treasure," he said in a tremulous voice, and crumpled to the floor in a faint.

Out in the street, men lifted the still body of Fennell to the sidewalk; others ran for a doctor. A child screamed as it saw the spattered face of the dead man before some one covered it with a coat.

Inside the express office, some one lifted Spike to a chair. The expressman picked up the brick and cried out in amazement.

"Why, it's lead," he cried. Others stepped over to him and saw that it was so—a bar of lead with gilt paint baked on it. One corner had been pounded in by the fall, and all could see where the gilt paint had been rubbed off.

After the sheriff got there from San Andreas, he called Adams on the tele-

phone and directed him to search among the dead man's effects for the gold.

Adams searched and telephoned back. "Why, the gold is right here," he said. "It's under a coat on a bench in the assay room."

Then they understood fully the mystery of the killing and the gilded bar of babbitt.

"Some scheme," the officer said. "You see he *wanted* to be held up. He wanted somebody to steal that 'brick,' which would leave him in possession of the real gold. He knew the thieves dared not tell when they learned their error. I found out he'd bragged about the size of it the other night in a rum dump and, even told the day he was coming down with it and the road he'd take. He was supposed to be drunk, but the clerk at the hotel saw him come in and go to bed, as sober as a judge."

The officer grinned.

"Sometimes when a feller thinks he's foolin' everybody—well, sometimes he's wrong. Sometimes he's jest foolin' himself."

And when they told Spike Deming, after his wound had been dressed and pronounced a slight one, he remembered the hard look in Fennell's eyes that day in Valley Springs.

"A plan without a bobble, hey?" he muttered after the sheriff had gone. "Well, I guess I was the bobble in that plan."



Top-Notch Talk

BY
THE EDITOR

All letters intended for Top-Notch Talk should be addressed to the Editor,
Street & Smith's Top-Notch Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

MORE letters from Top-Notch readers, continue to reach me every day. Even with the extra page given to Top-Notch Talk, sometimes there is not room enough to print them all.

The Top-Notch family, it seems to me, is a happy one. Not that there aren't kicks once in a while. There should be. I want them. I want to find exactly what most Top-Notchers like and what they don't like.

If you've never edited a magazine, you really can't begin to realize the variety of opinions received by an editor. Once in a while a story which he thinks is a "wow" falls flat. It is probably a pretty good story, too. That is an editor's business, selecting good stories. But there always comes the time when he selects a story which is good technically, well written, exciting, offensive to no group of readers, and still, when the story gets out, he finds that it just lacked appeal. It's a blue day when letters inform him of this development.

But, to make up for it, there are days when letters come in from readers who rave about a story which may have been presented to them tremblingly.

Some readers never get tired of a good series. Many readers who have read Top-Notch for twenty years would like to see a Burt L. Standish yarn in every issue. On the other hand, there are readers who like a series for a time, and then find that their interest gradually peters out.

Top-Notch is now running several series. These are Burt L. Standish's novelettes about "Brick and Boots," John Paul Seabrooke's series on "The Hawk," Ralph Boston's O. K. Polter detective stories, the Western yarns by Tex Bradley and Houston Irvine, and the Big Woods series by Vance Richardson.

Have you ever written me about these particular stories? If not, will you shoot me a line? Let me know whether you think they're great, or just pretty fair, or poor. Let me know whether you think they ought to be run more often or less often.

Ralph Boston has a new novelette in the next issue of Top-Notch. And, this time, it's not about his popular characters, O. K. Polter and Dreamy McVey.

"I just didn't think this was an O. K. Polter story," Mr. Boston said when he submitted the manuscript. "The main incidents in the story really happened in a large city on the Atlantic coast. Let me know what you really think of it."

And the most convincing answer as to what I "really think of it" is the cover on the next issue of Top-Notch. It was a thoroughly exciting detective novelette, I thought, so I gave it the cover illustration.

Its title is "The Murder Broker." Here's betting that you like it—a lot.

In the last issue of Top-Notch, I mentioned a coming story written by

Tex Bradley—"Kid Buckaroo's Bar Anchor Job."

This story—a fast novelette, and with the action real, I thought—will be one of the features of the next issue of Top-Notch.

And say! Want to read a great fight yarn? Then don't overlook "Toy Bulldog," by Robert H. H. Nichols in the next Top-Notch.

All the fighting doesn't take place in the ring. There are some ring battles, but there's a much bigger fight, too. You've all heard about that big fight. It was called the World War.

Warren E. Carleton, Clay Perry, and other favorites of Top-Notch readers also contribute to the 1st December issue. It'll be on the news stands on November 1st.

Here are two different opinions on the "Brick and Boots" series. A reader from Albany, New York, says he wishes they could be run every issue. And a reader from Chicopee, Massachusetts, doesn't care for them at all.

DEAR TOP-NOTCH EDITOR: I have found all sorts of stories in your magazine, some great, some pretty good, some not so good. But the best I have found in some time are those of Burt L. Standish's new series, "Brick and Boots."

If you could run one of these stories every issue, you wouldn't make any mistake. Every town has a ball team, some towns more than one. Baseball's the greatest game we have, and always will be. Tell Burt L. to give us more.

HAROLD GREENE.

Albany, New York.

DEAR SIR: I have been a reader of Top-Notch for six years, and think it is a mighty fine magazine. All stories are clean and good reading. Would like to see some more "Speed Dash" stories and "Seward of Sacatone." I like stories of the big timber country.

Don't care much for Westerns, and don't care for the present Burt Standish "Brick and Boots" series. It is all too foolish and unreal. Give us more *Kroom* stories. They were great.

GEORGE D. CARPENTER.

Chicopee, Massachusetts.

Are your letters printed below? If not, and if you have mailed in your opinion, look forward to seeing them reprinted in this department real soon.

ARNOLD B. HUTTON.—Like all your other fans, I am writing to tell you how much I enjoy your magazine. The Top-Notch speaks for itself with all its good stories. I have been reading your magazine for a year and a half, enjoying it more than ever. Ralph Boston, Burt L. Standish, and the others certainly know what they're writing about. Keep up the good work.—*Passaic, New Jersey*.

O. J. ANDERSON.—Have been a reader of Top-Notch for quite a few years. Like it very well. The first story I read was "Lefty of the Big League." Why don't you print that story again? I am sure there would be many who would like to read it. As long as you give us the stories you are giving us now, you will always have me for a reader.—*Chicago, Illinois*.

Glad you liked that story. But Top-Notch Magazine runs only new stories. It does not use reprint material of any sort.

R. E. SHEFFER.—I have been a reader of your magazine quite a while, and I like it very much. But I am a checker player and I got a few points from it formerly, but of late there's no checkers in it. I would like for you to tell me how to get some good games, as I am a good reader of your magazine.—*Union Deposit, Pennsylvania*.

W. W. W.—About a month ago I discovered your Top-Notch Magazine, and I am writing to tell you how much I enjoy it. I can't wait until the next issue is on the news stand. I enjoyed all your stories very much, especially "Brick and Boots" baseball series and your detective stories of O. K. Polter and The Hawk. I also enjoyed "The Big Tan Pup" of September 15th issue. Keep stories of the same kind running, and I will be a steady and satisfied reader.—*Ocean City, New Jersey*.

TED ADLER.—I would like to make a request in your magazine. I want back numbers of Top-Notch. Put this in Top-Notch Talk. I will pay fifteen cents a copy for them. I want mostly magazines way back to 1928.—*3955 Murray Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin*.

Several readers have sent in suggestions for a new title for this department. Here are some of them. Which one do you like best? Or can you think of a title more suitable?

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TOP-NOTCH BAND WAGON.

TOP-NOTCH CLUBROOM

TOP-NOTCH KNOCK AND BOOST CLUB.

TOP-NOTCH CHUCK WAGON.

TOP-NOTCH ROUND TABLE.

Are there many readers who don't care much for Westerns? I can tell from the letters received that a great many readers *do* like them. Let me have your opinion, will you? Would you like a big-woods story, occasionally, in place of a Western?

BERT BERRY.—Best story in September 1st issue of Top-Notch, "The Fentriess Murder Case." Next best, "Saddle Tramps at Round-up." Third choice, "Bill and the Bushers."

"Easy Mark" and "Green Timber" are good; also the first installment of "Tiger Shark" is good.—*Lincoln, Nebraska.*

MRS. GEORGE TODD.—You have an interesting magazine in Top-Notch, and I wish to congratulate you on it. My three young sons read it, and also I read it myself. Somehow I have the idea that you editors think that women readers like only love stories, and that may have been true a generation ago or part of a generation ago, but I can assure you that women to-day, who are out in business, and who follow the same sports, and may be seen at football and baseball games and even boxing matches, don't spend all their time reading love stories. Your "Brick and Boots" stories are good, and some of your fight stories, although I think you should run more boxing stories of amateur tournaments rather than the tougher and sometimes crooked professional matches.—*Kansas City, Missouri.*

HARRY LARSON.—You had a good selection of stories in the recent Top-Notch. "Tiger Shark" is keeping up well, and leads them all, with "A Trap for the Hawk" running next, and then "Iron Man." The short one, "He Stuck to His Story," was amusing, but did

not hit me as a real Top-Notch story.—*Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

WILLARD SPICE.—I like to keep in touch with things American, despite four years in England and several months out here, and I think your magazine is one of the most American of the popular group. "The Bench Warmer," in your June number, brought the roar of the stands to one far away. And after reading "The Clutch of the Mob," I think that the wilds of this country (where cobras are supposed to be squirming under one's feet at all times—and I have never seen one, except in captivity, by the way) are safe compared to certain cities in the States. I rather liked your *Kroom* stories. The scenes of some of them were scenes that I knew. Good luck from out of the East.—*Allabad City, India.*

WALTER KOLMEIER.—Now that you are running series of stories in old Top-Notch, and I like them a lot, too, why don't you cut out the serials? For instance, you announce a football serial for the November 1st number, which will be a blank for several issues for us readers who can't see football as a sport. I don't mind passing up one story in an issue on account of a subject that leaves me cold, but I don't like to pass up many pages in several issues. Your Western stories by Tex Bradley are fine, and the "Pinto Martin" stories pretty good, too.—*Cincinnati, Ohio.*

The following letter from a Top-Notcher who signs himself "Just a Cop," seems interesting:

DEAR TOP-NOTCH EDITOR: I have been reading your message to the readers of Top-Notch. You asked if we liked perfect heroes like Frank Merriwell, or just human fellows who sometimes make mistakes. Well, most magazine characters are a little too perfect, at least the heroes are. But if they didn't achieve things that the rest of us in real life couldn't, I suppose we wouldn't want to read about them.

Personally, I always liked the Merriwell stories pretty well, and I think what happened to me is that I got too mature and hard-boiled to get the same thrill out of them that they gave me at one time.

If Frank lost a football game, I'd have been disappointed, just as I'd be disappointed in the failure of Brick and Boots to win an important game, or more so, for somehow Brick and Boots are not supermen and don't win all the time.

In the case of O. K. Polter, I'd be rather disappointed if he failed to solve a case, for real detectives in real life are solving cases just as knotty all the time. Perhaps you'd assume from my profession that I'd be scoffing at these fiction detectives, but such is not the case. Polter's experiences I would call tame beside some of the adventures of plain-clothes men and even sometimes uniformed policemen in real life.


The police department of any big city is equipped to run down about any criminal wanted these days. If it doesn't do it, that means that some one in a high political place doesn't want the criminal brought to justice. I am not signing this, as we cops are not supposed to beef about those things. Well, maybe I haven't answered that question of yours about Merriwell. I'd say to keep Top-Notch very much as it is.

HOWARD VANN.—The best story that I found in your latest issue, to my taste, was "The Hawk and the Forty Thieves." The

next best was "K. O. at Coyote Butte," and third choice between "Hot Bunts" and "Bullring Buckaroo." I notice you are beginning to run a little more poetry, too, and I think this makes the magazine more interesting. You ought to run the ballot coupon again. That saves us from writing a letter to tell you what stories we liked best.—*Toledo, Ohio.*

And the letters about checkers are still coming in—letters for and against. More for than against in the batch just received, though. Here is one of them:

GEORGE W. BASS.—I wish you would start that checker department again in your fine magazine. You would be surprised at the number that bought it for checkers. For instance, I take a Newark, New Jersey, newspaper, merely for the checker feature that it runs.—*Eaton, Colorado.*



NEXT ISSUE!

(On the news stands November 1st)

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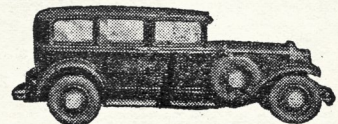
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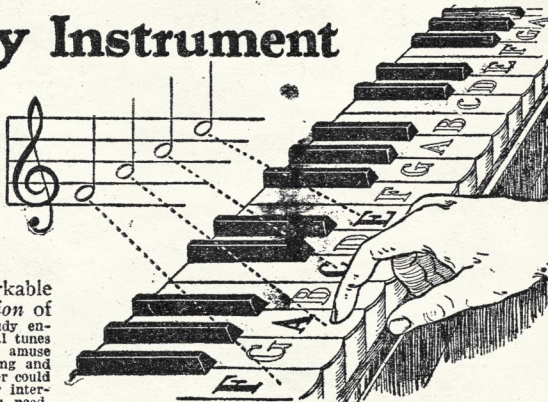
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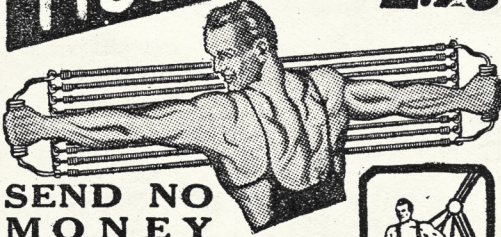
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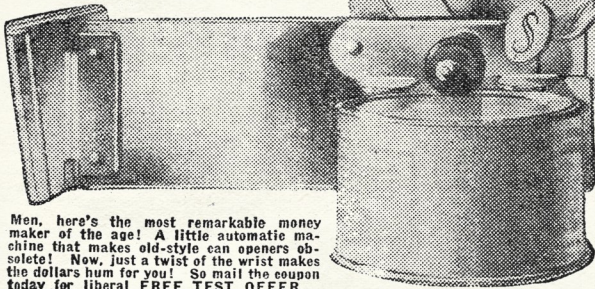
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"My son was in bad company. When I broadcasted my thoughts to him he told me he had no pleasure away from home. He felt I was thinking of him and that it was like electric currents striking him."—New Orleans, La.
"Your instructions were the first practical ones. Getting results in business. Business dull with everyone. With me it's different, thanks to Telepathy."—New Baltimore, Mich.

If you want to know more about TELEPATHY, THE ART OF BROADCASTING THOUGHTS, then send for our free booklet that is causing a sensation among men and women. This booklet also contains other sections referring to Astrology, Health, Self Betterment, and the discovery of a Mighty Law, the enormous powers of which will amaze you. This booklet will be sent to you **FREE** of charge or obligation.

PATY CO., 618 SOUTH WESTERN AVE., DEPT. A 11 LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

Test This Amazing Money Making Invention **FREE**



Men, here's the most remarkable money maker of the age! A little automatic machine that makes old-style can openers obsolete! Now, just a twist of the wrist makes the dollars hum for you! So mail the coupon today for liberal **FREE TEST OFFER**.



UP TO \$6 and \$8 ^{IN} AN HOUR

Just Offering This \$1,000,000 Can Opening Machine

NO more awkward stabbing and hacking with old-style can openers. No more danger of blood poisoning from gashed and lacerated fingers. For now a remarkable new invention banishes every old-style can opener to the scrap heap. Now a simple twist of the wrist opens any can in a couple of seconds. No wonder they all simply go wild over it. No wonder salesmen have sold to every house in the block and have made up to \$8 in an hour.

Works Like a Charm

This queer little device doesn't just chop a ragged hole in the top of the can. It cuts the entire top completely out, not off, clean as a whistle. The machine takes hold of the can—opens it—flips up the lid so you can grab it—and gives it back without any sharp edges to snag your fingers. You just put the can in the machine—turn the

handle—and almost instantly the job is done.

Sells Itself in Seconds

Everyone knows how women detest the dangerous old-style can opener.

Imagine then, how they welcome this startling new method—this automatic way of doing their most distasteful kitchen task. Men, honestly I'm not exaggerating one bit when I tell you that not ten words are necessary to sell many of them. All you do is hand your demonstrator to your prospect and let her try it. She often sells herself in seconds—and you pocket a nice, fat profit. Yes, really, it's just that simple and easy. That's why salesmen have made \$75 to \$150 a week.

Opens Any Can in a Jiffy

You just slip the can in the holder and turn the handle. Nothing complicated, nothing to get out of order. Opens any can, square, round or oval, in a few seconds. And, men, IT'S **TRIPLE PATENTED**, so there is no competition.



Act Quick for Free Test Offer

I don't care whether you're an "old-timer" or just breaking in, some of the quickest, easiest money of your life is waiting for you now, right here. That's a mighty strong statement. But all I ask is a chance to prove it at my risk. I know this proposition will coin money for you with such speed that it will make your head swim. Territories are closing fast. The Free Test costs you nothing. Just mail me the coupon and I'll shoot you the most sensational dollar making plan you ever heard of. Mail it today. Right now!

CENTRAL STATES MANUFACTURING CO.

Dept. M-2565

4500 Mary Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

OH BOY!

How the Dollars Roll In!

\$208 in 24 Hours



"Speedo products do everything that is claimed for them. I went to a small railroad town and sold 24 Speedo products in about 3 hours. In another instance I sold 30 Speedos on one street, in 1 1/2 hours. In 24 hours of selling I have made exactly \$208."

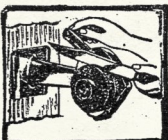
John Nabors, O.

1,000 Sales in 90 Days

"I have now made 1,000 Speedo sales in 90 days, which is pretty good to start. The other day I sold 21 Speedos in less than 5 hours. Anyone can work up a nice business with Speedo; my earnings are now almost \$1,000."

R. W. Graffe, Ind.

Revolutionary New Sharpener



Works like magic. Puts a razor edge on any knife or tool in a few seconds. Anyone can use it. Sharpens scissors, too. The coupon brings full details.

Central States Manufacturing Co.,
Dept. M-2565, 4500 Mary Ave.,
St. Louis, Mo.

Rush me your Free Test offer.

Name

Address

Town State

() Check here if interested only in one for your home.

START to PLAY Very First Day!

Pleasant,
Easy
Lessons
Show You
How!



Extra Money—Hosts of Friends—Loads of Fun Within Your Reach

HAPPY DAYS are in store for you if you will only act on this suggestion! Cheery evenings playing catchy music alone or with sweetheart, wife or sister; and moments as center of interest at gatherings; nights of joy making \$5 to \$25 for work that is "play." The Deagan Xylorimba is your opportunity! Wonderful for home, in demand at dances and entertainments, yet *easiest of all instruments to play*. No teacher necessary—you actually play simple melodies the very first day even if you cannot read a note of music right now! **Earns \$60 a Week**—Ralph Smith, Chicago, says: "Played 20 minutes at wedding. Received \$20." L. E. Hallmann, Reading, Pa., writes: "Made \$300 in 5 weeks, spare time. Had never played instrument before."

Send for Big Free Book! Our new book tells all about the delightful lessons furnished with each instrument, the five-day trial that removes risk, the wonderful Deagan easy-payment plan. No obligation—simply fill in and mail the coupon.

J. C. Deagan, Inc., Dept. 4867, 1770 Berteau Avenue, Chicago

Send me without obligation, full details of Free Trial offer and easy-payment plan of the Deagan Xylorimba.

Name
Address

Become a Specialist at This Fine School

To earn top wages, to be the one picked for the job, learn the trade you like best at this Y M C A resident school famous for turning out good men. Modern equipment. Individual instruction. Low tuition.

MAIL FOR FREE INFORMATION

**BEDFORD
Y M C A
TRADE
SCHOOL**

1115 Bedford Ave., Dept. SS-2
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Send me without obligation complete information on (check subjects).

- ☐ Caterpillar Tractor Mechanic
- ☐ Aviation Mechanic
- ☐ Flying
- ☐ Welding
- ☐ Auto Mechanic
- ☐ Radio Mechanic
- ☐ Talking Pictures, Western Electric

Name
Street & No.
Town State

How To Secure A Government Position

Why worry about strikes, layoffs, hard times? Get a Government job! Increased salaries, steady work, travel, good pay. Open to citizens from 18 to 50. I'll help you become a Custom House Clerk, Railway Postal Clerk, Post Office Clerk, City Mail Carrier, Rural Carrier—or get into any other Government job you want. I was a Secretary Examiner of Civil Service Commission for 8 years. Have helped thousands. Get ready NOW for the NEXT Railway Postal Clerk Examination!

Now FREE My 32-page book tells about the jobs open—and how I can help you get one. Send the coupon for your copy TODAY.

A. R. PATTERSON, Civil Service Expert.
PATTERSON SCHOOL, 7510 Wisner Bldg., Rochester, N. Y.
Please send me, without obligation, your free book "How to Secure a Government Position."

Name
Address



CHELSEA HOUSE

The Brand of



Good Books

Hearts of the Big Top

By ELLEN HOGUE

HE could ride, this Tom Jenison, this rather pallid, hollow-eyed nonentity in circus business, canvas slapper, man of mystery. That lean, long body was fluid as the liquid lightning it bestrode, reared and leaped with the lightning, thought with the brain of it and always one split second ahead of the murderous brute mind.

The story of how Jenison rode the wicked stallion Killer Boy, while the girl he loved looked on with agony in her beautiful eyes, is the smashing climax of a novel of circus life which keeps you as much on edge as that great riding kept its spectators breathless.

Under the Big Top of the circus, a fantastic world—"world of the ballyhoo, the shill-laber; of hot dogs and popcorn and water-thin lemonade; of horsesh and grease paint, of glitter and pomp; elephants that served a king in India; a mangy lion born in the Bronx zoo; stray dogs, stray boys, wives, sweethearts, bad men, good men, weak men, brave men, beggar men, thieves."

Such is the world which Milly, the daughter of the circus and the heroine of this colorful novel, adorned and reigned over. Ellen Hogue knows it so intimately and loves it so well that she makes it come to vibrant life before your eyes. Read "Hearts of the Big Top" if you want thrills in your fiction, thrills mingled with a most touching love story.

75c

75c



70-69 SEVENTH AVE.
NEW YORK CITY

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

No More Shaving! No Razor! No Bother!



1
The Beard!

One—

Two—

Three—

2
Snow
Applied

3 The Result!

and the beard is off without a razor!

Sensational Discovery

Now Makes Shaving Unnecessary!

Think of it—the quickest and slickest, closest and smoothest “shave” you ever had—without using a razor! A face so smooth you never knew you had such soft skin! Instead of shaving every day use this delightful discovery once or twice a week. It “breaks” the whiskers off slightly below the skin while a razor cuts them off above the surface. You just cannot believe it till you try it for yourself. And why not—when you can do so without risking a penny?

SNOW

The FACIAL Depilatory

The only hair remover applied swiftly and easily with a brush. Just follow the simple instructions. \$1.00 package lasts from one to two months.

**MILLIONS
SOLD ABROAD**

Not a harsh chemical that eats off the hair. But a gentle compound that makes the beard so brittle it “breaks” off. Thousands of men are now actually enjoying their facial glorification (which, by the way, may now be performed at night, because the beard barely grows overnight). In contrast with razor-shaving SNOW tends to retard the growth of the beard and to make it much lighter, thinner and softer. Endorsed by European authorities as perfectly harmless. Silver Medal Winner at Strasbourg, France.

ESPECIALLY GOOD FOR TOUGH BEARDS!

No rash—no itch—no pimples.

Sold by leading department stores, drug stores and toilet goods counters.

—WOMEN—



Women delight in this new and gentle depilatory which may be used on face or limbs with great speed and freedom from pain or undue stench. A \$1.00 package is four times larger than most others.

TO ORDER DIRECT—USE THIS COUPON

Rasofix Corp. of America,
299 Broadway, New York, N. Y., Dept. 384

Please send a large box of “SNOW” and a special fibre brush. I enclose \$1 (or will pay \$1.15 on delivery). You are to refund the full cost if for any reason I am not delighted with the results.

Name

Address

Inquiries invited from Druggists and Beauticians

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

Give Me a Name

**We Will Pay
\$500.00
Just for a
Baby's Name**



COSTS NOTHING TO WIN

Nothing to Buy—Nothing to Sell—No Puzzles, "Lucky Numbers" or "Guessing Contests" to Win this Cash Prize

JUST SUGGEST A BABY'S NAME

Here's an amazing opportunity to win a big cash prize for just a moment's time. Simply send us a name for this happy baby—either a boy's or a girl's name—a name that you think would sound nice in a Magazine advertisement. We have chosen this baby's picture to use in advertising for our new Baby Soap. We must have an attractive name. We are going to pay a big cash prize just for a winning name. Think of a name—send it to us TODAY! Win \$500.00 cash and qualify for an opportunity to win further prizes of \$2,600.00 or Buick 8 Cylinder Sedan and \$1,100.00 Cash for promptness. . . See rules below.

YOU CAN'T LOSE

Nothing to lose—costs nothing to win. Nothing to buy or sell to get the cash prize for naming the baby. It is easy to think of a name. Some name that may flash into your mind this very instant may win the prize. It doesn't have to be fancy name—maybe the name of your own or a friend's baby would be the very one we want. Just some simple name such as "Baby Jim" or "Mary Anne" may be chosen as the prize winner. Don't let this opportunity slip through your fingers. Think of a name NOW—send it TODAY.

Picture and Name to Be Used in Advertising

This smiling baby's face is to be featured in all our advertising for our new Baby Soap. For a fitting name for this baby we will pay \$500.00. Name may be for either boy or girl. Send name today. Win \$500.00 cash!

JUST SENDING A NAME QUALIFIES YOU FOR OPPORTUNITY TO

Win \$2,600.00 Cash or Buick 8 Cyl. Sedan and \$1,100 Cash

This huge prize is *Extra* and in *addition* to the cash prize for the Baby's name. No wonder we say that here is your opportunity to win a fortune. Think of it! \$2,600.00 all cash or a big Buick 8 Cylinder Sedan and \$1,100.00 in cash besides—all coming to you at once! Many work a lifetime without ever getting together such a magnificent sum. Hundreds of prizes—over \$4,300.00 in cash will be given in this huge prize distribution. Some yet unknown person is going to win a fortune—why not you? You have just as good a chance as anyone. *Every single person who takes an active part will be rewarded in cash.* Just send a name suggestion to qualify for this opportunity of a lifetime—nothing more to do to qualify. But act at once—remember \$1,100.00 Extra is given winner for promptness.

SEND NO MONEY You don't have to send any money—you don't have to buy anything or sell anything to win the Name Prize. Just send the first name you think of—it may be a winner—it has just as good a chance as any. But do it NOW! Rush letter with name suggestion or send coupon at once. I will answer at once giving you all the details and telling you just how you stand in points for the distribution of \$4,300.00 cash prizes. Here may be the means of making you financially independent for life.

TED ADAMS, Manager

906 Sycamore St. Dept. 1095-KK, Cincinnati, Ohio

NAMING CONTEST RULES

Contest open to everyone except employees of our company. Only one name may be submitted. Sending more than one name will cause all names sent by you to be thrown out. Prize of \$500.00 will be awarded to one name of all those submitted. In case of duplicate winning names, duplicate prizes will be given. Contest closes midnight, December 25th, 1931. Every person sending name qualifies for opportunity to win \$2,600.00 or Buick 8 Sedan and \$1,100.00 cash for promptness. Use the coupon or write letter for all details.

C O U P O N

TED ADAMS, Manager
906 Sycamore Street, Dept. 1095-KK, Cincinnati, Ohio

My suggestion for the Baby's Name is:

My Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

I am interested in winning \$2,600.00. Rush me all information and tell me how I stand.

Get Your Groceries at Wholesale

— and Make
**\$15 a Day
besides!**



Yes, right now, I'll give you groceries at rock-bottom, wholesale prices and a wonderful chance to pocket \$10 to \$15 cash profits in a day. L. C. Van Allen, of Illinois, reports profits as high as \$125 in a single week. Gustav Karnath, a farm laborer in Minnesota, says, "Made \$20.35 the first 5 hours." Mrs. B. L. Hodges, of New York, writes, "Never before have I made such money. Never fail to make a profit of from \$18 to \$20 a day." Of course some of my people make more than others. But these earnings of a few of my Representatives show the wonderful opportunities that are waiting for you. And right now I offer you an *even greater* proposition than I gave these people.

Big Profits for Pleasant Work

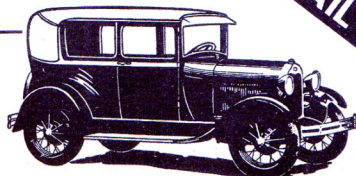
I am President of an old-established, million-dollar manufacturing Company. We distribute high-quality Groceries and other Household Necessities direct from factory to user through Authorized Local Representatives. We have thousands of customers in every

State. Last year our Representatives made nearly *two million dollars!* Now I invite you to share in these big profits. I'll help you make money from the very start. And I will give you Groceries and other Household Supplies at *savings of nearly one-half!* Thus you have a wonderful chance to make big money and also save big money.

FREE

Ford Tudor Sedan

This is NOT a contest. I offer a brand-new car free to producers as an extra reward or bonus—in addition to their large cash profits. If you already have a car I will give you cash instead. Mail coupon for full particulars.



MAIL THIS

No Capital—No Experience Needed

You positively don't need capital or experience. It makes no difference where you live. No course of training is required. All you do is call on your friends, neighbors and my established customers in your territory and take care of their orders. I never sell through stores. *You alone get the profit on all orders from these customers.* Keep your present job and start with me in spare time if you want to. Oscar Stuart, of West Virginia, reports \$18 profit in 2-1/2 hours' spare time. Mrs. K. R. Roof, of S. Carolina, with household duties and children to care for, earned \$50 *the first week in her spare time.* This shows the tremendous possibilities.

SEND NO MONEY

If you want to get groceries at our rock-bottom wholesale prices—and a chance to make \$10 to \$15 in a day besides—send me your name at once. Don't miss this wonderful opportunity. I will give you full details of my amazing new plan without cost or obligation. I'll give you the big opportunity you've long been waiting for. It may mean hundreds—even thousands of dollars to you. So don't lose a moment. Mail the coupon NOW!

Albert Mills, Pres., Zanol Products Co.,
7882 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Send me, without cost or obligation, all the facts about your new proposition that offers Groceries at Wholesale and a chance to make \$10 to \$15 in a day besides. Also explain your FREE Ford Offer.

Name

Address

© A. P. Co.

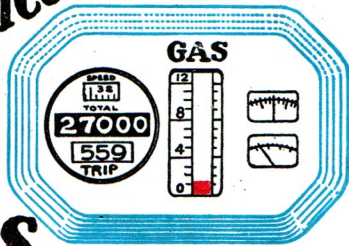
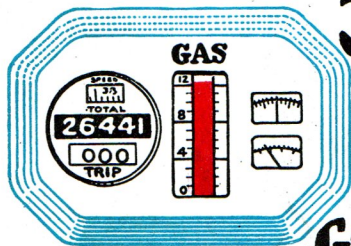
(Print or Write Plainly)

Over the Mountains from Los Angeles

559 Miles

on 11

Gallons of GAS



Think of it! FIVE HUNDRED FIFTY-NINE MILES over rough mountainous country burning only ELEVEN GALLONS OF GASOLINE. Imagine more than FIFTY MILES to the GALLON. That is what the WHIRLWIND CARBURETING DEVICE does for D. R. Gilbert, enough of a saving on just one trip to more than pay the cost of the Whirlwind.

THE WHIRLWIND SAVES MOTORISTS MILLIONS OF DOLLARS YEARLY

Whirlwind users, reporting the results of their tests, are amazed at the results they are getting. Letters keep streaming into the office telling of mileages all the way from 22 to 59 miles on a gallon, resulting in a saving of from 25% to 50% in gas bills alone.

Mark H. Estes writes: "I was making 17 miles to the gallon on my Pontiac Coupe. Today, with the Whirlwind, I am making 35 5-10 miles to the gallon. Am I glad I put it on? I'll say so!"

P. P. Goerzen writes: "I made an actual test both with and without a Whirlwind, getting 13 1/4 miles without and 34 6-10 miles with the Whirlwind, or a gain of 21 miles to the gallon. The longer the Whirlwind is in use on the machine the better the engine runs, has more pep and quicker starting. It makes a new engine out of an old one, and starts at the touch of the starter button."

R. J. Tulp: "The Whirlwind increased the mileage on our Ford truck from 12 to 26 miles to gallon and 25% in speed. We placed another on a Willys-Knight and increased from 12 to 17 miles per gallon."

Arthur Grant: "I have an Oakland touring car that has been giving me 15 miles to the gallon average, but I can see a great difference with the Whirlwind, as it climbs the big hills on high and gives me better than 23 miles to the gallon of gas, which is better than 50% saving in gas."

W. A. Scott: "I had my Whirlwind for three years. Winter and summer it gives the same perfect service, instant starting, smoother running, and what I have saved in gasoline these last few years has brought other luxuries which I could not have afforded previously."

Car owners all over the world are saving money every day with the Whirlwind, besides having better operating motors. Think what this means on your own car. Figure up your savings—enough for a radio—a bank account—added pleasures. Why let the Oil Companies profit by your waste? Find out about this amazing little device that will pay for itself every few weeks in gas saving alone.

FITS ALL CARS

In just a few minutes the Whirlwind can be installed on any make of car, truck or tractor. It's actually less work than changing your oil or putting water in the battery. No drilling, tapping or changes of any kind necessary. It is guaranteed to work perfectly on any make of car, truck or tractor, large or small, new model or old model. The more you drive the more you will save.

SALESMEN AND DISTRIBUTORS WANTED

To Make Up To \$100.00 a Week and More

Whirlwind men are making big profits supplying this fast-selling device that car owners can not afford to be without. Good territory is still open. Free sample offer to workers. Full particulars sent on request. Just check the coupon.

WHIRLWIND MANUFACTURING CO.

Dept. 728-A, Station C

Milwaukee, Wis.

GUARANTEE

No matter what kind of a car you have—no matter how big a gas eater it is—the Whirlwind will save you money. We absolutely guarantee that the Whirlwind will more than save its cost in gasoline alone within thirty days, or the trial will cost you nothing. We invite you to test it at our risk and expense. You are to be the sole judge.

FREE TRIAL COUPON

WHIRLWIND MANUFACTURING CO.
Dept. 728-A, Station C, Milwaukee, Wis.

Gentlemen: You may send me full particulars of your Whirlwind Carbureting device and tell me how I can get one free. This does not obligate me in any way whatever.

Name
Address
City
County State
☐ Check here if you are interested in full or part time salesman position