

A.N.C.

FIGHT STORIES

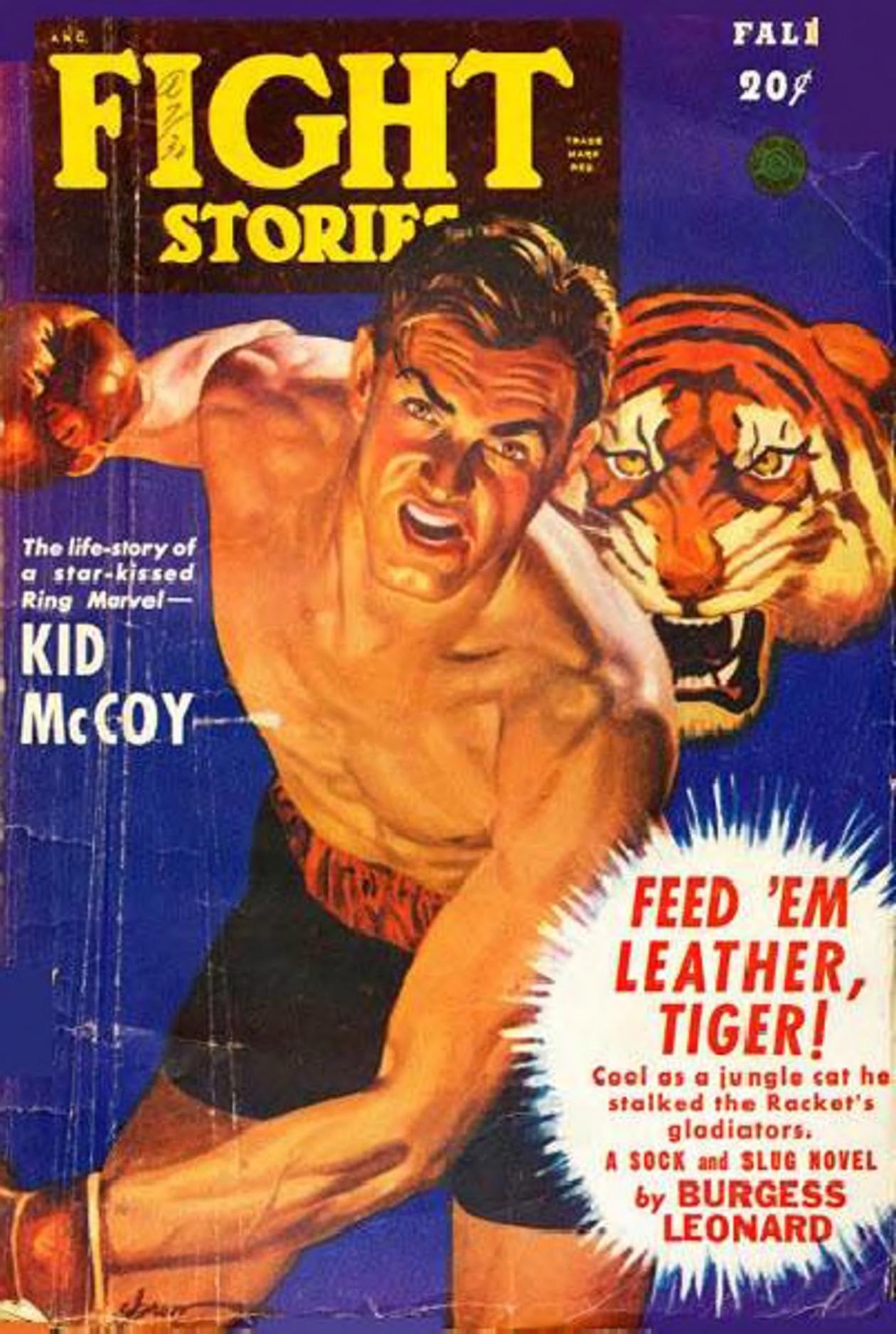
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The life-story of
a star-kissed
Ring Marvel—

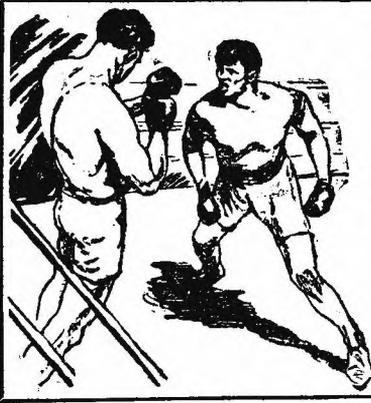
**KID
McCOY**



**FEED 'EM
LEATHER,
TIGER!**

Cool as a jungle cat he
stalked the Racket's
gladiators.

A SOCK and SLUG NOVEL
by **BURGESS
LEONARD**



FIGHT STORIES

Jack O'Sullivan, Editor

A COMPLETE PRIZE-RING NOVEL

"FEED 'EM LEATHER, TIGER" Burgess Leonard 4
 She was a million-dollar heiress crusading for a prize-ring clean-up. He was an East Side hoodlum flaunting dazzling kayo polish on either mitt. Together, they planned to knock the ring world for a ten-count sprawl.

TWO FAST-MOVING NOVELETS OF THE RING

RING THAT SIREN! Les Etter 94
 A lot of guys, especially those in the fight racket, have been neatly trimmed since Dellah first gave Samson the treatment. With a skirt-silly mugg like young Mickey Hale, the gag works as though it were thought up yesterday.

THE BUM WEARS YELLOW Ric Bentley 109
 His best friend couldn't tell you. Nor his girl. Nor his manager. Nor could all the fighters he'd spread on canvas with his devastating Blackjack Punch tell you why Lucky Jack was showing the yellow streak now . . . at the threshold to the title.

TWO STAND-OUT FIGHT FEATURES

KID McCROY—FISTIANA'S LONE WOLF Doc McGee 52
 A more disarming battler never entered the squared circle. He looked like a push-over with his flour-white skin, good looks and medium size. In actual fact he was the cat-eyed killer of the prize-ring; crafty, dangerous wielder of the famed corkscrew punch, he was predictable in only one thing . . . that his opponent, regardless of size, weight or destructive power, would soon be kissing canvas.

"WILL O' THE WISP" Walter Galli 2
 One of the fastest, cleverest, cagiest boxers that ever pulled on gloves—that was Young Griffo.

TWO HARD-HITTING SHORT STORIES

SAILORS' SOCKEROO Lloyd Derrickson 47
 Aboard the tramp steamer Roanoke, the crew ogled but one single target—the clean-shaven jaw of the Third Mate. Was it iron or putty? They had ways of finding out.

ONE FOR THE BOOKIE Joe Brennan 83
 Tonight the ring was a swimmin' hole awaitin' the big dive in the main event. Only trouble was there were some last minute changes . . . and not even the fat-wallet boys knew who was going to splash the tank.

Fall (Aug.-Oct.) 1948
 Volume IX, No. 2



20c Per Copy



"WILLO' THE WISP"



GRIFFO CAME TO AMERICA FROM AUSTRALIA IN 1894--AND PROCEEDED TO FLASH THE SKILL THAT MADE HIM ONE OF THE GREATEST FEATHERWEIGHTS OF ALL TIME.....

WALTER GALLI

A PHANTOM IN THE RING--**YOUNG GRIFFO** WAS ONE OF THE CLEVEREST JOCKERS THAT EVER PULLED ON A GLOVE.....

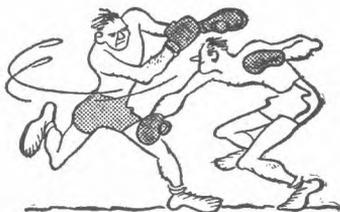


...**ONE** OF HIS EARLIEST BATTLES HERE WAS AN EPIC 20-ROUND DRAW WITH **GEORGE DIXON**, THE FEATHERWEIGHT CHAMPION....



HE HAD NO SEMBLANCE OF A PUNCH--BUT HIS DEFENSE WAS SUPERB--MAKING IT VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR AN OPPONENT TO HIT HIM A TELLING BLOW...**ONE** OF HIS FAVORITE BAR-ROOM TRICKS WAS TO STAND ON A HANDKERCHIEF AND DEFEY ANYONE TO HIT HIM--FOR A BET !!!

HE WAS A PHENOMENAL CHARACTER--COULD NEITHER READ, WRITE NOR COUNT--NEVER BOTHERED TO TRAIN--WAS MORE OFTEN DRUNK THAN SOBER !!!



GRIFFO NEVER BECAME CHAMPION OF ANY CLASS--YET HE PERFORMED BRILLIANTLY EVEN AGAINST MIDDLEWEIGHTS!

HE FOUGHT TWO ROUSING DRAWS WITH **KID LAVIGNE** AND ONE WITH **JOE GANS**, BOTH GREAT LIGHT-WEIGHT CHAMPIONS.



..HE DIED IN POVERTY IN A ROOMING HOUSE ON NEW YORK'S WEST SIDE IN DECEMBER, 1927--WHEN HE WAS 55...



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"Feed 'Em Leather, Tiger!"

By Burgess Leonard

She was a million-dollar heiress crusading for a prizefight clean-up. He was an East Side hoodlum flaunting dazzling kayo polish on either mitt. Punching together, they planned to knock the ring world for a ten-count sprawl.

HE DID not look like a future heavy-weight champion as he came quietly into the teeming barracks looking for an empty bunk. He picked one in a corner and walked to it, slung his barracks bag under it, unlaced shoes that were caked with Italian mud, and flopped on the bunk.

Corporal Ken Lee, 19, 6 feet tall, 176 lbs., was tired but tough. Three hundred miles of hitch-hiking on jarring Army trucks over Italian ribbon-roads began to slip from his compact frame. He lay at peace, body and mind. Tomorrow was soon enough to begin thinking about the Regional eliminations of the Inter-Allied Boxing Tournament. But Ken Lee seemed

to be the only fighter in that frame of mind.

A wide, freckled face slid out over the bunk above Ken. The face grinned and said, "Maybe we'll be seeing each other before this thing is done, if I'm any judge of weights. I'm Bill Stone, light-heavy."

"I'm Ken Lee," Ken told him, in the polite tone of the man who had rather be left alone. "And unless you are in the professional heavyweight class, we aren't likely to meet."

"You a pro?" The voice was skeptical as the face crept out further to study the slim length of the boy on the lower bunk, the unmarked, straight-featured face.



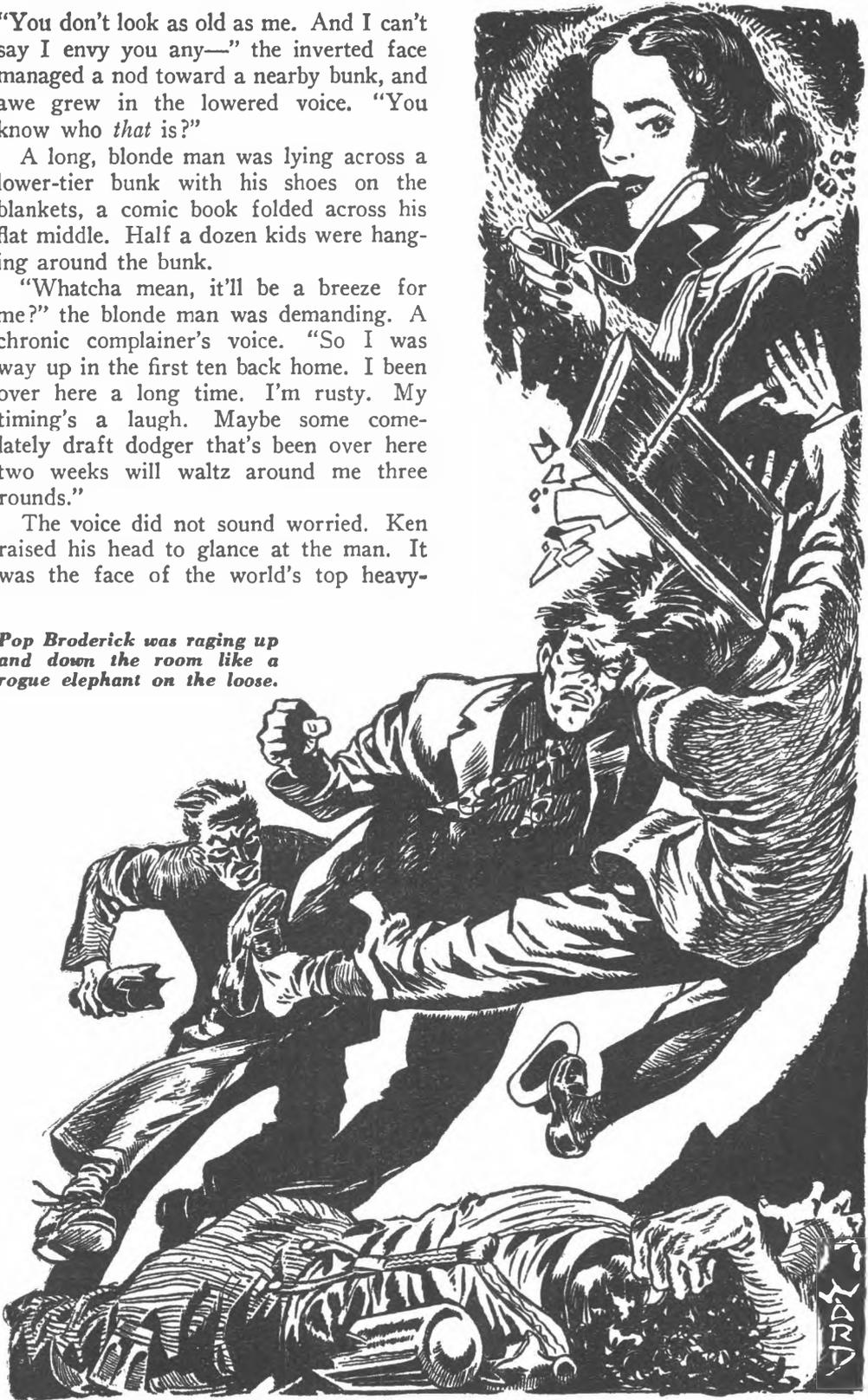
"You don't look as old as me. And I can't say I envy you any—" the inverted face managed a nod toward a nearby bunk, and awe grew in the lowered voice. "You know who *that* is?"

A long, blonde man was lying across a lower-tier bunk with his shoes on the blankets, a comic book folded across his flat middle. Half a dozen kids were hanging around the bunk.

"Whatcha mean, it'll be a breeze for me?" the blonde man was demanding. A chronic complainer's voice. "So I was way up in the first ten back home. I been over here a long time. I'm rusty. My timing's a laugh. Maybe some comelately draft dodger that's been over here two weeks will waltz around me three rounds."

The voice did not sound worried. Ken raised his head to glance at the man. It was the face of the world's top heavy-

Pop Broderick was raging up and down the room like a rogue elephant on the loose.



weight, Bat Kravitz, except that the flat, fierce features were lengthened—weakened, perhaps. This was Babe Kravitz, the Champ's younger brother, hailed as the Champ's successor.

"This war's costing some of us more'n others," Babe complained bitterly. "Some of these officers—never made a living, and look at 'em now. Me, I'm losing fifty grand a year, at least, and I've had three years of it."

"It's tough about you, Babe," a mellow voice stated.

A huge man with a moustache that had not been trimmed in months staggered through the door, grinning vaguely, and tripped over his barracks bag. He sat on the floor, still grinning. The soldier's sleeves were free of stripes, but there were dozens of needle-pricks, and the less-faded outlines where stripes had once been. His uniform was outrageously unkempt, and he gave off an overpowering odor of very bad *vin rouge*. The big man's grin spread charm through fogged blue eyes, heavy features, and that black, long-horn moustache as he repeated, "Sure is tough about you, Babe."

Kravitz sat up, bristling, snarling, "Before you start running your mouth, it might pay you to find out who—"

Babe Kravitz stopped talking as he eyed the wide-hipped giant, puzzled. He muttered, "What the hell?"

POP BRODERICK. The old Mongolia Arena. Brooklyn," the big man chuckled. "I own the joint, punk. You stunk up my place a couple of times.

Kravitz blinked. "What are you doing here?"

"I am a delegate to this convention," Broderick stated with pride. He beat his broad chest. "Me heap big killer. Nobody in my outfit would fight me. I been on a party for four days, three hundred miles, three stolen jeeps—one complete with an Admiral's flag. I figure the party's good for another week."

"Promoting fights don't make you no fighter," Kravitz sneered.

Pop Broderick made the precarious climb to his full six feet of height and stated with swaying dignity, "I am one of the world's really great fighters. It is only that rules and referees handicap me. And

I wish to state in this uninhibited moment, Babe Kravitz, that you have a yellow streak prettier than your hair."

Kravitz started for him. Broderick's eyes lost part of their glaze, and his loose body pulled to balance. Kravitz stepped back, growling, "You're drunk, Broderick. See me in the ring."

Broderick sighed, lay down on the floor, pulled his barracks bag under his head, and went to sleep, undisturbed in the excitement and tension that jammed the barracks. Most of these boys were kids in the amateur class. Some were stirred by the adventurous urge, others by ambition; some were just grimly glad to accept this as a glorious reprieve from the front lines, from shells and snipers' bullets.

To cool-eyed Ken Lee, the slim boy with poise that mismatched his years, this was much more. Ken intended to fight his way through this and succeeding events, on to the culminating championship matches at Algiers. "European All-Allied Heavyweight Champion" tacked after his name would bring him bigger purses back home; it would mean the difference between two wasted years and a springboard to ring fame.

He had been fighting most of his life, this Ken Lee. It seemed ages ago since he had moved out woodenly with the first bell of his amateur career. The bell, and the old, taunting cry, "*Ya, ya bum. Your old man was a crooked cop, ya bum.*"

Yeah, you're still nobody, Ken Lee. Your old man was a crooked cop, and they found him in a dope-den with his teeth and brains shot out, with crooked money on his belt, and enough heroin in his pockets to dope half the East Side. Your mother used to be a scrub woman, mopping office floors at night to feed a bunch of kids that went hoodlum. All but one. Yeah, it's a tough world. You have to be tougher. Because there is another world beyond your sphere of poverty and meanness; a place of wealth and gracious living, an eminence from which you can look down and say "to hell with the scum," of those who scorned and hurt you. But the wall is thick, and you have only your fists to blast a passage. . . .

THE lighter boys fought all afternoon in the outdoor ring that had been

pitched in the middle of a softball field inside the big Army Rest Camp. It was late that night before the bumper crop of pro heavyweights began to fall under the fistic harvest.

Umberto, a scarred, sad-faced old Italian from one of those orphan quarter-master corps, officially accepted as co-belligerents, and privately scorned, went into the ring first with Big John Davis, a happy-go-lucky negro sailor. Davis came back to the barracks first, unmarked, sweaty, teeth gleaming in a wry grin. Then Umberto, on the arms of proud handlers, grey-faced and sagging, but with triumph in his hang-dog eyes. Looking at them without moving from his bunk, and remembering the yells, Ken knew that the Italian had won two rounds, and barely staved off a kayo in the last minute. Umberto would be sick tomorrow. Easy prey.

Pop Broderick and bash-nosed, stocky Maxie Krebb, once a great middleweight, went out to the ring. Ken slid from his bunk, put on his ring togs, and began to shadow box. Across the barracks the big, phlegmatic Briton with the folded ear, Lance Corporal Duff of the Ulster Rifles, had been puffing and snorting through an odd, awkward routine for thirty minutes. Outside, the howls of the soldier audience rose to bedlam-volume.

Broderick barged in, half-lugging Maxie Krebb. Krebb was complaining querulously, "I never been fouled so much in no ten fights. The ref was fouling me, too."

"You was no shrinking violet yourself, Maxie," Pop roared genially. "That noggin of yours is a baby trip-hammer."

One of Broderick's eyes was closing. His mouth was bleeding gently, and skin had been laced from his cheek. Krebb was a more general mess.

Broderick roared, "Leave us remove the gore, Maxie, and get out of here. I am told that there is a rat-race joint in the village which is strictly a slice of old Brooklyn."

Ken slipped on an old Golden Gloves robe, now short and tight about the shoulders. The big Briton, Duff, pulled a short uniform blouse about his huge, rounded shoulders.

Ken went into the ring, feeling the chill

prickle inside him. Fight crowds had said he had no nerves. It was not true. But he was improving, schooling himself to utter coolness.

The announcer gave the weights, Ken 176, Duff 198. Ken examined the Ulsterman narrowly, thinking that Duff weighed more.

He was only an inch taller than Ken, but his long torso was huge.

They got their instructions. Duff said, touching gloves, "Luck, Yank." Ken murmured, "The same, soldier."

Ken came out slowly with the bell, melting the ice in his stomach. The Briton waited, feinting, poised in an odd, straight-up stance, turned sideways to Ken. *A sucker for a left hook*, Ken thought, but he circled, looking for the barb in the bait.

Duff was slow with his jab. Ken nipped him twice, and stepped to his right. Duff followed awkwardly. Ken saw the scars then, suddenly, the ugly pucker of red skin on the man's left thigh, the jagged red welt across the hairy chest. He saw, too, the great ribs, poking out in gaunt bas-relief.

Ken felt a tug of detached pity that had no part in what he had to do. He jabbed, stepped away, jabbed again, feinted a hook, and watched the Briton's scrambling attempt to recover.

The soldiers out there in the darkness were restive, calling for action. Duff ducked down suddenly and came on, sledging with straight-armed sweeps. Ken rolled, picking them off, beating a crisp one-two to the face.

They clinched, broke, and Duff stood up straight. Ken feinted, and abruptly shot in a left hook. There was a yelp of surprise from the crowd as the Briton rolled back on his heels. Nobody had figured this slim, cautious boy for a hitter.

Duff was bowing forward again, flailing away. Ken gave ground toward the ropes, slipped to his right, and darted inside with a two-fisted hammering that pinned Duff to the ropes.

Ken rocked Duff twice more with the left hook that round. He worked coldly in the second. The Briton threw twenty right hands that would have floored Ken. None of them came close. At the end of the round, Ken feinted the left hook and

drove his right full into the stomach. Duff sagged as the bell rang.

The Briton came out for the last round and heaved a barrage of leather that lasted almost until the end of the fight. Duff knew he had to land a haymaker to win. He never landed it.

There was not a moment in the fight when Ken was in trouble. Duff's strength faded, but he kept throwing leather feebly.

Ken opened up suddenly, cracking Duff's head back with a hooking left, driving his right off the chest. It smacked solidly on the bony jaw. Duff went down, stiff.

Ken went to a corner. The crowd was howling. Duff lay in a heap. The referee's count mounted to seven. Duff came alive suddenly, shaking his head, lurching up, staggering doggedly forward, swinging.

Ken jabbed with the left, curled it into a hook. Duff went to his knees before Ken could throw the right. Duff got up at "two" and swung wide, harmless blows.

Ken pried him open. He worked remorselessly, setting the man up. He had the right cocked—and then the bell.

Duff said shakily, "You 'ad me going, Yank."

THE DECISION was a formality. Ken got a fair hand, as good as he expected. He was too mechanical to win hearts. This crowd wanted to see Babe Kravitz. The great Kravitz.

Ken lingered at the edge of the crowd. Kravitz was in the ring now, tall and beam-shouldered, towering over the stocky sailor, Bob Jarvis.

Jarvis came out with a fine scorn for Kravitz's reputation, and waded into him. Charging inside, Jarvis drove Kravitz to the ropes with a violent, short-hooking attack. Kravitz tied him up easily. Jarvis leaped in. Kravitz met him with a long jab, and crossed the right hand. The glove took Jarvis over the ear. He stumbled and backed away, remembering suddenly that he was only a prelim boy, fighting a ranking heavyweight.

Ken turned away as Kravitz stalked behind a long left hand. With Jarvis properly awed, it would not take a hitter like Kravitz long to land the crusher. Ken heard the crash of Jarvis' body on the

canvas before he reached the barracks.

When Ken came out of the shower, L/Corporal Duff was in uniform, fitting on his knapsack. Duff stuck out a hand, and Ken took it, surprised. Duff said, "So long, Yank. Sorry I couldn't give you a better go. You'll go far in this game, you will."

Ken asked curiously, "You're not staying to see how it comes out?"

"Eh?" Duff exclaimed. He smiled faintly. "I fancy my furlough is a bit different than yours. My time is up, now I've lost. I'm due back. But it's been pleasant. And per'aps the bullet with my number on it, as you say—per'aps the beggar fired it up there while I've been safe down 'ere."

He went out into the night. Lance Corporal Duff. A corking good heavyweight once. Five years ago. Before he'd been sent to the Far East to fight his way home. Five years, one bullet, and one bayonet-slash ago.

Staring after him, Ken felt more strongly what he had already known. This was more than a chance at glory. For some who, like Ken, had come out of the front lines, it was simply a better chance at survival. When two men crawled into the ring, it was with the knowledge that one of them wouldn't have to go back to the front lines for a while.

Ken faced Pop Broderick for the semi-final the next afternoon. Pop had come in after dawn and bunked on the floor again. Now, at four in the afternoon, he was clear-eyed, smiling grimly as he touched Ken's gloves at ring center.

Broderick warned easily, "I got to tell you, kid. I use an elbow and the old noggin on occasion."

The thin curl of Ken's lips did not touch the steady grey eyes. They were cold, confident, undisturbed.

The bell raised a great, expectant roar as they came out. Most of the noise was for Broderick, encouragement, and a "ya dirty bum" accusations. Broderick came on in a leap, hands wide. Ken slipped to the side and whipped two jabs to the wide mouth. Broderick turned like a great cat, swinging a right that was too long. He jerked it around, backhand, and his forearm cracked Ken across the nose. Water stung Ken's eyes. Blinded, he tried

to hang on. It was a mistake. Broderick, forty pounds heavier, almost broke Ken's ribs in a one-armed hug while his free hand did nauseating damage to the face. As the referee wrestled him, Broderick slung Ken to the floor.

Ken got up calmly, wiping blood from his nose. His lips were raw from Broderick's laces. The referee warned Broderick. Ken, walking away coolly, checked Broderick three times with jolting jabs. He slipped a mighty uppercut, stepped away from Broderick's lunging shoulder, and sank both fists to an iron-tough middle.

Broderick kept leaping in, swinging in a patternless fury, a grinning demon with the urge to destroy blanking his dark eyes. Ken kept circling, knifing in solid counters.

Broderick was dangerous. He had no skill, but his fists were astonishingly fast. He caught Ken on the temple with a left, spinning him, leaping with a sweeping right. Ken saw his chance, even in that dazed moment. He stepped in, slamming both hands to the jaw. Broderick staggered three steps backward. Then he lunged in a football-block. His shoulder drove Ken to the ropes. And Broderick was swarming, punishing him, mauling the slight body, rearing to crash his head against Ken's cheek. A great gash spouted red below Ken's left eye.

Ken backed out of it, streaming blood. The referee looked at the cut. He looked at the steady grey eyes, and saw cool control in the grey depths. The referee warned Broderick again, and motioned them on.

That was the first round, and the second, a tall, slim boy giving ground carefully, slipping blows and sniping in his counters, never complaining with word or gesture against the roughing.

Ken Lee straightened with the buzzer before the third round. His thoughts were clear, orderly. He'd won two rounds. But judges were an uncertain quantity; Broderick had wrestled him to the floor twice, and the big man's aggressiveness might count.

Ken went out, jabbed, stepped away from Broderick's rush. As Broderick turned to rush again, Ken stepped inside a wide hook and threw a right to the jaw.

Broderick rolled back on his heels. Ken exploded into a flurry of punching. His slim body cracked like a whip as he twisted to put his weight behind every short, crisp punch. Broderick went back, unhurt but off balance, smashing fists down on Ken's shoulders as the slighter man drove Broderick to the ropes. In the instant before Broderick's back stretched the ropes, Ken was planting his feet. With perfect timing, Ken bombed the right to the jaw.

BRODERICK was folding quietly at the knees when Ken's left hook spilled him over on his side. Ken stepped to a neutral corner amid howls of delighted astonishment.

Broderick sat up at "four," grinning wryly. He got up, and Ken moved to him, and the screams were wild and pleading.

Ken fainted, drew a barrage of blows that could have knocked his head off, and went back to his counter-punching style. With the crowd grumbling, Ken boxed out the round carefully.

At the final bell, Broderick pulled back a wild swing. The destructive blank left his eyes; they filled up with warm humor. He grabbed Ken's right glove, hoisted it as a referee would, slapped Ken's shoulder, and slipped out of the ring without waiting for the decision. Broderick knew he was whipped.

Ken got a good hand, but he could sense the crowd's disappointment. *He'd had the big guy, hadn't he, and didn't have the guts to wade in and finish him?* It did not bother Ken.

Ken met Broderick in the showers. Broderick said, "Kid, you have the goods. A little more color and a smart manager, and you can go places."

"Color?" Ken repeated shortly. There were cuts on his face, targets for Babe Kravitz tonight, and he was resentful. But he kept his voice even. "I think I'll manage without it."

Broderick admitted, "Nobody else ever floored me with anything less than a bottle. You got any extra dough? They're offering five-six to one on Kravitz. I'm shooting my roll on you, and I'll get you covered for what you've got."

"Thanks. I don't bet."

"He don't bet. He just boxes a streak

and hits like hell. Okay, kid. You win, I lose. But I have the fun."

Ken lay on his bunk. Pop Broderick counted out his *lire*, the proceeds of fabulous exploits with the dice, and went out to bet the roll.

Ken was lying on his bunk that night. His side of the barracks was deserted. Everyone else seemed to be outside, watching the finals. Babe Kravitz came in, looked around quickly, and came over to Ken. He stood over the bunk, hands on hips. Ken noted that Babe was unmarked by his one-round kayo of Umberto.

"You want to make yourself a hundred bucks?" Kravitz asked softly. Ken just looked up steadily until Babe flushed and his mouth turned ugly. Kravitz's words were mingled harshness and persuasion. "It's this way. You know I'm going to knock you out. You know who I am. I've got a string of one-round kayos and I want to keep it that way. You're pretty fast, and you might run away from me a couple of rounds. I was over here fighting with a gun when you was home jerking sodas or something, and working out in a gym. So you take one in the first and lie down. You make a hundred bucks and save yourself a beating."

"I've been over here a year and a half," Ken said coldly. "I've been in this thing since the day I was eighteen. You can take your chances. I want this title, too."

Kravitz flushed darkly. He snarled, "Two hundred. That's final. Them cuts will bleed easy, kid. He read the cold grey eyes, and barked, "I don't believe a kid like you is a pro, anyhow. Maybe the judge ought to check on you."

"Check away," Ken shrugged. "I had twelve pro fights. And I won twelve. I was fighting semi-windups at St. Nick's. I could have had main events, but they wouldn't let me fight over six rounds. Save your breath, Kravitz. You'll fight for it tonight."

For an instant Kravitz doubled his right fist and bent, his eyes hot on Ken's stomach, vulnerable as the slim boy stretched on his back. Ken doubled his knee in a flash, feet ready to lash out. Kravitz stepped back. He promised, "I'll fix you. You'll be a bloody steak when I finish with you."

There was fury in Ken as he sat on the

edge of the bunk. He forced himself to lie down again. He applied mental ice-packs to his rage. When the time came, he walked calmly up to the ring.

Babe Kravitz towered over Ken as they got the instructions—three inches taller, broader, 15 pounds heavier. Kravitz's flat-featured face showed marks of his trade. Ken, with a patch under his eye, looked, as Maxie Krebb remarked to Pop, "A boy sent out to fight a man."

They came out of their corners deliberately, both stand-up boxers, each capable of doing damage.

Ken jabbed lightly, lost the jab on Kravitz's shoulder, flicked Kravitz's return off his upper arm. They stood at long range, rapping each other's arms and shoulders tentatively. Ken saw his opening, stiffened his jab in a smashing lead. Going away, the return jab batted his head back. Ken circled, feinted, jabbed again, and Kravitz's long jab reached him, sliding from his cheek.

Ken shifted thoughtfully, feeling out the tall, tough-faced man. It was apparent, after two more flurries, what he had feared. Ken was faster, but there was not enough advantage to nullify Kravitz's longer reach. If he tried to box Kravitz, Ken would be shaded out of a decision. If he opened up, Kravitz might tag him with a countering right. Ken had no doubts about that right hand—it was a killing weapon.

So he boxed. He was far up on his toes, fitting in and out, fighting in flurries that drew gasps of admiration from the crowd. The blows were about even, but Kravitz was planted more solidly, his punches made more noise, and he was snapping Ken's head back as Ken went away—doing no damage, but impressing the crowd, and perhaps the judges. Ken was bleeding from old cuts.

Ken knew he had lost the round by a faint margin. But, remembering the lightning that had grazed his cheek once when he had opened up with a hard hook, Ken knew he had to box Kravitz.

The second round was a replica of the first. Ken lost it to superior reach. The big guy was a seasoned performer. He had not left one real opening. Ken slumped on the stool, against the ropes, knowing he'd have to pull this one out of the fire.

Maxie Krebb sighed to Pop, "We've

bought ourselves some experience. Babe's a shade too big, a little too cute."

Pop said, shrugging, "He ain't six to one better'n the kid. At them odds, I'd back the kid six nights a week."

The last round. The same battle of jabs, of quick, light counter punches. The crowd was stamping for action now, knowing they'd never see prettier boxing, but wanting a kayo.

With half a minute to go, and defeat stalking him on the hands of the clock, Ken cut loose with his plan. He drove a hard left hook and a straight right to the face. He set Babe back, and went after him, hammering the face furiously.

Ken knew it was coming. He was rolling back, rubber in his jaw, but he could not entirely rob the fury of it. His senses swam briefly through blackness, and he was staggering back on stunned legs, and his eyes began to focus only with the third shaping jab on his chin, and he sensed the red lightning coming at his jaw.

Ken ducked, rolling. The punch took him over the ear. He was hurt as he stumbled back into the range of another right.

This one he had timed. He pushed it wide with his left forearm as he stepped in. His low-poised right glove leaped to meet Kravitz's lunging body. Right in the solar plexus!

Kravitz whooshed, grabbed at Ken. Numb hands slipped, fumbling down Ken's body as Ken jerked away.

Kravitz was down, kicking in impotent agony, wailing for breath. His gloves beat the floor, but his nerve-shocked body was helpless. Kravitz was still down, face red and wild with breathless fury, when the referee counted him out.

Kravitz got his breath back. He screamed, "Foul! He hit me low. He fouled, you hear?"

The referee was helping him to his corner. The official came back to raise Ken's hand. Then Kravitz was staggering toward them, howling protest, swinging to fell the referee, turning to appeal to the crowd, then wheeling on Ken. MP's invaded the ring and carried Kravitz away, still belching.

Winner. Regional champ.

Back in the barracks, Ken saw Pop Broderick empty bulging pockets on Ken's bunk. Broderick said, grinning, "You con-

verted a lot of unbelievers tonight, kid. Cut yourself in for twenty percent."

Ken shook his head. Broderick shrugged genially. He produced a money belt, stuffed away the larger denominations, and crammed the rest in his pockets. He looked at Ken for a long moment, and his eyes became serious. He said, "Kid, back home I'm still a bum, but I'm a higher class bum. I run a fight club, among other things. You ever need a favor, drop in."

"Thanks," Ken said automatically. He smiled faintly. "You figure I'll be fighting in clubs back home?"

His voice was quiet. There was no arrogance. But it was plain what he meant. Broderick grinned. "Kid, you're no club fighter right now. But there are angles. Some mighty good fighters never won a title."

"You take the angles," Ken told him quietly. "If a man gets to be good enough, you can't keep him down."

"Have it your way, kid," Pop conceded. "Luck to you at Algiers. I'm off. I see a weapons carrier in front of the Officers' Club. Them things will carry a lot of *vino*."

Babe Kravitz came in later. Fury was still on his face. He snarled, "You fouled me. You know you did."

Ken said coldly, "I just punch. The ref calls them."

Kravitz thrust his long face close. He hissed, "You've fixed yourself, wise kid. You've fouled me, and now I've got to go back up there and maybe get shot—" his face twisted in furious agony. "I could've got out of it. I'd of won at Algiers, and I could've worked a trip home out of it, and they'd never got me back over here. Now I'll get killed or crippled on account of that foul—"

Ken thought suddenly of Lance Corporal Duff, a guy with scars, who hadn't had a glove on for five years, who'd taken his licking and called it luck. And now this Babe Kravitz.

Ken said harshly, "You won't get hurt. It's only the good guys that get hurt."

Kravitz's face was livid as he threatened, "You'll pay for this. I'm writing to the Champ, to my buddy, Ed Bloom. Bloom just runs boxing, if you don't know. You'll never get a spot in the big time. You'll get your brains beat out in cheap clubs, or you'll quit. Don't believe

it, damn you. I can make it stick."

Ken turned away, disgusted. He turned his face toward the big tournament of champions at Algiers. . . .

II

THE ROAR that bulged the walls of Madison Square Garden was like a cry from the heart of the jungle as big Sam Goniff tottered on the brink of a knockdown in the fifth. The slim, cool-eyed boy was coming on now, speeding the pace with mathematical precision.

Ken Lee stepped in, feinting, always watchful. He rammed his left twice to the wounded gash over Goniff's scar-rimmed right eye. Ken feinted the right at the jaw, hooked the left to the ribs, and slammed the right glove into the V of Goniff's thick ribs. Ken bobbed under Goniff's flailing left, chopping his right to the jaw twice, then straightening behind a jab that broke up Goniff's grabbing for a clinch.

Ken checked his right as Goniff reeled away on unsteady legs. Ken slid after Goniff, feinting but not punching, trying to draw fire. Goniff blazed away suddenly, slow with fatigue. Ken slipped the lead, crossed his right inside it. Goniff's broad back hit the ropes, and he sagged as though someone had laid a bag of cement on each hulking shoulder as Ken worked him along the ropes, crowding with short, chopping blows.

Goniff was trying only to protect himself now. He had faded fast. Ken was suspicious, alert for an ambush. Sam Goniff's big-nosed face was contorted, gaping at nostrils and mouth as he sucked air. The statuesque body was sagging, heaving the chest. Miracle or not, Sam Goniff, the world's number two heavyweight, was on the string, and Ken was not going to let him get away!

Goniff fled from a clinch to ring center and crouched with his hands beside his face, giving ground. This was work of a different pattern for Ken Lee. Ken liked to have the other man moving in on him. But he came down from his toes. He went in smoothly, feinting for the head, smashing a right hook to Goniff's lower ribs. Goniff puffed audibly, trying to lock Ken's arms. Ken shifted his fists to the head, beating through the heavy arms, and sud-

denly his fists were free, slamming short uppercuts to Goniff's chin.

Goniff's head went back. A left hook smashed him away faster than his feet could follow. Then the long, straight right like the flash of a rapier, and Sam Goniff fell backward into a blare of sound that swallowed the crash of his body on the canvas.

"Eight—nine—ten!"

Goniff did not move.

Dumpling-faced Soap Scovill fitted the blue robe over Ken's shoulders and howled as he beat Ken's back. The tribute from the crowd was adequate. The fans would endure Ken's studied and colorless methods in exchange for that last big thrill.

Several of the big-time sports columnists were in the dressing room as Ken took his rub-down and shower. Writers viewed Ken with some distaste. He was "poor copy."

Rumford of the *Times* prodded. "What do you think about the Champ? Think you'd stand a chance with him?"

"I haven't been offered a chance."

Rumford shrugged thin shoulders. "You must have some idea how you'd stack up. Can you lick him, or can't you?"

Ken's grey eyes were cold as he tossed away the towel and reached for his clothes. He said quietly, "It would make nice reading if I shot off my mouth and said Bat Kravitz is a bum. You could make half a column out of it if I said I could lick him with a hand tied behind me. I'm not saying it, and don't you print it. You can quote me on this: 'Bat Kravitz is a good fighter. I think I can whip him. I'd certainly like the chance, a year or two from now.'"

Hamblin of the *Record*, a small man with a bulbous nose, said harshly, "Look who's getting too big for his pantaloons. Better think twice, kid, before you start nibbling on the hands that feed you."

Soap Scovill broke in smoothly, "Don't think we ain't grateful for all you boys have done. The kid knows we can't get anywhere without you back us. It's just that the kid ain't a talker, see? It's just that he—"

"It's just that I'm tired of having every word I say twisted around," Ken said deliberately, walking to a mirror to knot a maroon tie. He looked slimmer in grey trousers and white shirt. There was only

a raked-raw spot on his right cheek to mark the fight on him. "I'm tired of being the G.I. here—which I wasn't. Isn't the simple truth good enough for your readers?"

"What the kid means—" Soap chirped.

"I know what the kid means," Hamblin snapped. "And the same to him from me." Hamblin walked to the door, opened it, and called sardonically, "Okay, Miss Ty O'Hare. He's got his pants on. And you're welcome to him. Me, I'm going to get something to take the taste of cold fish out of my mouth."

The girl came into the dressing room when the others had followed Hamblin out. She was a tall girl. Heavy, horn-rimmed spectacles emphasized the firmness of her pointed chin, and offset the symmetry of finely-molded features. A tailored, man-nish suit did deliberate sabotage to graceful length of limb. Her hair was brown and thick, and her dark eyes were challenging, ready to shift into snapping defiance.

Ken grinned, letting her see the grin. He said, "It's a man's world, after all."

Color flared in her cheeks. She snapped, "Sonny, this is A.D. 1-9-4-8. We have woman suffrage. We have husband-beaters. And we have women sports writers."

"When they own newspapers, we do," Ken said pointedly.

With an obvious effort, the tall girl forced resentment from her eyes. She looked around. They were alone. Soap Scovill had followed the newspaper boys out, expostulating in haste.

"I have a business proposition to put to you," Ty O'Hare said bluntly. "It will take some explaining. Would you care to take me to dinner tomorrow night?"

"For the privilege of taking the O'Hare millions to dinner, I will promise faithfully to swear that Bat Kravitz is a punk who fattened his reputation on old men while I was away, doing glorious battle for my country—"

"If you will call for me about eight," she cut him off frostily. "I live—"

"The whole world knows where you live," Ken mocked, and her brown eyes were very angry as she walked out of the room.

Soap Scovill was frowning great creases into his doughy face when he came back.

He barked, "Now why'd you want to do that? It cost me two rounds of drinks to get those guys cooled off. And I'm charging it to you. You're going to ruin everything if you don't get off of that high horse."

Ken looked at him steadily. "Ruin what, Soap? Who put me on this high horse? You know I need to gain twelve or fifteen pounds before I can fight Kravitz. A few months ago I was just another fighter. I figured three years would put me close to the top. Where I am right now."

"The public wanted to see new faces," Scovill said wearily. "They were tired of war-time ham-and-egggers. You were out of the Army with a big rep, tagged as the next Champ. You won your fights, and I got you bigger fights."

Ken's grey eyes were clouded. He said darkly, "When Goniff started going, he went awfully fast."

Soap Scovill blinked rapidly. He looked ready to howl. He gasped, "You think he tanked it? Sam Goniff?"

Ken admitted after thought, "No."

Soap was breathing hard, outraged. He snapped, "Goniff's been howling for a title shot four-five years. This finishes him. I should hope to kiss a porker, he didn't tank it."

Ken pulled on his coat moodily. Soap watched him with curiosity. He suggested, "You win a big fight tonight, kid. There's a party at the Stork Club. Ed Bloom's throwing it. Even Goniff will be there. It wouldn't do you no harm. It's publicity."

Ken shook his head shortly.

Scovill moaned, "You ain't human. You lick Sam Goniff like it was a day's work, and now you want to go to bed."

Ken told him, "It's a good habit for a fighter."

But he did not go to his hotel room. He found a phone booth and called his mother.

"Mom? I won again . . . No, no, not a scratch . . . Yes, I know you were . . . You're letting the maid do everything? . . . If I catch you working, I'll disown you. You've done your part of that . . . Just thought I'd let you know I'm all right . . . And say, I have a dinner date tomorrow night. You won't believe it. That O'Hare girl, the heiress, no less . . . Oh, I don't know. I've never seen her without specs and some outlandish tweedy affair, trying

to be one of the people . . . Sure, I'll confess all. Bye, Mom."

He went out and walked the dark streets for a while, restless. Sure, this was great. Sam Goniff, licked, drinks Ed Bloom's champagne in the Stork Club, and Ken Lee, winner, plods the shadows alone. Looking for something? Looking for what? Self-respect, maybe. Balm for old hurts that would not heal, ice-bound loneliness that the roar of great crowds have never melted. . . .

He flagged a taxi after a while. Back to the East Side. To darkness and dirt. There was an old saloon with bright red lights blinking, "Jerry's Place."

"I'll get out here," he said.

Cassidy was in his regular place, the back booth, filling most of it. A big man, Cassidy, hard of flesh. Blue eyes heavy with cynicism, but somehow still warm. Lieutenant Cassidy of Homicide now.

"A smart fight. A great fight," Cassidy said warmly. "Your father would have been proud, Kenneth. Big John would have been proud."

There was no stiffness in the big man, no apology for the words that brought strain to Ken's lean face. A great hand rested firmly on Ken's shoulder.

"He was a good ringman himself, Big John was, before your blessed mother made him quit," Cassidy said evenly, then more firmly, "And a squarer man never lived, son. Don't you forget that. Ever. If Big John was in with that dope ring it was a job he was doing on his own."

"Sure," Ken said lifelessly.

"I got it all down in the morgue," Cassidy mused, half to himself. "Bullets. Some day I'm going to find the gun they'll fit. Part of a lower plate. Big John had an upper plate. Nub McCormack butted out his front teeth over in the old Mongolia one night. But no lower. The room was cleaned up. There was a whale of a scrap, but they cleaned it up. Murder lives a long time. One of these days I'm going to find—"

"Thanks, Cassidy," Ken said, leaving. And he thought "Thanks for lying." He went out and caught a cab to his hotel.

All right, Ken Lee. You've had your hour. You've been a sick and lonely kid. It's over now. Ken Lee, fighter. Those rubber balls in your pockets. Squeeze them. Every minute a bigger muscle. A fighter

mustn't look back. A fighter is a machine. Squeeze those rubber balls, Ken Lee.

BEN was not having dinner with Ty O'Hare. It was Miss Honora Ty-singer O'Hare who smiled at Ken across the table in one of the more exclusive restaurants. Her spectacles were missing, and gone with them, the brusque manners. She was beautiful, of course. Her brown hair was carefully done, not intricately patterned, and she had used the cosmetic science but lightly. The symmetry of face and form were but finishing touches to a larger pattern of beauty, a poise that transcended mere prettiness, the polish of centuries of breeding.

It's something called class, Ken thought; and immediately she smiled, an almost accusing flash of humor.

"You were curious, weren't you, Mr. Lee? That is why you let me force this date on you. You had no interest in my proposition?"

"It was my first chance at a peek inside one of those mansions," Ken admitted frankly. "If I had that, lady, I wouldn't be trying to learn the newspaper business the hard way."

"And you wouldn't be swapping punches in the ring," she added dryly.

"No, I wouldn't."

"I didn't think so." She frowned and suggested, "You are going to fight Bat Kravitz, aren't you?"

Ken countered, "I hadn't heard about it."

She gestured impatiently. "You know you have been built up rather expensively. You don't assume you beat Sam Goniff because you are a nice, clean kid?"

Ken's eyes went frosty. He started to draw into his shell. There was something about this girl that stopped him. He admitted, "I've come along faster than I wanted to. My spots were picked. But I whipped Goniff. A dive you can spot. I never landed a harder, cleaner punch than the one that dropped Goniff. Do you think he could afford to take a dive?"

She toyed with a dessert fork for a moment. Then she locked her eyes to his and spoke carefully, "I do not believe Sam Goniff went into the ring to win. Sam was a little slower, a little wilder than I remember him. Twice in the earlier rounds

you were shaken, and Sam was very clumsy with his follow-ups. I do not think he intended for you to knock him out. But I do not believe you whipped the real Goniff."

"What kind of money will buy the number two spot from a challenger?" Ken demanded acidly.

"Oh, Sam Goniff got his contract for a title fight out of it," the girl stated calmly. "Prove it? No more than I can prove that Ed Bloom owns a share of the Champ. No more than I can prove that Ed Bloom was a rum-runner and a mobster in the old days—a thing which nine of ten people on any street corner know. You fight Kravitz, and Bloom makes a killing. Then Goniff gets his build-up, and his chance, and Bloom makes more money, but not so much. Only if you are smart, you won't fight Kravitz now."

"You seem to have it all figured out."

"I am making it my business," she said calmly. She flicked a shapely thumb, as though turning an index card. "Kenneth Lee, pugilist. The Alger hero who did not go hoodlum like his older brothers while his mother scrubbed floors to keep them alive. The young Kenneth shined shoes, sold papers, ran errands after school, dreaming of the day when he would be rich enough—"

"Suppose we skip that?"

"Suppose we don't. You decided that the easiest way to quick riches was through the ring. You lost your first five amateur fights, were beaten badly enough to discourage anyone else. Then you began to learn. You won the Golden Gloves. But you never learned to love fighting. It has always been in your mind to win the title, cash in on it, and quit."

"And that makes me a bum?"

"Quite the contrary. I know, for instance, that you have bought a fine home in the country for a mother who certainly deserves it. I know that most of your purses have gone into an annuity for her."

"That's my business. Just mine."

"All right. And I know you intend to take this title fight because you think you must have the money. It doesn't make sense in the long run. In three years Kravitz will be slipping, and you will be ready. The Bloom-Moss-Kravitz combine wants to ruin you now. Your manager—"

"Soap Scovill used to work for Bloom,"

Ken cut her off. "I knew it. My old manager died while I was gone. Scovill offered ten thousand for my name on a contract. I knew who he was. I know what is going on. I can take this title fight now, or I'll never get it. I've seen Bat Kravitz work. I think I have spotted a weakness. If I have, it means that I can get out of this game a few years earlier than I expected."

"I hate Ed Bloom's hold on boxing. I'm going to break it, if I can. Ken, figure what the challenger's cut of a title fight would be—" She leaned forward, intensity in the set of her pointed chin. "—and I will match it. This year, and for two more years, I will pay you whatever you would make for letting Bat Kravitz beat your brains out."

Ken stared at her.

"I hate everything Ed Bloom stands for," she said firmly. "I intend to break his hold on the championship with any means in my power. That means simply that someone must beat Bat Kravitz, and there is no one in boxing today who can come close to it. Eventually, you will be able to do it. And I am willing to pay anything in reason to keep you away from him until you are ready."

"Of all the—" Ken gasped. Then the pattern of long habit checked his outburst. He said coldly, "I can't be bought."

"I thought not," Ty O'Hare said quietly. There was a hint of sadness in her smile. "But I had to try. And I warn you, I intend to fight this match."

"I notice your column has been fighting Bloom for some time," Ken pointed out. "It's the old story about sticks and stones—unkind words can't hurt Bloom. You can write a million columns, and Ed Bloom will still run boxing."

III

ED BLOOM was a small man, an incompetent-looking man, who seemed as mildly successful as any proprietor of any small town general store. His face was fleshy, and his body was thin. He smoothed a few tufts of hair across his baldness, and his false teeth clicked loosely when he talked.

Violence had slipped from Ed Bloom with the wasting of his years. He was a legitimate business man now, and the old stories about him were vague. There was

only the perpetual bulge under Bloom's left armpit, and the two sleek young men who usually walked beside him in public, to indicate that Ed Bloom knew that hatreds sometimes live longer than men.

Bloom let his faded blue eyes wander around the big office among the five men. Sid Moss, Kravitz's manager, was pear-shaped, small in the shoulder, bulging at the middle, with short arms and tiny, fat hands. Babe Kravitz stood behind Moss. Babe's hard stare had never left Ken since he came into the room. Unreasoning hatred was smeared across Babe's long face. Babe's right arm hung limply. The Army surgeons had left Babe the hand. He could eat with it. He could knot a tie with it. But that hand would never fell another fighter in the ring.

Bat Kravitz was slumped in a big chair, a lump of boredom, a tiger at rest. His flat-profiled face was almost cubical with bony angles and leather-cured lumps. His light eyes were expressionless. Bat was that perfect heavyweight size, six-feet-two, two hundred pounds. The Champ's real stature was obvious only by comparison. Compactness cheated the eye.

Bloom's tired eyes flicked over Soap Scovill and came to rest on Ken. Bloom said with sudden finality, "We've talked enough, son. You sign now or you never sign."

"He's yellow." Babe snarled. Nobody looked at Babe. All eyes were on Ken's carefully blanked face.

Ken got up slowly, walked to the table, and signed the contract. Soap Scovill took the pen from him and signed. The paper already bore the signatures of Sid Moss and the Champ.

Bloom slipped the document into his desk. He said, "Tomorrow we do it again for the photographers."

Babe Kravitz came close to Ken. His eyes were hot with triumphant hate. He panted, "That fixes you, you dirty, fouling rat. You're right where we want you. You kept me from being Champ. If you hadn't fouled me, I wouldn't have been there for that shell to smash my arm."

"The way I heard it," Ken said quietly, "You tried to make a curve, drunk, and doing sixty. Not even a jeep was built for that. A couple of boys who were riding with you were killed, and you only got a

crushed arm. I guess you were lucky, Babe."

Babe Kravitz came at him with a shrieking oath and a hooking left hand. Ken backed, not wanting to hit him. Babe missed and swung again, a glancing blow to the forehead. Ken backed, and Babe, missing, went to his knees.

It was the Champ who stopped Babe. He picked up the taller man with hands under his shoulders. Bat's tone was dull, almost a monotone, but there was gruff affection in his words, "Take it easy, Babe. I'm the one's going to fix ths dope."

He did not look once at Ken, this Champ who walked like a jungle cat; but Ken knew that Babe's frenzied hatred had been transferred to a more, powerful body.

Commenting on the coming fight, Ty O'Hare wrote:

Ken Lee is going to be fed to Bat Kravitz. Anyone who saw the recent Lee-Goniff scrap should not be surprised

A capble workman, Sam Goniff has been clamoring after a title fight for a number of seasons. Goniff, a remarkably large and aggressive individual, is the possessor of a crushing left hook and a structural-steel jaw. These attributes have deafened the ears of Sid Moss and Ed Bloom to Goniff's frantic challenges. The Champ, presumably, has had no part in the methodical run-around. Bat Kravitz would fight Goniff any morning before breakfast, and have him whipped before the coffee chilled.

Goniff, by the Bloom-Moss method of thinking, apparently is not good enough to fight the Champ. But a man capable of stopping Goniff becomes per se the logical challenger.

Ken Lee is a fighter just turned voting age. He has, or surely will have, all the qualifications necessary to become heavyweight champion—provided a bad beating does not ruin his career. He does not belong in the same ring with Kravitz now.

The records state that Lee knocked out Goniff in the fifth. The records do not explain that Goniff, traditionally a hell-for-leather slugger, stood up and tried to box a lighter, much faster man. The records fail to note that Goniff was wild with his famous left hook. They do not remark on Goniff's reluctance to crowd and use his weight.

In short, Goniff fought the type of battle exactly the most vulnerable to Lee's counter-punching craft. Lee won, and Bat Kravitz has a popular challenger.

This fight is not a Kravitz-Lee contest. It is the older battle, Ed Bloom vs. the public. And, again, the public will inevitably lose.

The girl was a fighter, and she was busy. There were many columns in like vein. And, though many agreed with her, most of them rushed to grab at the fast-dwindling tickets.

IF he was nervous, it did not show. He moved around the room methodically, priming his muscles. The sharpness of his condition showed in every movement.

Soap Scovill came in with a pair of handlers, a wizened oldster and a big Negro. Soap said, "This here is Hack Small and Goldie Blackthorn. They work your corner."

Ken froze his motion. He demanded flatly, "Where are Bimstein and O'Malley?"

"I couldn't get 'em, after all," Scovill shrugged. "These boys are just as handy."

"I don't want anybody just as good," Ken snapped. Ken knew quite clearly that a wizard with a cut can mean the difference between victory and a stopped fight. "What is this, a cross?"

"No cross, kid," Scovill said mildly. "These boys are good enough. You expect them to blind you, or something? This is the Garden, kid."

Ken watched him narrowly. Soap pulled a contract from his coat pocket and handed it to Ken. "A present, kid. I've got my advance, and this won't be worth a Mex nickel tomorrow. From now on, you're on your own. If you're good enough, you can even have the title."

Ken looked at the contract. He held it out, hands poised to tear. Soap did not wince. The manager struck a match. Ken touched the paper to the flame, and dropped it.

It was true, then. It was shocking, even though he had suspected it. It was all planned, right down to this final scene to upset him. They had built up an ex-soldier for sentiment; they had picked Ken

because of Babe Kravitz's clamorous hatred.

Ken turned away coolly and resumed shadow boxing. Soap looked at him curiously, then shrugged. Ken fought off anger and disgust. He had one thing to think of now. Bat Kravitz—

"—at two hundred and one-quarter pounds. . . ."

The fanfare was done, the interminable introductions. Babe Kravitz had been called to the ring, "that great fighter and wounded war hero." Babe had taken the cheers with a sick smile. He had turned toward Ken's corner, and hatred had shuddered through his big frame, and he had spat. . . .

And now Bat Kravitz was listening to the referee with his strong, square face down. There was fire in his eyes, but it froze instead of flaming.

The bell.

Kravitz came on with long pounces, grace in the sheer power of his spring, a great fighter at the height of his prowess. The slenderer fighter who circled nimbly was a boy by comparison, but poised, unafraid.

The Champ wasted no time. He capped his rush with a flurry of blows. Ken circled, stabbed a left out, and landed the first blow.

Kravitz wheeled and came on, contemptuous of the left. Ken took the punches on his arms, snaked in two jabs, and netted the mauling fists. Even in his grasp, gloves thudded on Ken's ribs. The Champ tore one arm free, and the glove beat like a maul under Ken's heart. Ken grabbed the arm again.

The referee broke them, and Ken went back, slashing with the left, finding Kravitz's burrowing jaw. The left failed to check the Champ. He was inside, faster than Ken could move away, and his fists were driving great spikes of pain into Ken's middle.

Ken hung on. He went away fast with the referee's tap, squirming steadily backward, pumping the left as the Champ stalked him with furious lunges, bobbing from a deep crouch, gloves spread to hook. Ken jabbed to that jerking forehead, and shifted away as Kravitz's two-handed attack tore at him, getting away cleanly. Ken stepped to Kravitz's right, did a dangerous,

cross-stepping shift perfectly, slammed a one-two into Kravitz's face, and went under a whistling left hook to come up at long range, working the left into Kravitz's mouth.

Kravitz was working him toward a corner now, blocking the retreat. Ken feinted to his right, broke the stride neatly, and slithered to the left, picking off the savage right hook with his glove. But the force of it threw him back, and the ropes checked him for an instant. In that moment, the Champ was striking!

A left hook bent Ken's ribs. A right uppercut hacked through the defense and exploded dully on Ken's jaw. Ken's body turned to ponderous stone, too heavy for his muscles to move; and his vision went hazily four-dimensional. Four other blows blasted his jaw. Then battering-ram jolts to his middle.

In dim desperation, Ken tried to slide from the ropes, while his numb arms groped for something to hold. Only an octopus could have tied up Bat Kravitz then.

The screams were dull in Ken's ears, fading entirely for instants while his senses were splattered.

KEN'S legs quit. He did not fall. The fists were driving upward at him, holding him against the ropes. Ken punched back feebly. The fists were driving deep into his body now, crushing him. A glove landed on his right eye, whirling lights through his head in kaleidoscopic patterns that settled to a dark red. He felt the blood hot on his cheek, on his chest. Then the terrible blow on his nose, a piercing agony so different from ordinary pain that he almost screamed as bone and cartilage broke.

The pain jerked him out of numbness. He aimed one blow at the bobbing head. With his left eye, he saw the glove coming at his jaw. He could not dodge it, and behind it was blackness.

"... six—seven . . ." A monotone. A routine. Ken rolled over and pushed with his hands. He beat the count. He stood with his bloody head cocked back a little, to use the bad eye. The Champ slung a pinwheel left at the exposed jaw. Ken rolled with it, so slowly that the blow hurt him, but he had a death-grip on Kravitz's

arms now, and his face smeared blood on Kravitz's hairy chest.

The referee broke them. Kravitz circled, feinting with his right hand wide, coming at an angle that would herd Ken into a corner. Ken walked into the right hand, staggered, and lurched to the center of the ring. Twice more he took the full right hand, trading his jaw to keep away from the ropes. Then Kravitz rushed him, took Ken's shaky blows to the face, horsed him around, and drove Ken to the ropes with sheer, wilting power.

Just before he hit the ropes, Ken clamped an elbow down over the glove that had landed with rib-wrecking effect, and jerked it hard as he stepped back. They hit the ropes together, and the bounce flung Ken free. Ken was back at ring center, melting under the blazing attack, when the bell rang.

Ken flopped on the stool. He gasped, "Fix the eye."

Hack Small, the grizzled little man, was already at work, his fingers quick and knowing. Goldie, the big Negro, was holding Ken's trunks clear of his waist, kneading Ken's thighs. Nothing crooked here. Good handling. But no genius.

Hack Small had stopped the bleeding from the gash over Ken's eye, and had even given him a slit of vision from it as he went out for the second. The rest had been a reprieve, but Ken still moved heavily. Kravitz bobbed down, feinted, and hacked a fierce hook at the jaw. Ken got his left glove against Kravitz's forehead and pushed himself away, and the hook thudded on his shoulder.

The Champ straightened abruptly. Three times his left hand flicked out, as cute as any gym-fighter's, but crunching heavily to the gash over Ken's eyes. Blood was gushing again as the Champ moved to Ken's blind side and blasted him with long hooks.

The fury of the first round had been harnessed to deliberate demolition. Kravitz toned down the pace. He feinted more, called his shots, raining his blows to the head. A short hook landed below Ken's left eye. There was no cut, but a great mouse rose.

Kravitz shifted the attack to the body, driving Ken around the ring with un governable short blows. Ken lurched and staggered as the fists nearly broke him apart.

Ken never lost his head. He worked his left continually to that flat face. He chopped his right, going into clinches. He finished the round on his feet.

It was the same in the third, except that Ken was blinder now, right eye completely closed, left eye swollen disturbingly. He had no steam to his punches. The Champ was battering strength from him faster than Ken's magnificent conditioning could replace it. The Champ was cutting him down at leisure.

Outgunned, Ken stuck to his fight. He rolled and slipped punches. He stabbed Kravitz with good lefts, but the Champ inevitably bobbed under and beat Ken's middle until it was like the inside of a hinge. It was a calculated destruction. There were no fouls. None were needed.

A left hook sent Ken to his knees just before the end of the fourth round. The bell rang, and he got up, but Goldie had to steer him to his corner. Small had abandoned Ken's right eye as beyond temporary repair, and was trying to pry the left open. The attending physician looked Ken over, and hesitantly granted him one more round.

This was it! Ken moved out with his head cocked to the side, mouth strained almost around to his right cheek in an effort to hold the lower lid of his "good" eye down. Kravitz was in a deep, restless crouch again; a killer now, he was done with spoiling. He forged through Ken's left and poled his right hand to the ribs, and Ken sagged, feeling broken ribs knifing him.

Kravitz was coming in again, weaving with fists low. There was something Ken had to remember Something about the way the Champ jerked his head up when—

Ken swung blindly. He felt the crunch as his long bolo uppercut made contact. Then a great roaring was shrill in his ears. He jerked his slit of misty vision around frantically. He put his right glove to his forehead and strained the eyelid open.

He saw Kravitz coming to him, coming slowly, the shakiness sliding from him as a duck drips water. Ken swung one blind blow, missed. Then he was a bit of flotsam on a sea of fists, smashed by raging currents, sliding down into a great whirlpool. . . .

" . . . eight—nine. . . ."

Somehow, he got up. He stood in howling darkness, trying to get his gloves up. There was the scuffle of feet on canvas. He tried to turn toward them. But there were no punches. There were arms about him, guiding him away.

There was a great voice, ". . . and STILL champion. . . ."

And a lesser voice, close in the darkness, a voice glugged with vengeful passion, "This finishes you, punk. I'll never be Champ, but neither will you. You're through, punk? Are you too punchy to hear me? This is me, Babe Kravitz, the guy you as good as shot, telling you you've had your last fight."

The big Negro half-carried Ken up the aisle. Inside the dressing room, Ken fell. The blackness was merciful and long.

IV

JOE BYRD was Ken's fourth manager in sixteen months. Joe Byrd was quitting. He gazed sadly at the lean, hard-faced man who sat on the bed in the tiny hotel room, squeezing methodically at the rubber balls in his strong hands.

Byrd said, "Ken I honestly thought I could do you some good. I can't. There's no club in the metropolitan area that will touch you. A couple of words out of the side of Ed Bloom's mouth, and any little promoter in this burg is cooked. I know you think your other managers sold you out. I don't want you to think that I have. It's just that—"

"Okay, Joe," Ken said tonelessly, without raising his eyes from his hands. "You tear up your contract. I tear mine."

Byrd paused at the door. His face showed concern. He said uncertainly, "Ken, I'm sorry."

Ken said, "Okay, Joe."

Ken did not look up when the door closed.

Big muscles hunched in his forearms as he cut his fingers deep into the rubber balls. Ken Lee had changed. His shoulders were heavier, his chest was deeper. He was lean now, but no longer slender. Ken weighed a hundred and ninety-two pounds. The stamp of the fighter was on his face. It was not so much the scar in his right eyebrow, nor the faint ridge across his straight nose. The hard-

ness of his body showed on his face, impassive and unyielding.

His coat was hanging on the single chair in the room. Ken stood up deliberately, dumped the rubber balls into the coat pockets, and pulled on the coat. It was a good coat. It was perhaps a trifle tight under the arms, but it had worn well. If he remembered to keep the soles of his shoes flat against the floor, hiding the hole in one of them, he looked quite fashionably dressed.

A grim smile tugged at his straight mouth, then was gone. He went out and caught a subway uptown.

Miss Ty O'Hare had graduated to a small office of her own at the *Clarion*. Not a remarkable progress, Ken reflected, considering that the paper belonged to her.

She stood up to offer her hand, and her smile was friendly. "Ken Lee! It's good to see you."

Ken did not smile. He told her bluntly, "I've hit bottom, I suppose, asking a newspaper for help."

She smiled, waved him to a chair, and waited. Ken sat, but he did not accept her cordial mood. He kept his voice impersonal, "Miss O'Hare, I can't get a fight in this town. I've fought from coast to coast twice. I've had forty-two fights."

"And you won forty-two. Thirty-eight knockouts," she added. His hard face showed no surprise, but he looked at her curiously. "It's an impressive record, Ken."

"It won't get me a club fight around here," Ken told her grimly. "But I didn't intend to beat up your ears with my troubles. I just want to know if you can tell me of any club owner who doesn't take orders from Ed Bloom?"

She did not answer at once. She said finally, "You can hardly blame the smaller promoters, Ken. When Bloom blacklists a fighter, the clubs have to string along. Before I answer your question, I want to ask you one. What is your reason for wanting to fight Bat Kravitz again? Do you want to repay him for what he did to you, or is it still your ambition to use the championship like a checkbook, and then toss it aside?"

"Kravitz did just what I'd have done to him, in his place," Ken said with cool impatience. "If you want to put it that way, the title is just a big checkbook to me."

The girl shook her head slowly. She said, "Ken, I was pretty young and foolish the time I tried to bribe you not to fight Kravitz. I'd gotten too much money too quickly. Quite aside from wanting to do something decent with it, I let money upset my sense of values. I hope I have changed. At least, I wouldn't try a stunt like that again. But you haven't changed, Ken. You still despise the game you expect to do so much for you. I do not believe that a man who thinks he is better than the boxing game can ever become a champion."

"Thanks for the lecture," Ken said shortly, getting up.

"Wait, Ken!" she called after him. When he turned, she added, "Along with my lecture, I'll give you a note to a promoter I know. It isn't uptown, but some of the local fans go over to Brooklyn. Broderick's Mongolia Arena is something of an institution, and he doesn't give a snap of his finger for Bloom."

"Pop Broderick!" Ken exclaimed. His mouth twisted. "I guess I won't need any note. But thanks for reminding me."

He felt her eyes on him as he went out. He knew, oddly, that this girl liked him. It made no sense. Ken grumbled at himself, "Maybe you're on the wrong track, Lee. Maybe you should try to marry that money-bags and buy the title from Kravitz."

It was easier to jibe at himself than it was to think about Pop Broderick. Thinking took him back to the old days in Italy, when the championship was a straight road ahead. . . .

IT was not that Pop Broderick had changed. Looking at the suave, brisk man behind the desk, Ken knew that the soldier he had met in Italy had been the real Broderick no more than the thinly clipped moustache recalled the wild brush Broderick had sported. Broderick looked ten years younger, fifteen pounds lighter.

Broderick's dark eyes had the worn-smooth polish of cynicism as he shook his head. "Kid, unless you've changed your style, my club is not for you."

Ken asked harshly, "Does Bloom give you orders, too?"

"Nobody gives me orders," Broderick answered. "My crowds aren't Garden crowds. They're right hand crazy. I put

in a pair of sluggers who couldn't buy their way into the Garden, and they beat each other up. The crowd is happy. The sluggers make a buck, I make a couple. My fans like their steak raw."

"I'll fight the first prelim for nothing," Ken offered. He saw the surprise in Broderick's eyes. "I'm not kidding. I've got to get a toehold in this town."

"Still believe that a man with the goods has a free ticket to the top?" Broderick jibed easily. "Okay, kid. You get a semi-final. Six rounds. You write your own ticket with my fans. If they like you, you get a wind-up spot. If they don't, I can't use you.

Ken moved around the dressing room easily, pounding taped fists into the huge mitts of a colored boy named Flophouse, a stunted giant with a huge stomach.

Broderick came in. Pop was mad. It showed only in his slitted, dark eyes. He took out a cigarette, fired it, and said, "The Duke hasn't showed."

Ken stopped punching. He said dully, "Oh." There was much meaning in his tone.

Pop dragged smoke intently. He said, "I've sent some boys out after the Duke."

Ken shook his head jerkily. Pop's boys would not find old Duke York. Not tonight.

Ken was wrong. A husky boy, earmarked a fighter, thrust his head into the doorway in a few minutes and asked, "In here, Pop?" Pop nodded. Two more huskies sidled their burden through the door and dropped him. It was Duke York, veteran club fighter.

"Drunk as a lord," the first boy said. He amended, and looked to Pop for appreciation, "Drunk as a Duke."

There was no humor in Pop now. He stirred at the Duke's stupor with a toe. He called harshly, "Duke!"

The Duke's eyes opened. They focused gradually, almost gave up the battle, and then flickered wide. Duke whimpered, "Pop, I didn't wanta. They threatened my family. I didn't wanta run out on you, Pop."

Pop was motionless, except for the drift of smoke from his nostrils. He said finally, "Duke, get out. You're through."

Duke sat up, scrambling for balance. He began to sniffle. "Pop, you been good

to me. I'll fight for you. I'll go out there and give you the hellinist fight you ever saw."

There was more sadness than anger in Pop's voice.

"Nobody's going to hurt you, Duke. Just get out. You could have come to me, if you were threatened."

A man in a green sweater stuck his head around the door and barked, "Get it out there, Lee." The man looked up at Broderick, down at the Duke, and whistled softly.

Pop said, "Go on out, kid. I'll have you a man."

Ken went down the aisle. The Mongolia arena was an antique, just short of being a fire-trap, but it was huge. And it was packed by a howling mob from fandom's lower crust.

When he got into the ring, the crowd got a glimpse of his face, tough, but almost unmarked. They began to razz him. "Pretty boy." "Wait'll the Duke curls 'em ears for you, honeychile."

He had to stand it for several minutes. Then Pop came up into the ring. Pop cupped hands to his mouth and shouted.

"Ladies and gents—" The roar came back, "Who you kidding, Pop?" "Your attention, please. Duke York will not appear in this ring tonight. Or any other night."

There was an astonished roar, a protest.

"Duke York is too drunk to stand up right now," Pop shouted. "He is drunk because he was warned not to appear in this ring—threatened by men who are afraid to let the fans of this city see the boy in this corner—" Pop slashed the air with a dramatic finger, pointing to Ken. "There he is, the boy Bat Kravitz fears, the fighter who has Ed Bloom lying awake nights. In the Army he was heavyweight champion of all the Allied European fighters. Maybe you saw him pushed into the ring with the Champ when he had to spot Bat Kravitz twenty pounds. You saw him knocked down, but you didn't see him stay there. You saw him, blind as a bat, almost floor the Champ a few seconds before the referee stopped the fight. The smart boys said Ken Lee would never be worth a nickel after that fight. But here he is, a full-sized heavyweight now, with a record of knockouts as long as your arm over

the best fighters in the country—"

Pop shouted on, revolving as he roared, getting louder and angrier. Pop roared, "The toughs who stopped Duke York from fighting thought they had fixed Ken Lee for tonight. They figured I couldn't dig up a man good enough to test his mettle. They knew it; but they were wrong. I have such a fighter, who has agreed to go on for four rounds."

Necks craned as eyes searched the exits. Nobody was coming down the aisles.

Pop shouted, "To oppose this great heavyweight, I am bringing to the ring one of the truly great fighters of all time."

Cheers, slightly doubtful. Eyes on the exits.

Pop shucked off his coat, tossed it out of the ring. His tie and shirt followed. Ken saw suddenly that Pop was wearing boxing shoes.

Pop bellowed, "It's me."

Fans climbed their chairs, shrieking.

Pop came to the middle of the ring. His bulging, hairy chest was bare, an odd contrast with the sharply-creased, herringbone trousers. Pop's face was cold now, and his eyes had that curious blankness. He said to the referee, "Just don't let me kill him, Ab."

Ken answered a bell that sounded tinny in the great wash of noise. He went out, and it was Italy all over again, except that Pop was faster. And the referee was Pop's.

There was no getting away from all that riot. The gloves, Ken could parry. But not all the elbows, the forearms, the bull lunges of smashing shoulders, the wrestling matches where Pop's head was a busy battering ram. Ken was hurt after the first fifteen seconds. The referee kept warning Pop regularly. Three times in the first round Pop used the knee. One smash struck Ken in the groin almost solidly, and he sagged while Pop beat him across the ring.

Through it all, the howling barbarians in the darkness saw the lean, heavily muscled man stepping away methodically, taking punishment without changing expression, reeling under smashes that would have spilled an ordinary fighter, and hitting back with sharp counters.

In the third round, Pop began to breathe heavily. Ken's left hand began to check

him, to move him back. The tide turned. Broderick was still rushing, but Ken was stopping him, setting him off balance, and shaking him with a straight right. Pop was bleeding at the nose and mouth at the end of the round.

They came out for the last round. Pop said, "You trambo, if you let up, I'll kill you. My fans get an honest fight."

And he came at Ken with a murderous leather windmill. Ken covered up and gave ground. Down in a crouch, Ken came out of it with a straight right that carried all Ken's strength, and the force of Pop's rush, as hard as Ken had ever hit any man. Pop hit the canvas on his shoulders and his feet went on over his head.

Pop got up at "nine." Ken went to him steadily, jabbing the left. Pop grabbed Ken's wrist, slung him into the ropes, and swung a decapitating right as Ken bounced off. The swing barely missed, and took Pop to his knees. He got up. Ken set him up and pulled the trigger. Pop went down again. He sat up, with the timer giving him a slow beat. But Pop got up on the sixth count.

Ken worked him along the ropes, avoided his wild clubbing, and drilled his right to the button. The bell rang while Pop was hauling himself up by the ropes. The howling was insane.

Pop gestured for silence. He bellowed, panting, "Any six guys that don't believe the kid is a great fighter, see me in the dressing room." And Pop collected his clothes and walked up the aisle, with the fans giving him their hearts and tonsils.

Pop looked little the worse for his beating when he came into Ken's dressing room. He said briskly, "You did all right. You get a main event in two weeks. Here's your two C's." Pop grinned suddenly. "You just missed your kayo bonus."

Ken pocketed the money without looking at it. He asked, "Who do I get?"

"Bobo Brown or Cass Nabors," Pop told him, shrugging. He studied Ken for a moment and said, "Kid, let's get it straight. This is a club, not the Garden. I think I pay better than most clubs. I'm lucky to have you. But you won't get any fights in the Mongolia that will build you up for a title go."

"Just asking," Ken pointed out shortly.

The main event was just over, and the crowds were spilling into corridors when Ken went out. He spotted the towering, frosty haired figure in the shiny serge suit, bulking large out of the crowd, smiling at him.

"Hello, Lieutenant Cassidy," Ken said.

"Kenneth, my boy," Cassidy exclaimed.

"It was good to see you in there tonight. I knew you wouldn't quit. You've too much of your father in you to quit."

"Thanks. Thanks, Cassidy," Ken said, keeping the bitterness out of his tone, and shaking off the big man.

He went back to his hotel room. He lived alone, and liked to be alone. Ken had never had a close friend. Even his relationship with his mother had never been companionable. He adored his mother, almost worshipped her; yet he had no small words of affection. A few words over a telephone; a short note enclosing money he needed himself.

"Some day I'll be champion. Some day she'll have a fine home, and somebody to wait on her hand and foot, and nothing but silk to wear," the kid had said to himself long ago. Never to her. Only to himself. And she had the house now, the maid and the silks, if she wanted to wear them. And he was going to be champion. Somehow, he was going to force Bat Kravitz to get into the ring with him again.

He undressed and went to sleep.

Ken was up early, as usual. His setting-up exercise consumed a full half hour. It was a program that might have put an unaccustomed man to bed for a week. Monotonous work, tedious strain that harnessed every muscle in his body. Ken never minded it. It was part of a goal that had built him to full heavyweight stature.

He showered, went out to breakfast, and brought the morning papers back to his room. Two of the Sunday editions mentioned the previous night's fights only in the summaries. Ty O'Hare had a feature story in the *Clarion*:

THE FIGHTING PROMOTER

Nobody tells Pop Broderick how to run his fight club.

The above statement can hardly be clas-

sified as news; but last night it made news in an unusual manner.

Do any of you fans remember Ken Lee? For the benefit of short memories, Ken Lee is the fighter who, as a light-heavy, was literally shoved into the ring against Bat Kravitz a couple of seasons back, amid much fanfare and loud clicks of the turnstiles. Immature, inexperienced, badly outweighed, Ken Lee gave the fans a much better show than they deserved. Ken Lee took a ruinous beating. Promoter Bloom made hatsful of money. And Promoter Bloom wrote fighter Lee off the books. Finis.

But Ken Lee did not quit. Any fan in any boxing town between the oceans will tell you that Ken is—not was—one of the finest heavyweights in the business today. But Ken Lee cannot fight in this city. No promoter will give him a chance. Ed Bloom's blacklists are more effective than those of the Commission. Two years ago Ken Lee had no chance of defeating the Champ. Today, bigger, more mature, with a string of forty-two wins that include thirty-eight knockouts, he might conceivably turn the trick; and he finds the doors of fight clubs closed in his face.

After many a disappointing experience, Ken Lee finally ran into Pop Broderick, the large and colorful fellow who operates the Mongolia Arena in Brooklyn; and Broderick promptly offered Lee a spot on his card, matching him against the veteran Duke York. At last, Lee was getting his chance to appear before local fans.

But the peculiar "jinx" that has pursued Lee locally got in another body blow. Duke York failed to appear in condition to fight. York claimed that he had been threatened if he appeared. Lee was left without an opponent, and seemed doomed to one more disappointment. Not in Pop Broderick's club!

Pop Broderick is something of a legend in Brooklyn. There are those who will tell you that Broderick could take his entire card of fighters into any alley, and lick the lump of them.

When no substitute for York could be found, Broderick shucked his silk shirt, climbed into the ring, and proceeded to make Lee think the roof had fallen on his head. In typical Broderick—which is hardly Queensbury—style. Broderick

whaled, butted, and elbowed the daylight out of Lee for the better part of two rounds after which Lee collected himself and began bringing the rafters down on the head of the man who was paying him to fight. Fans claim it was the most furious brawl since the Dempsey-Firpo fracas.

If the fans were jubilant, many thinking people were not. Why it is possible for a too-good fighter to be blacklisted unofficially? If you happen to meet Ed Bloom, you might ask him. Bloom could answer that question.

V

THE STORY was too pointedly a favor to be ignored. He went by the *Clarion* offices the next morning to thank her. Ty looked at him curiously and smiled.

"Gratitude doesn't come easily to you, does it?" she commented. "You self-made men are the real snobs. You resent anything that doesn't come through your own efforts."

"It must be nice to be in a position to judge," Ken countered sourly.

"I think that you put yourself in a sort of cell when you were a child, hurt and ashamed," she said. "You expect to come out of it when you get to be someone great—like champion of the world. You have nothing else to live for; and you have denied yourself everything else. The pattern is setting, Ken. Being champion won't transform you. You will still be a lonely, surly, distrustful man. If you don't come out of that shell before it is too late—"

He hadn't come here to be psychoanalyzed; and he told her so. He added, "Save your noble impulses for your social work. I'll get along."

There were some white shirt-fronts at the Mongolia ringside when Ken Lee made his second appearance in the old arena. The *Clarion's* steady publicity campaign had brought some of the dyed-in-the-woolers across the bridge to look Ken over.

He was fighting Rock Naylor, champion of New England. Both Bobo Brown and Cass Nabors, Pop's original choices, had claimed injuries. Ken tugged at the ropes grimly, knowing he would have to do better than merely win tonight. He would

have to win sensationally, or those white-shirt fronts would be gone from the Mongolia forever.

The Rock came bouncing out with the bell, a hard-faced oldster, chunky, with slatted ribs. The Rock fought from a crouch, bobbing his bullet head while he slammed in his hooks to the body. He was fighting from the first tinkle of the bell. He came in close, butted off Ken's light left, and got his head on the taller man's chest, punishing the ribs. Out of the clinch, the Rock drove for close quarters again. The oldster was good in there, beating the body while Ken only tried to tie him up.

Ken caught Rock Naylor with the long left. He walked him around with it, studying the stocky man, and Rock nuzzled off the left and got close again, chopping with rude power. Ken looked weak and inept at the close work, with Rock driving him into the ropes.

Rock Naylor had his line of battle established. He had discovered weakness, and he exploited it. Rock found it surprisingly easy to get under that long left and close with the taller man. For two full minutes Rock drove Ken around the ring with a furious inside attack that had Ken apparently baffled. He drove Ken to the ropes again, and worked him toward a corner.

It was a distinct surprise to Rock Naylor when the left to the body spun him, and the right uppercut smashed against his jaw, buckling his knees.

Ken knew exactly how much time he had. He did not throw wild punches. One miss, and Naylor would get away. Ken flicked his left to the face, and hooked the right to the heart as Rock tried to clinch. He feinted the right to the body, hooked the left to the jaw, and then he had all the time he needed. The Rock floundered, badly hurt. Ken feinted, smashed the right hand over the heart, and shifted instantly to bring the same hand up to the jaw in a crushing short hook. Rock Naylor went down, through for the night.

Ken went back to the dressing room with the knockout-rumble in his ears. He had not made much money—Rock Naylor's demand had been high; but Ken was satisfied. It had been a good win.

Naylor was no pat-on-the-wrist push-over. The boys in the snowy shirt fronts knew it. They'd be back.

Ken had almost finished dressing when he first heard the sirens, the sizzling howls of fire engines. He grabbed his coat and stepped out into the corridor. The smell of fire lanced his nostrils before he spotted the smoke, just beginning to billow out in dark, rolling masses from the arena. The crowd was gone. A few men were running for exists. Ken trotted up the corridor. There seemed to be plenty of time; then abruptly there was very little time. Red tongues appeared in the black waves thousands of them, speaking a snappish language in tones of fury. Ken broke and ran.

He ran outside, and the trucks were roaring up, spilling men who dragged hoses with waspish energy. But the arena was a howling inferno now, with flames leaping up in a thousand new spots. Staring dully, Ken knew that it was too late.

Voices shouted at him, and he moved outside the lines the police had drawn. Ken saw Pop Broderick, staring impassively at the flames, fitting a cigarette automatically to his tight lips. A bunch of Pop's "boys" stood around him, ushers and roustabouts and old fighters, with their faces fallen apart. When the first rafter wrestled itself free and crashed down in a flame-fanning dive, Pop shook his head once briefly, and then he asked, "You boys see any characters around? Any of the mobs?"

There were only numb shakes of the head. Pop went on, almost reflectively, "It started downstairs. It was timed. When it got to the main floor, it was too late."

"Boss!" the cry came from deep in the crowd, halfway around the flame-bathed circle. They finally located Flophouse. The squat negro had lugged a safe out of the office. Now he could not budge it.

"Leave that thing there," Pop called dryly. "I can't see anybody walking off with it."

Flophouse came on the run, a duck-waddle. His eyes were rolling, white and angry flutters. "Boss! I see that little ol' crook runnin' up the basement stairs. The one I never can remember's name.

Little bitty ol' moustache an' a egg-sucking nose."

"Palo Condi?" Pop barked, sucking air. The negro nodded wildly. "I just run him out. You never told me—"

"Good boy, Flophouse," Pop said, and control was a dam before the mounting flood of savagery. "You guys! Anybody know if Blinky Bryan holes up in the same spot?"

Two of them nodded. Then Pop was whirling, shouldering through the mob. Ken snarled at the "boys," What's the idea? If he's going after somebody, he'll need—"

"Boss don't want no help," Flophouse snarled back. "Help'd just cramp his style."

BEN was racing after Broderick. There were taxis cruising like beetles around a street light. Broderick was in one, its gears screaming. Ken dove into another cab and shouted for the driver to follow Broderick. They crossed the bridge, veered with screeching turns into a waterfront sector.

The building where Broderick stopped was small, two-storied. A bar and restaurant occupied the ground floor. There were outside steps at the rear of the building. Ken was out of the cab in time to see Broderick vaulting the stairs, to see him outlined against an open door. He heard Broderick's voice, low and hard, "Hello, Palo. Hello, Blinky."

And then violent noise shattered the night. Ken raced up the steps. He stopped in the doorway as a whirling bottle sucked air viciously, passing his ear.

The big room was outfitted as a private bar. It seemed full of men. Some were already on the floor. Ken stared, frozen.

Pop Broderick was raging up and down the room like a rogue elephant on the loose. Pop had the rather improbable talent of being able to use both fists simultaneously, while lashing out with his feet. Numbers handicapped the defenders, and every blow of Pop's was landing. Whenever a man sneaked out of range to use a weapon, Pop snatched a missile and heaved it. His generalship was as remarkable as his fury.

The ranks thinned. Men lay limp on the floor, or crawled sickly to the walls.

A small man with the spikes of his moustache broken under an enormously high-bridged nose crawled toward the door, then turned and steadied a gun at Pop's back.

Ken picked up a bottle from the floor. He leaped and cracked the little man sharply behind the ear, just before Pop's pivot brought a huge foot crashing into the man's ribs. Pop's eyes blazed, and he howled, "Get out of here, kid!"

There were four of the enemy standing now, circling for advantage, all wielding bottle or blackjacks; and Ken understood that this, and not the mad rampage, was the real danger. One of them darted close, raising a sapper. Pop parried the blow with a chair, then whirled and broke the chair over the head of the man who was charging from the rear. He took a slashing blow from a bottle, staggered, then leaped, hands dragging a face down against the pump of mighty knees.

The enemy had dwindled to two. One of them broke for the door. Pop hit him with a football tackle, drove him against a wall, slammed his head against the floor, and whirled on the last man.

The survivor was a big man, paunchy. Sweat streamed down a flabby face. A deep scar lined the face from forehead to jaw, across one eyelid. The short nose was pushed up, and the hairy black nostrils were gaping.

Blinky Bryan broke a bottle across the edge of the bar and backed to the wall. Pop walked at him steadily, hands at his sides. Bryan slid along the wall into a corner. Pop kept moving toward him, and a thousand jagged glass knives gleamed.

Bryan dropped the bottle suddenly. He gasped. "Pop. I don't know nothing. Whatever it was, I wasn't no part of it."

"The Bryan mob fights to the last man," Pop said tonelessly. "Blinky, I'm going to tear the meat off of your bones unless you talk. Whose money, Blinky? Bloom?"

Bryan whinnied, "Pop, I swear I don't know."

Pop hit him in the mouth. He swung short blows, twisting his fists to cut, not hard punches. When his fists dropped to the belly, they drove harder. Bryan took it, cringing in agony while the blood streamed. He wailed finally, "I wasn't in

it. Sid Moss said Bloom wanted to see Palo. That's all I know."

Pop smashed him then, a full crusher to the jaw. Bryan squatted in the corner, one leg folded under him.

Pop found a phone behind the bar, righted it, and dialed. He asked quietly, between pants, "Lieutenant Mahan? Pop Broderick. You people looking for Palo Condi?" There was a pause. Then Pop said, "That's right, Lieutenant. I saw the little weasel in a bar. When he ducked, I remembered he was wanted, and like any decent citizen, I followed him when he ducked in a dive. You would be astonished, the fight that little rat put up. A number of innocent by-standers were injured. You would do wisely to send an ambulance when the boys come to pick up this Palo Condi, this small-time public enemy. Sure, Blinky Bryan's joint. What's that? Oh, sure, Johnny. Yeah, it was tough. I can't prove a thing. This Condi's packing a roscoe. You can nail him with the Sullivan, and he's a fourth-offender. Thanks, Johnny. Forget it. You can find me at the usual place."

They did not say much for a while in the taxi. Ken was dazed. Pop was irritably trying to reassemble his clothing.

Ken asked finally, "Why didn't you tell the cops? Bryan practically admitted Bloom hired Condi to—"

Pop requested shortly, "Don't be an ass."

"I heard him admit it. I'll swear to it."

Pop said coldly, "With me beating it out of him, he admitted it. Any two-bit lawyer would make a jack-ass out of me. I know. One of Ed Bloom's bully boys was around last week. I threw him out on his ear."

Ken sat up stiffly. He blurted, "On account of me?"

"I run my own club. My way."

"But if it hadn't been for me—"

"All right. On account of you," Pop growled. "Maybe I could have got by without ever tangling with that mob. Now I get in their hair. I can't build one-tenth of an arena at these prices from the insurance. To hell with it anyhow. I've got a better idea. Kid, can you take Bat Kravitz?"

Ken said steadily, "I can take him. Why?"

"I'm not so sure. I'd have to find out," Pop mused, his face wrinkling in hard concentration. "Damn it, it's the only way I can get at Bloom. If Palo Condi sings like a canary, he can't put the finger on Ed Bloom. Bloom's legitimate, pure as a lily. He just suggests, and somebody else gets the dirty work done. Kid, you want a manager? You show me you can do the job, and I'll get you a shot at Kravitz."

Ken said nothing. He did not see how Broderick could get him a shot at anybody now. But the ashes of the Mongolia Arena lay heavily on Ken's shoulders. He put out his hand silently.

VI

THE FIGHTS Pop lined up were out of town, mostly in smaller places. Ken made little money. The fighters were generally tramps, home-town favorites, all of them oldsters. Ken met something new in each of them: the queer shift of an unknown named Tippy Stone, the light but startling double-left of the punchy veteran, Cass Revere, the masterful feinting of glass-jawed Joey Gladstone. Pop dug them up from fistic graveyards, and Ken buried them with landslide fists; but he began to realize that there were still things he could learn. Pop never had a word of advice; he just lined up a fight a week. Against that kind of opposition, it was not too often.

Then the pattern changed. Ken fought a stubby, dirty little man in Boston, Fritz Zablski, whose life's ambition seemed to be to get his head on Ken's chest and tear out his ribs. Ken took the roughing, threw in his counters, and knocked out Zablski in the sixth.

Then Moe Wolfe in Pittsburgh two weeks later. Another Zablski; short, a croucher, a terror inside. Ken got to him in the seventh. Then Mike Brennan in Chicago. Bad company, Brennan. Tough as Zablski, strong as Wolfe; smarter than the two together. Ken had him down twice in the tenth; but the bell saved Brennan.

They went back home. There was some publicity about the Brennan scrap. Zablski and Wolfe were just good journeymen; but Brennan had been mentioned

for a title shot. Most of the papers gave the story a fair play. The *Clarion* featured a photo of Brennan going down before Ken's right cross.

Pop had a copy of the *Clarion* rolled in his hand when he came into the room where Flophouse was giving Ken a brisk rubdown after a light session in the gym. Pop jerked the tubed paper slightly and said, "You've got a friend there, kid."

Ken rolled over to give Flophouse a chance at his thighs and shook his head. "Not a friend. A fellow-traveller. Like you and me. She's heading in the same direction, and takes the same boat.

A muscle in Pop's cheek jerked. He said quietly, "Have it your way. Only some day you're going to wake up and find out you've missed some boats. But have it your way. I've got you a fight. Hop Snow, ten rounds, in Philly."

"Hop Snow! Snow is just a middleweight," Ken protested.

"He is a middleweight, he is a light-heavy, or he is a heavy," Pop declared steadily. "He is a round bunch of rubber, and he takes it off or puts it on. He'll come in at better than one-eighty, and don't let that middleweight dope fool you. You had better be right, or you'll get your head slapped off."

If there was no resentment on his blank, chiseled face, there was plenty inside him in his corner and looked across the ring at plump, almost-noseless little Hop Snow. Ken didn't want this fight. Snow, though he seemed to add or pare off pounds by thought-control, was a middleweight, ranked Number Two. His record was not spotless. Pop had explained, "Hop is not above sticking out his chin for one if the price is right." It would be no credit to Ken to knock over a middleweight. It would hurt him if Snow made a showing. Ken intended to get Hop Snow fast.

Hop Snow had come into the ring with a grin on his wide face, and the crowd's cheers in his ears. His dark hair was plastered to his round skull. Hop looked sleek and chubby, a short man with long, heavy arms.

Ken slid out smoothly, intently. And gloves began to splatter around him like raindrops.

Hop Snow was no killing puncher. The

kayos on his record had been achieved with the weight of thousands of punches, never with a single blast. Hop's gloves were never still. He simply threw leather all the time from every angle.

Ken circled and gave ground, trying to find some pattern in the wild attack. He set himself to counter, but his fists met gloves or threshing arms. Hop Snow came on, bouncing to the rhythm of his own punches, hunched low, but not too difficult a target—if a man only had time to throw punches at him. Hop's defense was a pinwheel of gloves.

There was no boxing this maniac. Ken tried to back up, to set himself to use superior power, but Hop was all over him, unbalancing Ken with a flood of punches.

Ken went to his corner, knowing he had lost the round by a wide margin. This was not going to be the quick slaughter he had sullenly planned. But experience told him that no man could hold Hop's killing pace for ten rounds.

Five rounds later, Hop Snow was punching as furiously as ever. Ken's ribs ached, and his ears were ringing from the assault on his head. He was bleeding from the mouth. Hop's round head had smashed into Ken's mouth in the third round, and loosened teeth were filling Ken's mouth with the seep of blood.

Ken was still calm. He had come into this ring at his physical peak, but mentally untuned for battle. Now, recognizing peril, he could not get going. Those slapping, stinging gloves had him baffled.

In the seventh, the sense of the shortness of time began to strum on Ken's nerves. Hop was as bouncy as ever; whirling arms seemed to have the secret of perpetual motion. Ken went down to match Hop's crouch suddenly, elbows spread. He could not match Hop's footwork down there, but he waited. Ken took a barrage of hooks to the head. He lashed out with his own left and, finding the jaw, crossed the right viciously. Hop fell into the ropes.

Ken moved after him swiftly. But Hop was bouncing out, hammering hard uppercuts to the jaw! Ken had to cover up, and then Hop had the fight going at his pace again.

In the ninth, Hop began to stall. Ken stepped up the pace. His feet moved him

around with a speed Hop no longer owned. The tide turned swiftly. The long left to the face was catching Hop, staggering him, pushing him around. But Hop's eyes were fixed on Ken's right hand. He was always rolling with it, sneaking under, coming inside to wrestle.

Hop clinched and staggered through the last two rounds, grinning. He had this fight won, and his grin showed plainly that Hop Snow was not going down. Hop used all the craft of the ring master, holding and stalling, riding out the gaudy punches, fighting back in sudden flurries.

Hop slipped to the floor, unhit, just before the final bell. He waited out a count on his knees, grinning, until the bell cut it short, and he leaped up, mitting the delighted mob.

Ken waited in his corner. He could not fully believe he had been beaten until he heard the decision.

Whipped—and by a middleweight! His mind would not accept it. Numbly he followed Pop back to the dressing room. He sat on a rubbing table, staring blankly.

Ken jerked his head up. He said, "Pop, I want a rematch. I'll fight him for nothing."

"You've got a rematch," Pop shrugged. "It was in the contract, a return go in three weeks if he beat you. The guy is good. I saw Frandetti slow him down with a body attack. But you figure it out."

ONE of the front teeth Hop Snow had butted loose had to be pulled. Dr. Frankel, an aged little man and an ardent fight fan, was retired from public practice, but he maintained a small office in his apartment, and sometimes did jobs for fighters. The bent, silver haired little man talked incessantly as he worked, and his words were a patter of the past.

"Lee?" Frankel murmured. "I made a plate for another fighter named Lee. Big John Lee, the old East Side heavy. Must have been twenty years ago. No, nearer thirty. Any relation—well, there's the offending tooth."

There was no charge, the old dentist told Ken. "Just sign the book."

The book was an ancient, torn-backed

register. Ken signed his name. Curiously he flipped back a few pages. Some of the signatures startled him. The register would have been an autograph seeker's delight.

He asked, “You practiced in New York?”

The little man nodded. “Came here to retire. Some great names there, eh? Most of the champions came to me. Few fighters don't lose teeth. You'll find Mayors and Governors and a couple of Senators listed there, along with the champs. If you are really interested, you should see my collection of bridgework and discarded plates that belonged to famous people. Rather gruesome hobby, some people think; but it has been a source of pleasure to me.”

Ken went with the little man into a back room only because his mouth was still bleeding slightly. He listened with quiet disinterest while the dentist displayed ghoulish, mocking rows of teeth, with a story for each of them.

“Now this set belonged to a man you should know,” the old man rambled. Ken stifled a yawn. But as the dentist spoke. Ken's whole body suddenly froze—

HOP Snow was grinning as he bounced out of his corner. The crowd was his, all his. They wanted to see him swarm all over this tall, deliberate man again. Old Hop would oblige. He had the leather-windmill flying before he came close to this Lee, this punk.

Hop cut loose with a hail of leather. A timid jab raked his jaw, and Hop retaliated with a dozen cuffs to the head and a hard left hook to the body. Hop swarmed close, bulled from his lower center of balance, and rushed the taller man to the ropes. Hop leaped around a left jab, smacked solid blows to the middle, then cuffed a flurry to the face. Blows that defied the eye to follow.

Then, BANG!

The right hand hit Hop squarely over his great heart. For an instant, Hop's knees sagged. Then he was bouncing back so fast that only a trained eye noted his faltering lapse. Hop Snow, hurt, was Hop at his best. Anger added heft to his blows. Ken Lee was giving ground before the wild attack.

Bam!

Over the heart again. Many people saw it this time, the way Hop's knees went rubbery. And though Hop swarmed back with an ungovernable rally, he knew he was whipped. This cold eyed Lee, this careful punk, had found a way to slide backward on planted feet, crouching a little, refusing to be horsed off balance, with a sickening right hand always ready to be thrown.

Hop Snow rose to new heights. Hop could take a dive now and then; but Hop could not stand to be mastered. He never fought a greater battle than the desperate one he waged that night. He never threw more leather. But that right hand over the heart was sapping him, shaking him down to the roots of his existence. Hop was a shell long before he went down in the fifth. When he fell, Hop did not move.

The referee raised Ken's glove. The arena was silent. The victory was not popular. This was the colorful Hop Snow's home town. But there was no boos. The win had been too decisive. At no single moment had Hop had a chance. There was only the murmur of stunned grumbling. There were no cheers, and Ken made no bid for any. He pulled on his robe and walked up the aisle, curtness in the length of his stride.

Several newspaper boys drifted through the dressing room. Ty O'Hare came in later. She was wearing a mink coat and a tiny, modish hat. She looked much more mature than when Ken had first seen her.

“A smart fight, Ken,” she complimented.

“He licks me. I lick him. It's a game,” Ken shrugged.

She turned her dark eyes to Pop. “Is he ready, Pop?”

Pop nodded slowly. “If anybody can beat Kravitz, he can. If he can ever beat the Champ, he can do it now.”

“Then you are ready for me to really start beating the publicity drums?”

“From now on we're after the Champ,” Pop assented.

When she had gone, Pop stood with hands on hips, looking curiously at Ken, shaking his head slightly. He said, “Look, kid. Maybe someone should tell you, young as you are. That is a girl. A

woman. When one looks at you like that, she is absolutely not admiring your biceps. As women go, that one is tops. What she sees in you is more than I can understand, the more so since she has also seen me. But—"

"Suppose we skip it," Ken suggested shortly. "She's Fifth Avenue, she's determined to be different, and it pops out in a peculiar way. A fad, like a new hat. I've got no time for women, and especially filthy-rich women who make democracy a hobby. I've come a long way from a shoe-shine stand, and I've come by myself. I've got a long way to go yet, and I'm travelling alone."

"Yeah, I know," Pop said tonelessly. One corner of his mouth dipped wryly. "I've never been able to tell you anything, kid. Mostly I haven't tried. That's why you fought Hop Snow. You were getting a little too good in your own mind. You're going to have to be on your toes all the time."

"I figured Hop, on a good night, might cuff you around just like he did. I wanted to see if you could come back from a licking. You did. From now on, we go places."

"We've been most places," Ken grumbled, with different meaning.

Pop ignored the interruption. "Old Hex Dunlo has agreed to come out of retirement and promote the fights. We use the ball parks. If you can lick Marty Wing, Herb Myers and Goniff in a couple of months, it will make a good build-up."

"A wonderful build-up," Ken agreed curtly. "Let me know when you get them signed. Please do."

"Were you born with that chip on your shoulder?" Pop grunted. The corner of his mouth dipped again. "The average guy wouldn't guess you were human. If I didn't know you'd stuck with me this long because of the Mongolia, I wouldn't either. From now on, keep your eyes open. You're going to see some fast work in the clinches, Broderick style."

FLOPHOUSE lavished the last of his genius on the gauze over Ken's fists and stepped back, satisfied. It was quiet there, deep in the bowels of the stands.

The noise from the crowd in the ball park was faint and muted.

Pop lit his sixth cigarette. He said, "There were some whispers about that last Goniff fight. You want to watch that left."

Ken did not answer. He was on his feet, sliding and smacking his fists into Flophouse's palms, wondering about the doings of the past two months.

First it had been Marty Wing, the lanky defensive marvel. Marty had made his reputation the previous Winter by staying fifteen rounds with the Champ. Though Bat Kravitz's crown had never been in danger, he had not been able to catch up with the spidery man, the clinch and cover-up genius. The Lee-Wing fight had not been a good battle to watch, a marathon of jabs and feints, a dancing match. But in the ninth round Ken had cracked open the lanky man's shell and sent him down for the count. If the fight had been less than satisfying, Ken had done what the Champ could not.

Then young Herb Myers a scant three weeks later. A fighter cut from the Champ's own pattern, this Myers. A shifty hooker with sleeping powder in each fist, a charging hustler who never backed up. The crowd's man, Myers. Still the crowd's man when he lay supinely on the canvas in the fifth round, with the referee shouting numbers into deaf ears.

And now Sam Goniff.

Goniff was already in the ring when Ken walked across the dew-damp grass of the infield toward the ring, and the glory-roar the crowd had given Goniff was thinning as it wrapped itself around Ken's shoulders. Goniff looked big and fierce.

His huge nose was a little flatter. The Champ had done that; but the Champ remembered Sam Goniff. Twice in the early sessions Goniff had sent the great Kravitz reeling; once he had dropped him to his knees for a short count, before the Champ's murderous fists had beaten Goniff down for the long count. Goniff had lost little reputation in that fight; the crowds wanted to see a rematch.

Goniff's craggy face was grim tonight. Muscles in his great back bunched as he heaved at the ropes before the bell.

Goniff came out quickly with the bell.

The look of the kill was in his eyes. He came out fighting.

Ken moved to him, fainted, and shifted. Goniff flicked out a left, then hooked it without shifting his feet. Ken pushed the glove wide with his forearm. He jabbed and went away. Goniff followed. He hooked with the left again. Ken went under it and poked a light right at the body. The left again—

Goniff's right shot out suddenly as he delayed the left in mid-arc. The right took Ken in the mouth, snapping his head up as he tried to duck. Then that thunderous, delayed left hook smashed Ken on the side of the chin.

Ken staggered. The ring floor seemed full of holes as Ken tried to bicycle away. Goniff was too fast with his long, sweeping fists. Ken tried to hold on, but the fists blasted him away. A long right hand to the jaw swept Ken into the ropes. A shorter left rose to his chin as he bounced off. Ken grabbed, and missing, went down, with one punch landing on top of his head as he settled to the canvas.

The early counts were vague, but he heard the referee say, "Four," quite distinctly. Ken bunched his knees under him and waited. He got up, and slid his head inside Goniff's left, and took a vicious uppercut from Goniff's right before he could grab. The referee broke them, and Goniff was coming on, holding himself back with an obvious effort. Feinting, Goniff made his left hands count.

Ken could not block them all, and Goniff had a deadly way of twisting that hook down to smash at the ribs. He kept Ken shaken and slow. He punished Ken with a long right. Ken had to take the right hand as he would take medicine. Weakened, he had to concentrate on that deadlier weapon, Goniff's left. Goniff had him in a corner, mauling him. The referee had to pull Goniff off of Ken at the bell.

In his corner, Flophouse gasped as he worked on Ken, "Mister Ken, you got to—"

"I know what I've got to do," Ken growled.

He went out on steady legs for the second round. He moved out slowly, cautiously. Goniff stamped out, big and eager as an old fire-horse, but not reckless. Goniff jabbed with a long left hand, inquir-

ing how much the minute of rest had given Ken back. Ken took the jabs. Goniff's feet went flat against the floor. He hooked a handful of dynamite at Ken's jaw.

Ken's right hand lashed from off his chest.

He beat Goniff to the punch. Not much. Just enough to scatter the power of Goniff's hook as Goniff staggered. Ken moved after him. He jabbed two lefts to the face, shoved Goniff's flailing right hand wide, and jolted the big man with a short left. Goniff tried to bull inside. Ken stood him off and made a complete circle around him, peppering his face. Goniff lunged, but Ken's left was a ramrod.

GONIFF fainted the left and threw it. Ken's right flashed inside the punch again. Goniff's knees buckled. He missed a wild uppercut as Ken ducked down and planted both fists to the middle. Hurt, Goniff crouched with his fists cocked, not feinting, just waiting. When Ken fainted with left, Goniff threw his hook again, and Ken smashed with the right. Goniff staggered, but he came back with both fists flying wildly.

Ken slipped in and out, and his fists left their mark on Goniff's face. Goniff cocked his fists grimly and marched in. The crowd was up now, screaming, knowing that both men were hitting for a knockout.

Goniff knew he could not box with this cold-eyed master. Ken was boxing only enough to keep that fact planted in Goniff's mind, to keep the big man sliding in flat on his feet, trying for a kayo with every punch. Ken was convinced that the way to beat Goniff was to rob him of his greatest strength, to cross the right hand inside Goniff's mighty hook.

Twice more he did that. Then Ken staggered as Sam Goniff beat him to the punch. But Goniff moved woodenly as he pressed his advantage. Ken's feet were planted when Goniff came in on him. Ken blocked the left, went under Goniff's chopping right, and tore a gasp from the big man with a left hook to the body. Ken moved around, rattled Goniff's teeth with his left, then smashed his right cross to the jaw. Goniff's gloves dropped to his sides. Ken set him up with a rising left

hook, and shot the right hand to the unprotected jaw.

Goniff went down so hard his head snapped back limply against the floor. He got up at "eight." His eyes were vague. He walked aimlessly to the ropes, bumped them, and fell to his knees. The referee gestured widely with his hands, stopping the fight.

There was a raging storm of emotion out in the darkness beyond the ring. Sound piled on sound, a monumental roar that rent the air. Ken realized suddenly that it was for him. It was almost a shock. He smiled once, grimly, as he slipped out of the ring. His face was wooden again as he walked out.

The dressing room was full of newspaper men. Ken had learned to let Pop do the talking. Pop handled them with affable ease. "A new Ken Lee? Naw, look at his record. The kid's always had a punch. He came within a whisker of belting out the champ, and the kid as blind as a bat at the time. The kid's eyes beat him that night. He's bigger now. Takes a punch better. That was the idea, mixing it with Goniff. The kid can take anything anybody can hand out, and dish out more himself. Anybody—including Bat Kravitz."

Ken did not open his mouth once. The scribes seemed impressed by Pop's speech when they left.

Ty O'Hare came in just before Ken and Pop were leaving. Her face was slightly dushed, and her eyes had an unaccustomed brightness. She put a hand on Ken's shoulder.

"I suppose it was foolish, swapping punches like that," she told him. "But it was magnificent."

"Nuts," Ken said distinctly. He shrugged. "Goniff has as good a left as there is in the game. His right is just a ball-bat. There are two ways to beat him. Beat his left with a cross inside it, or stand off and chop him up. I fully intended to box and carve him up. He caught me and slowed me down. If I'd tried the in-and-out stuff, he might have clipped me again before I got all my legs back. There was less risk, especially since it caught him by surprise, to fight him with a right hand."

"Oh," the girl said. The light faded from her eyes, though her expression did

not change. "Just a game of chess."

"If you say so," Ken's words jolted her. He walked out, leaving the two of them.

Ty smiled faintly. She shook her head. "Pop, somebody has to take care of the tough guys. Somebody has to help the boys who don't need any help."

Pop growled, "Somebody ought to kick his teeth out. If it's any help to know, he's hurting himself twice as much every time he thinks he's slapping you down."

She said slowly, "He hasn't had much out of life, Pop. Not even what he could have had. He's one of the men who must have exactly what they want, or nothing. Only the title will relieve him of that terrible inferiority complex."

"Nuts to his complex," Pop snorted. "We've got Bloom on the run, but he's not in a corner yet. We've cleaned up all the logical challengers. I've got to see to it that Kravitz doesn't get a fight with anybody else."

VII

THE ROLLS-ROYCE was as big as three cars. It had two cracked pistons. Embalmed in tractor oil, the motor would purr sweetly for a few miles. The rear compartment had once been a portable palace. For years the Rolls had gathered dust in a used car garage. Pop had rented it for the day. Cleaned and waxed, it sat in archaic majesty near the dock where the British liner Liverpool towered.

Flophouse was at the wheel of the limousine. His uniform was a colorful monstrosity. Beside him sat a fighter named Muldoon. Muldoon wore a towering hat, and a garb that recalled the uniform of a commodore of the War of 1812.

Pop Broderick slid out of the car. Pop's face was the countenance of a general about to send men into a critical battle. Ken Lee, grimly amused, followed Pop.

"He ought to be coming through customs in five minutes, Pop said tensely. "By the pictures, we can't miss him. He will be the elephant in clothes."

Ken grunted, "Pop, you belong in Hollywood. This drama stinks. All foreigners talk the dollar language."

Pop said shortly, "Ed Bloom is here, you can bet your last dime. If he gets his hands on this Guerilla Artillerac, you

can kiss your hopes for a title fight good-bye for another year. When the shouting starts, you help me get this big Serb or Croat, or what-the-hell-ever he is, out of here. Preferably, we walk him out. But we bring him out.”

They went inside the huge building that ran the length of the pier. Ed Bloom was very much in evidence. His party included a bevy of cameramen. Guerilla Artilerac was a sensation. Bloom intended to build him up.

Pop pulled Ken into the shelter of a huge pillar close to the Bloom party. Pop talked in a clipped, hurried voice while they waited: “This Artilerac claims to be heavyweight champ of Europe. The way things are over there, there are probably a dozen bums with an equal claim. But he’s getting here first. Artilerac isn’t his name. It’s Serbian—or maybe Croatian—for “Gunner.” The guy was a guerilla in Yugoslavia. He’s supposed to have killed close to a hundred Krauts with his bare hands. Broke their necks. Just like that. Maybe he did. He’s big enough—here he comes.”

Newsreel cameras began to click. Flash bulbs exploded. Ken stepped from behind the post.

One of the biggest men he had ever seen was blinking before the lights as cameramen advanced. The man had on a sort of fur cap that made him look seven feet tall. He was a mammoth, a tower of humanity. A loose-fitting suit of a material little better than burlap hid the lines of the hulking body, but concealed none of the massiveness of shoulders that strained at seams. The giant grinned dazedly, blinked, and raised a hand the size of a shovel to shield his eyes. Ed Bloom stepped forward, smiling, slowing his stride to match the swing of the cameras.

Bedlam broke loose.

A scantily-clad blonde was quite suddenly chasing a short, fat man, screaming and swinging a long *bolo* knife. The fat man ran into Bloom, staggered, and plowed into the crowd, howling. The blonde chased him, swinging the gleaming blade over her head in wicked circles.

The place was suddenly a madhouse as men lunged and heaved through the crowd. A careful observer would have noted that

the men contributing most to the confusion were flat-nosed boys with the glaze of scar tissue about their eyes; but there were no careful observers present. The whole thing had a jack-in-the-box quality of explosion.

The giant, Guerilla Artilerac, stood planted outside the realm of confusion, staring. A very small man, similarly dressed, was huddled close to the Guerilla. Pop was at Artilerac’s side with long bounds, grabbing his elbow.

“Opasnost! Brzo!” Pop sputtered. “Slijedite me! Come on, yokel. Hurry. Pozurite—or what the hell ever it is!”

The giant stared at him. Pop hauled at the elbow. The giant moved forward a couple of steps, then braced his feet. Pop abandoned his hold suddenly. He picked up the tiny man and heaved him across his shoulder. Pop began to run, shouting back, “Dodjite sa mnom.” Pop’s evident briefing of the language exhausted itself. He bellowed, “E pluribus unum. Parley voo. God save the King. Ken, keep that big ox off of my neck!”

The little man was squalling. The giant spurted after Pop with gargantuan strides. Ken grabbed a tree-trunk arm and pointed insistently at the gate. He slowed the huge man down enough so that Pop got outside safely.

In front of the old Rolls, Pop deposited the small man gently to his feet. The giant rushed up and stopped, very quick on huge feet. His beefy face was puffed with wrath, and his eyes were blazing outraged anger.

Pop bowed deeply from the waist. Muldoon and Flophouse, standing at attention in their magnificent uniforms, also bowed. The Europeans looked impressed.

POP said, “Pardon. Apologies. In there —no good. Trouble. Get you out. In there— no good. You understand?”

The giant seemed somewhat mollified. He muttered uncertainly, “Da.”

“I—me—big man fight business,” Pop said with difficulty. He tapped his chest. He gestured with his fists. “Boxing. Fight. Make million dollars.”

They had been following his words and gestures with pained expressions of doubt. At his last words, the eyes of both men came alive.

"Da!" exclaimed the little man. "Mjllon dullers."

"Million dollars!" Pop shouted triumphantly. He said out of the side of his mouth to Ken, "That cooks it. Start talking fast, Pilgrim. Say anything. Recite the Gettysburg Address. Just end every sentence with 'million dollars.' To hell with Esperanto. We've got the universal language."

With Pop and Ken parroting the magic phrase, the Yugoslavs climbed into mouldy magnificence of the limousine.

"Cost me a grand to bail out those boys that get pinched," Pop reflected happily as Flophouse meshed ancient gears. He beamed at Guerilla Artilerac and chortled, "Million dollars."

The apartment to which Pop escorted the foreign pair was, like the old Rolls, rented only for the day. It was magnificent. The rugs were ankle deep, and there were butlers at every elbow.

Pop knew his Europeans. First on the program was food. The little man, who was apparently the Guerilla's manager, displayed a startling appetite; but the Guerilla was apparently a fugitive from a famine. A steak was no more than a tidbit before the onslaught of the Guerilla's big, yellow teeth.

When the Guerilla finally heaved himself away from the table, he carried a platter of French-fried potatoes with him to munch. Pop installed them in overstuffed chairs in the drawing room, and began to talk.

Pop had an interpreter, a little man who operated a second-hand clothing shop in Brooklyn. His name was Telejac, or something of the sort. He interpreted at about six words to every one of Pop's.

Pop lounged in a chair and smoked a cigar grandly. He said to the interpreter, "Tell them that there has been a revolution in the fight game. Revolution is a good word. They'll understand that. I am now the big shot of boxing instead of Bloom."

The interpreter spouted a long stream of consonants. The small man listened, worried. He said finally, "Da." The Guerilla transferred potatoes to his mouth in sleepy silence.

Pop outlined his proposition. Instead of fighting the Champ, the Guerilla should

fight the Uncrowned Champ, Ken Lee, and make more money. The Guerilla's manager squirmed and asked numerous questions. His fighter ate potatoes.

"Tell him the Champ will make him fight for peanuts," Pop instructed. "I'll give him twenty-five percent of the gate and a whopping big bonus to sign. I'll offer him any guarantee in reason."

Guerilla Artilerac scooped the last of the potatoes from the dish, licked banana-sized fingers, and asked distinctly, "Who you kidding, Pop?"

Pop leaped out of his chair. His eyes bulged. He shouted, "Did he say that?"

Pop leaped out of his chair. His eyes bulged. He shouted, "Did he say that?"

Artilerac grinned. Apparently he had been practicing the phrase. His next words came with more difficulty. "Big surprise, yes? I myself am born in Brooklyn. My parents go back to old country when I am small. Me, I not talk much. I listen. I learn much. Now I talk. I ask, how it is I make more money to fight other fellow, not fight champion?"

Pop recovered slowly. He swallowed hard, then sat down.

Pop explained, "The Champ gets most of the money to put his title on the line. The other boy fights, not for the money, but for what he can make, after he wins the title. You'd be lucky to get twelve percent, and Bloom would take a cut of that."

The Guerilla nodded slowly. He admitted, "This is so. I am warned about this Bloom. You possibly remember my friend, Kid Serbo? Before the war?"

Pop nodded, surprised. "The Slugging Serb. A good welter. He fought in my club."

"Is dead," the Guerilla said sadly. "In the war. We plan to come to America together. I learn much from the Kid. He speak much of you. I hear the black man call your name. This is why I do not break your neck when you carry away little Sorkin from the ship."

"Kid Serbo," Pop muttered. "It's a small world."

"Because of the Kid, I will talk to you," the Guerilla went on. "We will, as you say, put the cards on the table. I come to America to make money. Before the war I am champion of Europe. But I am

wrestling champion, not boxing. In America, wrestlers are not regarded with honor. So I have become a boxer. I have fought many times, and won. I defeat the former champion of Europe, Hans Biedecker, and I claim the title; but it is all very phony. I am great wrestler. Boxing, I am not so good. In the movies I see this Bat Kravitz, this champion. Him, I do not think I can beat."

Pop exclaimed, "By Godfrey! A pug with brains."

"I am a large man," Guerilla continued. "I am told that many people wish to see me fight, and will pay much money. You say I make more money if I do not fight the champion. This is good. This is sensible. Who is this Ken-Lee?"

Pop jerked the glowing tip of his cigar toward where Ken was lounging in a chair, enjoying Pop's confusion. The Guerilla looked surprised.

"Ah, the cool one?" the Guerilla exclaimed. Under bushy brows the wide-set, pale blue eyes studied Ken. Ken knew from that scrutiny that the Guerilla was nobody's fool. Artilerac admitted, "Is bigger than he looks. Move very fast, not hit so hard, I think. Is big fake, Pop? You want me to fall down?"

Pop shook his head. "I just want you to fight him."

"If I catch him, I think I knock this one out," the Guerilla decided. "Is good business, maybe. How much money I am given?" The Guerilla smiled broadly and suggested, "Million dollars?"

Pop winced, but he grinned. He said, "I think we can do business, Shylock." Pop handed Ken a card with a number on it.

"Ken, how about calling Hex Dunlo while I haggle? Tell him he can bring on the contract, the lawyers, the notaries, and the Photo Joes."

Hex Dunlo and his entourage arrived a scant quarter hour later. Dunlo was a large man, heavy. He wore a derby to hide an almost complete baldness, and smoked black cigars perpetually. Dunlo had the quick, nervous motions of a slighter man. He had been retired for some seasons, but he had entered into this campaign like an old war horse. Ten years before Ed Bloom had Dunlo had been matchmaker for the Gar-

forced him out. Dunlo felt personal enmity for Bloom.

The ceremonies went on for some time, punctuated by the flash of bulbs. But in the end, Guerilla Artilerac's signature was on the contract, pledging him to fight Ken Lee, with any previous opponents subject to Pop's approval.

THE Guerilla was a sensation long before he climbed into a ring. The giant had color. He exuded it from the pores of his skin. Photographers followed him around.

Hex Dunlo rented a college stadium for a pair of dates and lined up two large and undangerous opponennts for the Guerilla. The "Standing Room Only" signs were up long before the first preliminary was fought.

Ken and Pop sat in the third row and listened to the gasps of the crowd as the Guerilla's torso was bared in the ring. The Guerilla looked as big as the Queen Mary. He was six-feet-seven, and his body was rocky with muscular knobs. Yet, wanting only a bit less bulk about his hips, the Guerilla was as well proportioned as any man. When he yanked at the ropes in his corner, the whole ring seemed to tremble; and he laughed, a great, guileless roar.

Willie Wells waited patiently in the other corner. A long, thin negro, Willie had been handpicked for slaughter. Willie knew it, and he did not care. A fair boxer, Willie did not take punishment to the head very well. He made his living out times he reached the giant with light jabs. of taking beatings, and he had no particular fear of this giant.

The bell rang. Willie Wells moved out easily, boxing with his hands high, feinting. Willie blinked in surprise.

Guerilla Artilerac marched at him with great, loose strides. The Guerilla's great fists were dangling at his sides.

Willie blinked again, and feinted. Guerilla paid the feint no attention. Willie circled. He stabbed out a left. It was short. Guerilla kept walking forward steadily. Willie stabbed and sprang away. Three The huge man did not remove the gloves from his sides.

Willie continued to circle and jab. His left might have been a fly, buzzing around

the lofty head. A thoughtful look came into Willie's eyes as he back-pedalled and sniped with the left. A gleam. Willie fainted twice with his right hand. No response. Just that unhurried pursuit, those dangling gloves.

The sweat broke out suddenly on Willie's back as the fever seized him. Maybe he was just one right hand punch from greatness! Willie muttered, "Come seven, come eleven. Fade me, brother, 'cause I'm shooting the works."

Willie struck with the jab, and followed it smoothly. He swung his right in an overhead hook for the huge jaw.

Guerilla Artilerac's right hand came up from the vicinity of the floor in a great sweep. It paused briefly on Willie's jaw, and continued over his head.

Literally lifted from his feet, Willie fell flat on his back. His head jerked back against the padded floor with a heavy thud. If the punch had left him any senses, the floor removed them. Willie had to be carried from the ring.

Ken heard it in the tone of the crowd's noise, the thrilled awe, the loving admiration, as the Guerilla walked around the ring, all imposing muscles and innocent grin, waving a ham-sized hand aloft. It was a note of tribute Ken had never earned—had never wanted.

Ken told Pop. "They love him. The guy has everything. Size, color. If only he could fight."

Pop shook his head slowly, but the perplexity in his eyes did not dissolve. Pop muttered, "That was no splash, kid. I wonder—Let's get into the dressing room."

The dressing room was in the field house. Guerilla Artilerac was sitting on a padded table beside a platter of hot dogs. He was devouring them with delight, two bites to each dog, to the astonishment of a room-full of sports writers.

The Guerilla grinned, that vast spreading of guileless humor, and said, "I am lucky. I push this black boy, he bump his head. He is knock out, bongo. I never win so quick before."

Pop stared at the giant a long time with narrowed eyes. Then he turned and walked out. He grumbled, "I don't know, Ken. There never was a guy that size could get snap into his punches. It's not reasonable. But I believe that big mattress

is trying to take us for a fancy ride."

The stadium was almost deserted as they walked toward the main exit. The men grouped there were obviously waiting. Ken and Pop kept walking, but Pop slid a little apart from Ken, clearing the decks. There were four of them, Ed Bloom, Sid Moss, and both of the Kravitz brothers.

"Broderick," Ed Bloom called mildly. Pop swung to face the promoter, but his eyes were over Bloom's shoulders, watching the bigger men. Bloom asked simply, "How much?"

"How much?" Pop repeated grimly, smiling. "The Guerilla wouldn't take much building up, and he'd draw two million with the Champ. Sure, I'll tell you my price, Bloom. The Mongolia rebuilt, every stick and brick of it. And the first title bout for Ken this Summer."

"The Mongolia part I could go for," Bloom offered quietly. "Lee is a dead duck with the crowds."

Pop snorted. He said, "We can't do business. You knew it. If you have any fancy threats, let's have 'em."

Bat Kravitz mover around Bloom, sliding flat footed. Bat growled, "You talk too much, Broderick."

Pop spread his feet a little. That was all. He told the Champ coldly, "You're not in a ring now, Kravitz. Lay a hand on me, and you won't be fighting anybody for a long time."

"No rough stuff, Bat," Bloom warned. Kravitz fell back, muttering. Bloom said gently, "You've got me wrong, son. I'm not threatening anybody. I don't have to. Nobody ever got the better of me before. I'm not sore; I have to admire you for it. You can hurt me if Lee whips and discredits this big fellow, but it won't help you. I still make the title matches."

Pop told him coldly, "The price is still the same."

Pop walked on past them. Ken followed. He saw Bloom's face, a harmless and mediocre sort of face, as Bloom shook his head sadly and called after them, "I hope you won't be sorry, son."

Two weeks later, the Guerilla fought Harry Legore in the same ring. Legore was a better fighter than Wells, though an older man. Legore was long past his peak. The war and the shortage of fighters had kept Legore in business; and though he

was fighting infrequently now, he still had a name.

Legore came out with the bell and worked close, a big, semi-bald man who knew the score. He rapped good punches to the Guerilla’s ribs with no apparent effect before the giant shoved him away. Legore, weaving from a low crouch, got in and out twice without being hit. He went in again, but when he started to back-pedal, an enormous foot descended on Legore’s instep, pinning him. The Guerilla’s right uppercut came from the floor.

The Guerilla stepped back. Legore was just steadying his legs, trying to shake his head, when the second uppercut blasted his jaw. Legore flew across the ring and landed heavily on the back of his neck. The referee counted him out.

In the dressing room, the Guerilla said, “I am lucky. This fellow, he stumble, I think, when I hit him. . . .”

VIII

POP was worried. The ball park was sold out, and Pop was worried. He had paced several miles in the dressing room. He crunched out a cigarette with his heel, reached automatically for another, and muttered, “Kid, you be careful. All we really know about this Simple Sampson, he can knock your head off with an uppercut. I got a feeling—”

Ken asked irritably, “Who’s fighting him, me or you? Sit down before you have a stroke.”

Guerilla Artilerac was already in the ring when Ken came out. It was a balmy night with stars, but excitement was tearing it apart. The Guerilla towered above the ropes like an adult in a child’s pen.

Ken went to the middle of the ring at Jack Seigel’s instruction. The chubby little referee repeated his fol-de-rol. He asked the Guerilla if he understood, and Artilerac nodded shortly. The Guerilla was wearing his great, simple grin, but Ken thought the pale blue eyes were crafty as the Guerilla stared at the floor.

Ken walked out with the bell. The Guerilla marched to him methodically with seven-league strides. When Ken was still two good steps from the monster, the left hand hit him in the mouth. Ken ducked

as a sweeping right hand cut air over his head. He backed, circling, and the Guerilla came after him.

There was none of the dangling-hands stuff tonight. The Guerilla had a long left, as pretty as any man’s left, working out there, and his right was cradled on his chest. He hit Ken twice with the left, jolty shoves. When Ken worked under the left, the Guerilla grabbed him and seemed likely to tear away Ken’s right arm in the clinch. The man’s strength was immense.

Seigel, grunting already, got them apart. Ken slid off a left, stabbed his own left to the jaw, and ducked down, shifting to the body. He got in one good right to the ribs, and then the great arms smothered him. It was surprising. Ken had figured the giant would be vulnerable in the infighting. Guerilla was not trading in close. He was simply grabbing, doing more damage with bear-hugs than he could have with clumsy fists, and stifling Ken’s attack.

Ken circled, and the Guerilla followed him, picking at the face with a mast-like left. Ken stepped up the footwork. He slashed his left three times to the jaw, and got away unscathed. But the Guerilla swung a ponderous right hook, and when Ken went inside it, the Guerilla threw him into the ropes, bulling him into a corner. Ken had to fight. He struck out with both fists to the body, but he could not move the giant. Guerilla missed an uppercut and fell against Ken. His arms locked about Ken’s waist. Deliberately, the Guerilla began to squeeze the breath out of Ken. The smaller man was like a child in that hug. It took the combined efforts of Ken and the referee to get Ken loose.

Ken fled to ring center. His breath came in heaves, and spots were drifting before his eyes. He saw the Guerilla’s right hook. It looked ridiculously slow, but it landed on Ken’s jaw. The blow drove Ken back four steps, and the crowd was standing, howling. The Guerilla came on swiftly, poking with the left. Ken ducked and sidestepped out of it. The Guerilla’s punches seemed like more than pushes at the moment of impact, but there was a delayed-action power that numbed. It was like being hit with a sledge hammer wrapped in pillows.

Ken stepped around nimbly while he

figured it out. Then he feinted his left, stepped in with his right trained on the body, and lifted the right hand to the Guerilla's jaw. The full weight of his body was behind the punch. He had never hit a man harder. But the Guerilla only blinked and did not stop. He clubbed Ken with both hands, landing on the shoulders, but driving Ken back.

Ken slid from the ropes neatly. The Guerilla charged, swinging wildly. Ken picked off the punches, but there was an intolerable strength behind them, twisting Ken around, throwing him back. The crowd was screaming, thinking Ken was in trouble.

Ken was not hurt, but he could not get set. Those violent half-shoves had him off balance. The Guerilla's speed was amazing.

The Guerilla missed a sweeping left, and Ken fell in close. He fell precisely into the Guerilla's famed uppercut.

It was the sort of punch to knock down a wall, not to render a man unconscious. But it lifted Ken from his feet and hurled him down on his back. Ken had the sense to let himself go limp. His feet went on over his head, and the roll cushioned the impact of his head against the floor. He lay face down, and the knockout shriek was wailing into his ears as the count began.

Ken turned his head, and found Pop. Pop was, oddly calmer now that the danger he had feared was revealed. Pop's spread hands were palms-down. Ken waited out the count. His head was quite clear. But when he got up, the peculiar numbness was in his limbs.

The Guerilla rushed at him, and the bell rang.

In the corner, Pop grated, "Stay away from that ape. He'll break your ribs. Dance around him. Cut him up."

Ken shook his head calmly. He said, "Watch."

He went out and began to dance very nimbly. The Guerilla pursued him, feinting with huge gloves, eager to land. Ken slowed a little, and the Guerilla stabbed the long left. Ken came down flat-footed. He let the left slide over his left shoulder and hit the Guerilla on the side of the head with a full armed wallop from his right. The Guerilla blinked and swung a

ponderous right. Ken beat him to the punch with a shorter left hook. The Guerilla's right grazed the top of Ken's head as Ken ducked down to smash his right to the stomach.

THE Guerilla snorted and came on. Ken did not move. He planted his feet. He rolled off the Guerilla's punches and countered, hitting as hard as he could with every shot. Though the blows had no apparent effect, he was beating the big man to the punch, destroying his aim. He chopped at the Guerilla like a man cutting down a tree.

He did it for two rounds. Ken backed up only when some sweeping glove literally threw him back, or when the Guerilla's massive weight was hurled against Ken in a clinch. He stood with his feet planted solidly as the ring posts, and used his speed to smash his fists inside the Guerilla's punches, hitting first, hitting harder.

There was no danger in it, really. The Guerilla was a pusher, not a puncher. The crowd saw Ken being moved, lurching before the impact of the huge fists, while the Guerilla seemed to ignore Ken's punches. The crowd thought the Guerilla was killing Ken.

In the fourth round, the Guerilla ripped his right hand loose in a clinch, shoved Ken backward, and belted him with a long uppercut. Off-balance, Ken went over backward. He scorned a count this time. He leaped up. Seigel scrubbed at Ken's gloves with his shirt-front, and the Guerilla was lumbering eagerly at him.

Ken stepped in and planted a right hand to the stomach. It was a beautifully solid contact. For the first time in the fight, the Guerilla backed up. Ken walked after him. He hooked a left to the jaw, and crossed the right to the same spot. Ken rolled with a ponderous left hook, and it threw him into the ropes at the bell.

He came out for the fifth and walked into the Guerilla with his hands low. He used the huge man for a punching bag. It was no longer a fight, and both of them knew it; but they seemed to be the only people in the stadium with that knowledge. The Guerilla's ponderous shoves were still greeted with awed yells.

Through the sixth and seventh, Ken mauled the big man. An impatient disgust

sharpened Ken's punches. The Guerilla did not belong in this ring. Granted that the giant could have broken Ken's back with his bare hands, his punches simply had no snap. The fight that had kept spectators screaming until their voices were hoarse was a phony.

But the man was incredibly strong, and his bovine courage was unshaken. In the sixth Ken sent him reeling a dozen times with mighty right hands to the jaw, but Guerilla would not go down. Ken shifted to the body in the seventh. He raised great welts. Still the Guerilla plodded doggedly forward, ramming his painless gloves out.

Ken walked out for the eighth and rammed his right hand deep into the Guerilla's middle. The Guerilla gave ground, and Ken stayed on top of him, slamming his fists home just above the trunks. The Guerilla tried to grab. Ken went under his arms, stepped away, and there was an open avenue for his right hand as the Guerilla's jaw drooped.

The Guerilla stood motionless for an instant after the right hand had bombed him. Then his left knee folded, and he pitched sideways and down, huddling on his knees.

The Guerilla got up at "eight." He got up and traded punches. There was desperation on his face, and the inevitable bewilderment of the outsized man who knows he is the stronger, but cannot hurt a smaller, weaker man who is landing solid blows.

The Guerilla sank to the canvas again. No one blow had done it. Ken watched the vast man get up steadily, and Ken thought, "This could go on all night."

Ken fainted with his left. He wound up with his right and threw it in the longest, rankest haymaker he had ever used in white as the Guerilla's eyes rolled, and the long jaw. Ken saw the wild flicker of a ring. It hit squarely on the bulge of the huge bulk splattered on the canvas, lay still.

The referee counted the Guerilla out.

The ovation came as Ken left the ring. The acclaim after the Goniff fight had been loud, but it was nothing compared to this bellowing of affection. People fought to reach him, to slap his shoulders. Ken took it with a cynical smile.

In the dressing room, Ken complained, "Of all the stupid games! I've given them

a hundred better fights than those last two, and nobody ran high blood pressure over me. I throw one haymaker like a rank amateur, and they love me."

Pop was looking at him steadily, grimly amused. Pop snorted, "You don't get it yet, do you? Kid, you started out as a fancy-footwork boy with ice water in the veins. You've changed. The ice water's melted out. Those crowds have seen you walk in and take punches to land harder licks, instead of waiting for the other man to make a mistake. Blast me if you haven't turned out to be a fighter."

ED Bloom was alone.

He came into Ken's small hotel room and closed the door carefully behind him. Ken, getting up warily from his chair, realized that he had never seen the old man before without his bodyguard. Bloom looked commonplace and shrunken.

"What do you want?" Ken barked. Bloom looked harmless, and his loose lips smiled affably around his dental plates, but there was the accustomed bulge under his left armpit.

"I want to talk business," Bloom said quietly. He sat on the edge of the bed without being asked. "You raised hell with the boxing fans those last couple of fights, son. All kind of pressure's being used on me to give you a title shot."

"Talk to Broderick," Ken shrugged.

"I don't like Broderick. You'll never get a title shot while Broderick is managing you. Drop him and we can do business."

"Broderick is my manager," Ken stated. "You're afraid of him. We've got you on the spot and you're crawling. You can't dodge us any longer."

"No, I can't dodge you any longer," Bloom conceded mildly. He laughed, a harsh cackle, and added, "But I can ruin you, son. You and that smart mick manager, and that beautiful but oh-so-dumb girl friend of yours."

Ken stiffened. He snarled, "Rough stuff won't get you—"

Bloom shook his head patiently. He re-proved, "Son, I am an old man. I can't go in for violence. Suppose you take a look at these before you lose your temper."

Moving slowly, Bloom removed an envelope from his pocket. He shook out the contents and offered them to Ken. Ken

stared at what seemed to be photographs. He took them in his hands and saw that he held photostatic copies of several checks.

"Pay to the order of Samuel J. Goniff—Fifty Thousand Dollars," he read over and over, staring without comprehension. The check was signed by Honora Tysinger O'Hare.

Numbly, he shuffled the photostatics. "Pay to the order of Martin Wing. . . of Herbert Myers. . ."

He stood in numb silence, and Bloom's chuckle was far away. Ken could understand Pop Broderick's miracles now.

"So you see, you are just a phony after all, son," Ed Bloom taunted softly. "A fake, built up by a girl's money. A phony who pushes over trained seals."

"Don't be stupid," Ken said slowly. He was numb. His brain would not clear. "I won those fights."

"You believe it. I believe it," Bloom admitted calmly. "Will the public believe it when these photographs are printed in the newspapers?"

Ken's fingers tightened around the photographs instinctively, then relaxed. Bloom laughed. "Sure, there are more copies. A smart bank clerk made himself a nice piece of change there. Do you understand, son? I can smash you and Broderick. I can handle Marty and Herb and Goniff. They'll lie like troopers to get back into my good graces. I'll get them off with short suspensions from the Commission, and you'll be broken for life. That won't end it. There's the girl, you know. Maybe the other newspapers won't unload both barrels at her—"

Ken gestured wearily with his hand. He sat down, slumping in a chair. He asked tonelessly, "What do you want?"

Bloom nodded. He said, "You're a sensible lad. Give me your copy of Broderick's contract. My lawyers will have you out of it by noon tomorrow. Then you sign to fight Kravitz twice."

"Twice?" Ken repeated.

"Why should we make a million when we can wring five out of it?" Bloom shrugged. "The first fight you start punching Bat around from the first bell. You keep it up for three or four rounds until even the boys back in the three-buck seats can see Bat is about to lose his title. Then he starts fouling you, low punches that every-

body can see. You turn to protest to the referee, and Bat lands a haymaker on the jaw. You go down and out. The rematch will break all records."

"And you make a fortune betting on it," Ken snarled.

Bloom shook his head. "Son, I've got more money than I'll ever spend. Much of it I made in ways I'd like to forget. I want something different. I want to be remembered as the biggest promoter who ever lived; bigger than Tex Richard, bigger than anybody. Oh, some of the boys will pick up some change. Babe Kravitz handles most of our betting now that he can't fight any more. But a record gate is what I want. The second fight will be honest. If you can lick Bat you can be champ. I don't think you can do it, but I won't care if you do. I'm getting a little tired of Bat."

It was not hard to believe Bloom, not too hard now to understand him. The man was old. He had wrung the last of pleasures from excesses; fame was the only opium that stirred him. Bloom had lived out most of his promised years, and he was thinking now beyond them. Bloom was building himself a pyramid in the history of boxing; and, like those other pyramids, he expected it to stand after the blood and sweat and hurts of the builders were forgotten.

Bloom said patiently, "That's the deal, son. String along with me and you get a chance to be champion. Buck me, and I break you—and your friends. Which will it be, son?"

Ken sat stonily in the chair. He needed time. There was no time. Automatically he fished out the rubber balls from his pocket and began to squeeze them. He could not think. He was on the floor, and the last count was coming up, and he could not think. . . .

"Why do I hesitate?" the words forced themselves on him. "What do I owe them, these two people who got me in this jam? They'll be hurt if I accept Bloom's terms. They'll be hurt worse if I don't."

It was odd, how his mind worked. He was not thinking so much of himself. Nor Broderick. A scandal would not crush Pop; the big guy had a way of always landing on his feet. But Ty O'Hare—the girl who had backed Ken so thoroughly,

if unwisely, and asked nothing in return—Ty O'Hare was a different matter. Other newspapers resented the fighting *Clarion* and its upstart owner. Other papers would crucify Ty. And in this moment Ken knew that the girl was important to him.

Ken made his voice harsh. He asked, "What are friends for, if not to stab in the back? Your proposition interests me, Bloom. I'll go along with you."

"Friends? You never had a friend in your life," Bloom chuckled. "You're a smart lad, son. We'll get along, you and I."

Bloom's words seemed to echo in the room after the old man had gone, bearing Ken's copy of the contract with Broderick. "You never had a friend. . . ."

In dismal silence, Ken began to pack his belongings. He was getting out of this cell-like room that had been his home so long. He didn't want to be found when Pop and Ty heard the news. He could not tell them the truth, and he could not face them. He knew what they would think; he had given them no basis to build confidence upon. Lee, the cold fish; Lee, the opportunist; Lee, the traitor.

There was no other way.

Ken had never felt so lonely in all his life.

IX

IT SHAPED to be a great fight. The reporters watched Bat Kravitz at Mohammed Rey's camp in Jersey. They did not see how the Champ could be beaten. The same reporters journeyed up into the hills to stare as Ken cut down sparring partners with cold ferocity. They did not see how Ken could be stopped.

Ken was a lonely and bitter man. He had no manager. Martin White ran the camp, and Jocky Graven was the trainer. Both were Bloom's men. They did their jobs efficiently. They did not intrude, but Ken always had the feeling of being surrounded by enemies. Only in the ring could he find release from haunting oppressions. He boxed murderously. His spar-mates learned early to fear him.

Ed Bloom drove up one day and watched Ken spill three sparring partners. Bloom came into the dressing room afterward. "You're looking wonderful. I wouldn't

ask for a better show. The way you are going into this makes an old man wonder. Son, if you have any ideas about crossing me up, you want to remember—"

"I haven't forgotten anything," Ken growled.

"Just thought I'd remind you," Bloom said, and went away satisfied.

Some days Ken would outrun his mates on the road. One morning, in the last week of training, he left them far behind as he sped up a rutted old mountain road. When he was out of sight, he left the road and raced through the woods, climbing the crest of a ridge, speeding down the mountain side to another road.

Cassidy was waiting, chewing an end of his white moustache as he stood beside the old car. Lieutenant Cassidy wore an old serge suit that was neatly pressed. Somehow, Cassidy's suits always looked like uniforms.

Cassidy grunted, "You made it. You look in shape, lad."

Ken's chest was rising and falling with perfect rhythm. He shrugged. "Of course. Did you have any luck, Cassidy?"

"Maybe. Maybe not," Cassidy said bluntly. "I had a long talk with Slops Genty up at the Big House. Slops knows something—but I've talked to him before. Slops is doing life, and he'd give a leg for a chance at a pardon. But Slops is scared. He's been up there a long time, and he still thinks pre-Prohibition. Slops won't talk until he knows we have an open-and-shut case. If we have it, Slops will be the clincher. Kid, why do we wait? Why not go ahead now?"

Ken shook his head. His lips were grim. He said, "Then there'd be no fight. We'll have to wait. We'll have to gamble that I'm right. If I'm wrong—"

Sweat that was not sweat of the road stood on his forehead. He said hoarsely, "I can't be wrong."

THEY weighed in at two o'clock. Ken was first on the scales. A hundred ninety-two. Then Bat Kravitz. The scales moved to an even two hundred and hovered there.

There was nervous comment among the spectators. Opinion was about equally divided, but the experts were not confident of their choices. There was nothing to

help them here. Both gladiators were perfectly conditioned, drawn superbly fine and hard.

The flat-faced Kravitz was twenty-eight. The tip-off on the Champ was that he had not gained a pound since he had won the title. Kravitz had lost nothing. At twenty-eight, he was at the peak of a furious career. The Champ's extra years would help Ken no more than the pull in the weights would aid the Champ.

So they weighed and left, the husky, slope-shouldered Champ, and the slighter built, squarer-shouldered challenger who was quite as heavily muscled; and the ceremony settled nothing for the anxious watchers—the experts who knew nothing of Ed Bloom's machinations.

At three o'clock, Ken walked into Bloom's office. The promoter was not alone.

Two of his sleek bodyguards were close to him. Bloom looked up from his desk and said flatly, "You shouldn't be here, son. Beat it."

Ken stood firm. He said, "I've got to talk to you."

Bloom eyed him narrowly. Then he jerked his head, and the bodyguards sauntered out.

Ken announced quietly, "I'm not going through with it, Bloom. I'm going in there to win."

Bloom raised his brows. He fished for a cigarette, lighted it patiently, and spoke softly, "I still have that damning evidence, you know."

"You can't hurt me now," Ken told him. "I'm matched for the title shot. The doctors have pronounced Kravitz ready. You can't stop it."

Bloom suggested, "And the pretty little girl?"

Ken laughed coldly. He pointed out, "You once told me I have no friends, Bloom."

"Yes. Yes, I can see that," Bloom admitted. He looked weary, faintly disappointed. He shrugged and said, "You leave me no choice."

Bloom seemed to move slowly, but the gun slid out of the shoulder holster with smooth abruptness.

"I haven't used this in fifteen years," Bloom said quietly. "But I've kept it ready. Son, these two fights were to have been

the climax of my career. Before I'll let you botch it, I'll kill you."

"And you'd burn for it," Ken sneered.

"I've used it before," Bloom said quietly. He said casually, with no anger but rising impatience, "Self-defense, son. I can get all the witnesses I need. I can bang my head on the desk and raise all the bruises and blood I need. You can't buck me, son. So just be a good boy and promise—"

Ken yelled, "Cassidy!"

The bodyguards came in first, hands high. Then two uniformed cops. Then Cassidy.

Bloom shrugged. He flicked a reproachful smile at Ken. He said, "Hello, Cassidy. You're interrupting a little scene."

Not so little," Cassidy commented, eyes on the gun.

Bloom started to put the gun back in the holster. He said, "I have a license to carry it, of course. Have had for more years than I care to admit."

"I hope so," Cassidy said fervently, taking the gun in a big hand. "I hope to God this is the same gun you have registered!"

Bloom's eyes narrowed. He suggested, "Talk on, copper."

Cassidy was looking down at the gun in his hand, turning it. He kept his eyes on it when he said, "The years go by, Bloom. A punk dope-king called 'Leggsy' Bloom can get to be Ed Bloom, the famous promoter. I guess there are crooked cops now. I know there were some then. Higher-ups. Big shots who could queer the work of a thousand honest uniformed boys. Big George Lee was an honest cop, Bloom."

"That's not what the papers said," Bloom told him. Bloom looked supremely calm, but slightly puzzled.

"It does something to an honest cop to bring in rats and have their cases squelched," Cassidy said slowly. "It happened to Big George once too often. Big George decided to take things into his own hands. He dropped a hint to me what he was doing; and the thing has been inside me all these years. There's always a market for a cop who will sell out. You thought you had bought him, Bloom. He would have broken you and your mob except you found out a little too soon what he was doing. So you killed him."

Bloom shook his head.

"Big George was the kind who would get in one lick if he was weighted down with lead," Cassidy went on. "He broke your plates. And you left a piece of dental crockery behind you in the room. That fragment is going to help burn you, Bloom. A dentist named Frankel made new plates for you. What you didn't know was that he kept the old plates as part of a collection. We have that old set now. The missing piece fits. And we have the bullets we dug out of poor Lee. Bullets from a .32 caliber revolver. Like this one."

Everyone in the room saw Bloom's hand go toward the gun. Then he dropped his hand. He asked steadily, "Is that all, Cassidy? Just a couple of pieces of circumstantial evidence? You're slipping, Cassidy. Too bad you can't reach down into their graves and dig up witnesses. So unfortunate all my former associates are so thoroughly dead."

Cassidy's words were slow and even. They struck with the impact of blows from a ball bat. "Slops Genty isn't dead, Bloom."

For an instant Bloom seemed to be strangling. A gurgling whine came from his throat as he made one feeble grab at the gun Cassidy pulled easily away.

Bloom slumped back against his desk. His face was ashy, and sweat puddled the brows. He looked a hundred years old.

When he spoke, his voice was faint.

"But it was all so long ago."

"There's no law of limitations for murder," Cassidy said, and now his voice was big and hard. "You'll be coming along now, Leggsy Bloom, and the charge is murder in the first degree."

Bloom's lethargy vanished with the great hand on his arm. He struck Cassidy across the face. He kicked while the handcuffs were fitted on his wrists. He cursed his bodyguards for cravens as they stood helpless and stunned.

As the cops carried him out, Bloom twisted a livid face and shouted back, "You, Motz—and Carr! Tell Bat I said to kill this stinking bum. To kill him, you hear!"

POP Broderick closed the dressing room door and leaned against it. He stood there for a long time without saying a

word. Finally he said, "You pig-headed fool."

Ken swallowed hard. He stammered, "Pop, I—"

Pop grunted, "Save your breath. Cassidy gave me the whole story. You got a license to be a martyr? Who the hell told you to take the rap for the rest of us? If you'd told me the pressure was on, I'd have worked over that mob like a flame-thrower working over a pound of butter." The anger on Pop's rugged face was spread very thin; there was none at all in his dark eyes. The huskiness came back to Pop's voice as he said, "It took a pair of shoulders to carry that load. It took a pair of shoulders."

Pop would never speak of it again, Ken knew; but Pop would never forget.

Ken said, "I sort of hoped you'd bring Flophouse. I fired my seconds. They were Bloom's boys."

"He's on the way," Pop assured him. "And I got Baldy Ives. Nobody's better with a cut than Baldy."

Ken nodded, satisfied. Pop fired a cigarette and said thoughtfully, "Kid, you've got to lick Kravitz. If you've got the evidence to hang Bloom, you've got it; still, it's going to sound a lot like a sour-grapes squawk if you get licked tonight. It'll leave a bad taste in a lot of people's mouth. Bloom will drag out those photostats and make everybody believe you're a phony if Kravitz whips you. Whip him, and we can forget that."

It was more than that. Ken had a whole rotten empire hanging on the ropes; if he did not apply the crusher tonight, the thing would shake off the threat and grow strong again. A mint of money had been bet on this fight, money backing honest opinions—and most of it covered by Bloom's hangers-on, men like Babe Kravitz, crooks who had contemptuously bet their rolls, knowing they had a sure thing.

Ken went out into the night. Broderick walked behind him. The seconds trailed them, Flophouse with the bucket, Baldy Ives with his little black satchel. When the crowd spotted him, the noise almost picked him up and carried him along.

It was queer how the shouting got him tonight. Always before he had sneered at the crowd. Ken was thinking as his shoes scuffed in the dew-damp grass. Somehow

he seemed to have a father. Big George Lee had never been more than a black and haunting memory. Ken knew now that Big George had played as devious a game as Ken himself—and Big George had lost. Ken found his lips moving. He wanted to shout back to these people, "My father was an honest cop," and let them share his joy in the knowledge." But he only climbed into the ring and mitted them.

The Champ came down the other aisle, late. The Champ had a small mob trailing him. Ken looked at that group, and the hatred in their faces was a force that tried to smash him down.

They were scared, these men. They were angry and uncertain. They were snarling at each other, all trying to talk to the Champ. Babe Kravitz and Sid Moss were sweaty-pale with staggering anger. Black Diamond Martini and Smoothy Jones, the gamblers, were flushed with stimulants that had not settled in their bellies. Bim Russo and Mart Bowden, the seconds, fiddled nervously with their equipment. Only one man in that group was not scared.

Bat Kravitz, the Champ, was not scared.

Bat tore away from frenzied last-minute exhortations by Moss and his brother. He climbed into the ring. And in the flat face, Ken saw fury. Hatred was a roaring, banked flame inside Bat Kravitz. It was not a crazed madness that would defeat the Champ; it was a force that would carry Kravitz to new heights as a fighter. To be hated like that is a disturbing thing, even to a fighter.

The ring was clear, the ceremonies done. Bat Kravitz crouched in his corner, motionless as a set trap, as a tiger before the fatal spring. Ken glanced down for an instant into Pop's haggard face. Pop tried a ghastly grin and croaked, "Knock him in my lap, Kid."

The bell.

THE trap was sprung; the tiger pounced. Two hundred pounds of fury slithered across the ring. Ken took two steps forward. No more. Both the Champ's fists were red blurs of murder under the cold, white light.

Ken threw the right hand.

He threw it straight out, with his body behind it, and his feet grinding at the can-

vas. He hit Kravitz squarely on the jaw as the Champ's head bobbed up with his punches. He hit him with righteous hatred and the lust to destroy.

The Champ went back halfway across the ring. His heels made staccato, frenzied thuds as they tried to catch the catapulted body. The Champ stayed on his feet. But Ken was on him, blasting both hands to the body, shifting to ram the right up to the jaw. Kravitz tried to clinch. Ken shoved him off. He hooked the left to the body, slammed his right over the heart, and Kravitz fell into the ropes.

Ken stepped in coldly, timing the wooden weaving of the hurt Champ. He hit twice to the body, blows like the cut of an axe. Then the Champ caught him in a drowning man's clutch, and Ken could not tear himself free.

A Champion is fistic royalty, and a referee is awed, perhaps unconsciously. Referee Maynard gave Bat Kravitz possibly two extra seconds in that clinch.

The Champ came out of it with his face twisted with the same pattern of hate, but dullness in the slitted eyes. Ken jolted the Champ with a jab, nailed him with a left hook that threw his chin clear of the protecting shoulder, and sledged with the right.

Bat Kravitz fell on his face. Ken backed to a corner. In the tempest of sound, the beat of the knock-down counter on the ring apron sounded like the hammerings of a great, unconquered heart.

For four beats of the hammer, Bat Kravitz lay like a dead man. He was up at "nine," reeling on drunken legs, fading backward with his gloves and elbows a shield.

Ken tried to raise that burrowing face with uppercuts. Failing, he shifted to the body, tearing gasps from the Champ. Kravitz fled to the ropes, and found safety in a clinch.

Ken cut that weaving face. He landed blows to the body that rang like hammers on an anvil. Just before the bell, Ken landed a right under the heart that dropped the Champ to his knees, but the Champ did not fall over. He was on his knees at the bell.

Frantic seconds dragged the Champ back to his corner. Ken lay against the ropes. His chest was leaping. He had

spent himself prodigally. If Kravitz was hurt, so was Ken.

Bat Kravitz came out steadily at the bell. He came out to give away a round. His eyes showing his violent distaste for what he had to do. The Champ boxed.

It was not showy boxing. It was not the blow-blocked-in-mid-air, the cleanly-slipped-punch showmanship. It was that greater artistry, that finished craftsmanship, that kept the Champ rolling ahead of Ken’s punches, that sopped up fists and robbed them. Ken brought blood pouring from the Champ’s nose; he hacked a deep cut over the right eye. The knockout-roar was a hoarse scream in the night as the blood bubbled. The crowd saw, and did not understand. Only Ken knew the real greatness of this man of iron. Ken knew that Kravitz finished the round stronger than he had started it.

Ken won the third round. He won it with a punishing left hand and one right cross that knocked the Champ half through the ropes. But there were red welts over Ken’s liver when he went to his corner. The Champ was beginning to hit back.

Flophouse and Baldy Ives worked industriously. Over his shoulder, Ken heard Pop’s uncertain voice, “You’ve got three rounds.”

Ken hadn’t thought about it at all. He considered it now. Indubitably, he had won three rounds. With fast footwork and the fancy left hand, he could win enough rounds to carve himself a clean win over the route. But Ken laughed.

He snorted, “Who’s cautious now?”

He went out and hit Kravitz with a right hand. The Champ belted Ken downstairs with a pair of short hooks. Ken made Kravitz’s flat nose flatter with a crunching, brief left. Kravitz worked close and mauled Ken’s ribs with a mule-kick right. Ken flayed the Champ’s jaw with two lefts.

THEY fought like alley cats for three rounds. Ken was walking in flat-footed, countering. Sometimes his blows landed first; but as often, they did not. There was blood smeared over both their torso’s, on the referee’s shirt. It was no longer entirely the Champ’s blood.

In the seventh, the Champ began to come on. Ken’s counters could not stop



him. The Champ drove through them, landing first, landing more often, hitting harder. Ken’s lower lip was split. He had an ugly cut under the right eye.

And in the eighth, Ken knew that it could not go on much longer. He caught the Champ coming in. He nailed him with his finest right hand, and the Champ kept coming, lacing hooks to the body, shifting to the jaw to drive Ken to the ropes. Ken felt the corner cramping him. He tried to fight his way out, and the body of the Champ was a wall of masonry.

The Champ began to throw grenades. They landed thick and fast, rocking Ken wildly. There was an instant of pure shock as a mightier shell exploded. Ken felt his body dragging him down. He caught at the ropes, and the bell sounded, tinny and distant.

Flophouse carried Ken back to the corner. An ammonia capsule popped, spearing explosive force up his nostrils. Ken ordered thickly, “Take it away.” He leaned back and tried to think. The conviction had been forced on him: The Champ was a little bigger, a little tougher, and he hit just enough harder to outbalance Ken’s speed and accuracy. Pop had been right; Ken wrong. But it was too late now to change his style. Ken no longer had the legs.

So he met Kravitz almost at ring center. The Champ punched with both hands, and Ken slugged with him. Slowly, inch by inch, Ken felt himself being forced back. He fought desperately. Inexorably, the heavier man drove him.

With the ropes licking at his back, Ken lashed out with a desperation uppercut. For an instant, he had room. He took a step forward, feeling the Champ waver. Then a punch crashed on Ken's jaw. It rumbled through his body like the reverberations of a brazen gong, until he could see nothing, feel nothing in the shock.

He heard the referee yell, "Eight!" Ken was not sure he could get up. He made his try, lurched up, and robbed himself of a second he could have had. He tried to clinch, and he was too weak. So he punched back, until that great gong rang again.

He heard no count this time. He stumbled up, and sensed that it had been very close. He knew he would not get up again.

His blurred eyes found Bat Kravitz weaving at him, out of focus, distorted. And his mind, suddenly cold, reached back and remembered that tiny little flaw in the Champ's weaving style—the way his head always bobbed up a trifle when he let his heaviest punches go.

So Ken slung a bolo uppercut.

It was no harder than the punch that had shocked the Champ in the first round; no harder than a dozen others that had shaken him throughout the fight. But it had all these other punches behind it. The Champ's body sagged forward as his knees went loose, and his gloves drooped.

Ken stuck out a wooden left, caught the Champ. He hit the Champ's jaw with a straight right, and the Champ's weight went backward, tugging at those limp knees.

Wearily, Ken drew back his right hand and slung it overhead in the pattern of the haymaker that had felled the Guerilla. It drove the Champ backward and down to the canvas. It seemed to drive him into the floor of the ring.

Suddenly strong, Ken walked to a corner, keeping his intent stare on the fallen Champ. Kravitz tried. At "four" he rolled over on his stomach, a limp, convulsive heave.

At "eight" Kravitz was lifting one knee under him, dragging it painfully.

But the knee would not hold him, and Kravitz pitched face down again at the final count. Everything that had made Kravitz a champion seemed to drain out of the big body. When his seconds got him on his feet again, Bat Kravitz looked old and shrunken.

The referee raised Ken's hand. "Winner and new champion. . . ."

Of all the gang that had come down the aisle with Kravitz, only his brother Babe, with a grief-distorted face working like a mess of melting putty, followed him up the aisle. Defeat had scattered the Bloom mob like chaff before a strong wind.

It was a long time before the crowd dwindled away from the dressing room. Ty O'Hare came in then. She stood hesitantly just inside the door. When Ken saw her, she flushed. She looked very beautiful, and helplessly flustered.

She said in a small voice, "It helps a little, Ken, that you won. It takes a little of the edge from knowing I almost ruined everything with another of my foolish stunts. Cassidy told me."

"Cassidy gets around," Ken observed. He said, "Maybe you need somebody around to keep you from pulling foolish stunts."

The flush grew with her smile. She admitted, "It's an idea I seem to have had longer than you."

Pop cleared his throat gracelessly. He demanded, "As manager of the Champ, I'd like to know what the program is? Do you still figure to fight a couple of soft ones, pick up the dough, and get out?"

Ken frowned. He said slowly, "I don't intend to stay in this game until I have grey whiskers. And I expect to marry all the money I need. Still, I'd hate to leave the game in a mess, the way it has been. I think I'd better stick around until I'm sure we've run all the rats out of boxing. I guess I'll have to go on fighting for a while, Pop."

Pop's eyes were twinkling, but he did not crack a smile. He repeated, "Yeah, I guess you'll go on fighting for a while, Kid — I mean, Champ."



SAILORS' SOCKEROO

By Lloyd Derrickson

The tramp steamer's rough-house crew was fascinated by one single target—the clean-shaven jaw of the new third mate. Was it putty or iron? There were ways of finding out.

THE TRAMP STEAMER Roanoke, three days out of New York, pulsed lazily through a long, hot afternoon that licked thirstily at the smooth-surfaced Atlantic. With decks scrubbed pebble-clean for the voyage and her sleek plates purring under the sustained and monotonous swishing of the waves, she seemed entirely unaware of the growling

hubbub rising from her broad, squat stern-deck.

A dozen members of the vessel's deck-crew stood in a solid, defiant group, circling a tall young seaman built along the general lines of a smoke-stack. His square, green-eyed face was burnt almost black with wind and sun and he panted like a dog after a run in the sunshine.

"We been imposed on ever since we cleared Sandy Hook in this tinbox," he shouted.

Twenty yards distant, calmly facing the crew, Captain Reeves stood between his two tall mates. A short, wide, weathered man in his early fifties, the Captain was one of those masters who spoke little, seemed to see and hear nothing, but who knew everything—heard every whisper, saw every fleeting shadow of his ship's life. Now he was looking at his angry third mate, Harry Brian, thoughtfully. "What about this imposing business?" he asked.

"I've only relayed your instructions, sir," said Brian. "That they should chip rust."

Captain Reeves gave him a steely gaze. "I should have known," he said bitterly. "Hire a man with a new ticket and you hire trouble. You're supposed to handle these men, Mr. Brian. That's what you're paid for."

Brian's face was pale, furious, but he spoke respectfully. "It's not really the men, sir," he said, "it's a man. That Hayden. Somehow he's got the port-watch gang under this thumb. Impressed them with his knuckles like as not. Seems he's been a wrestler, fighter, rough-houser and what not. Anyhow, he's managed to sell them a bill of goods that I'm imposing on them. He's threatened to report them to their union steward if they don't back him up. And of course they're co-operating, especially as it means less work for them."

The Captain jettied a stream of tobacco juice in a neat hurdle over the port rail. "Well?" he rasped, "and may I ask just what the hell you're doing about that?"

"Well sir," replied Brian, "I'm trying to hold them to their work. But—but Hayden is tough. I order him to pull on a rope, splice, or chip rust and he puts as much in it as a sick kitten, sir."

"Hah," said the Captain. He squinted at his young third officer shrewdly. "Of course you know what you're up against, Mr. Brian?"

Mr. Brian's eyes tightened. "I've an idea, sir."

"It's a personal matter, really. They've spotted the new ink on your ticket and want to know whether you stow putty or

guts beneath that belt-line. If it wasn't this Hayden geezer it would be somebody else. Every new third goes through it."

Brian, fresh from the academy, flushed. "Didn't take 'em long to start on me," he observed bitterly. He'd been warned of this, knew his future as an officer depended on how he handled this situation. If he didn't somehow nip this goldbricking Hayden fellow he was through. There'd be no work from any deck-crew in the service if he failed with this one. The word would get around.

"**W**HY not throw the book at him," suggested Mr. Knowles, second mate. "A fellow like that deserves to be broken."

Brian shook his head. "Crying to the authorities wouldn't help much, I'm afraid, Mr. Knowles." He paused. "There's only one way," he said finally, and balled his fist.

"You'll keep your hands off him, Mr. Brian," said Captain Reeves sharply. He turned and put one foot on the spider ladder, then changing his tone, added:

"Thirty years ago you could hard-fist a man. There's never been a better way to make that type understand. But this isn't a windjammer or thirty years ago. Now you got a bundle of rules and regulations to tangle you, so anything in that line has to be done on a strictly personal basis. Nothing official. Nothing that I nor any of the ship's officers can possibly know about." Tobacco juice sweetened the sea again, and the mates were left facing each other.

Mr. Knowles prepared to follow, hesitated, then winked broadly. "I'm sure, Mr. Brian," he said stiffly, "you understand the master? Only," he added, "I'd be awfully careful. That Hayden looks like maybe he eats iron fids for breakfast."

Harry Brian turned and walked slowly back toward the clustered seamen on the stern deck. His six feet and 190 pounds of muscle trembled under his blue uniform. He shook his head in self-disgust. "Anybody would think I'm frightened," he muttered, "when it's just I'm plain sore. Bunch of jerks trying to ruin a fellow on his first voyage as an officer." The injustice of the situation made

Brian's voice sour as bilge-water as he faced the men.

"All right, you men," he said clearly, "get going with that chipping."

A mincing voice, hidden behind the front row of grinning sailors, chirped, "My, my, scoot gang. Here comes papa Neptune hisself."

Somebody laughed outright, and a young ordinary seaman, brave in the sight of his comrades, spat disdainfully in the scupper.

Brian felt as though it had been in his face. "Wipe that up, George!" he ordered.

The lad's eyes screwed in surprise. He had caught a new note of authority in the third's voice. For a moment his eyes battled with Brian's, then wavered. "Why you pick on me?" he mumbled.

"Wipe it up! Now!"

George wanted desperately to be brave—to contribute his share toward this game of baiting the new mate—but the habit of obedience and respect to his superiors had been ground deep within him. Slowly he extracted a piece of waste from his back pocket and, with a sheepish grin, cleaned the scupper.

Brian tasted the first crumb of victory in his fight for discipline. His arms seemed glued to his thighs but he determined to push forward. "All right," he snapped at the rest of the men. "Get to it."

They began to shuffle back to their work, some leering knowingly, others watching with frank animosity as they tipped their chipping hammers languidly. Only big Hayden stood still, his arms crossed on his chest.

"You too, Hayden," said Brian. "Get chipping." They were much of a size, and Brian exchanged a deadly glance with the big fellow's beady eyes.

"Can't," said Hayden slowly, "lost my chipper." Instantly there was an epidemic of hoarse giggling behind Brian's back.

This was what he was up against, Brian reflected bitterly. No open flouting of his authority. No honest cut-and-dried refusal of orders. Rather, this maddening, schoolboy method of resistance.

"Find it!" he bawled, anger cracking his voice. "Find it and get to work!"

Hayden had a trick of propelling his nostrils in and out like a bellows. The crewmen were positive they had never witnessed anything half so amusing. They cackled beyond control. "I'm tryin'," mouthed Hayden. "Don't y'see I'm tryin' to find it?" His nostrils flapped strenuously.

BRIAN strode toward the stern water-cooler, debating with himself what his next move would be if he returned to find Hayden still stalling. Then he sensed the sudden silence behind him and the next instant heard the shattering clang of a heavy object as it clattered along the deck and lodge against the iron deck-housing not five yards from his feet. He whirled in time to see Hayden's arm move to his side. He picked up the chipping hammer still ringing on the deck and took a long stride forward. Hayden faced him, a cheeky grin exposing his yellow teeth.

Brian felt as though his mouth was full of dough and his stomach was twisting itself into half-hitches. But he forced himself to advance so close he could breathe into Hayden's face.

"I believe the dirty cur that threw this chipping hammer is yellow." He was staring straight at Hayden. "But," he continued, "I'm going to give him a chance to prove otherwise." He pointed to a nearby cabin. "I'm going in there and wait for the tough boy that threw the hammer. Understand? No rank is to be thrown around. No reports made. Just a little personal satisfaction." He flung one last glance at Hayden and walked to the cabin.

He knew it was empty save for a small table which he shoved against the wall. He stripped down to his waist immediately. His muscles were hard and supple and his stomach flat as a board. While waiting he found himself grimly grateful that he had done quite a bit of amateur boxing while at the academy and had always kept himself in excellent condition.

Hayden took his time about accepting the challenge, but finally stepped in over the foot-high iron sill of the cabin and flung the heavy door closed behind him with a bang. He looked at Brian with a sort of mocking sneer. "You sure you're

not going to go whinin' on paper about this no more'n we get back to port?"

"You heard me," said Brian. "No rank's being considered."

Hayden ducked his head in satisfaction and began to strip to the waist.

Brian watched him. The man was a beautiful physical specimen, all right. Six-foot-two and weighing 210 pounds, his brawny sun-blackened shoulders might have belonged to Joe Louis. His hands were hard as marin spikes, conditioned by years of hard manual labor. His legs were mahogany hued, thick and solid as the bow-bitts of the ship.

"C'mon," Hayden drawled spitefully. "C'mon and take your hidin', pretty boy."

Brian barely heard the schoolboyish words as he advanced slowly, circling to the right, his left poised. Hayden held himself loose, but he was trigger-cautious at the same time. Suddenly he feinted with his left and then sent his right thundering forward. Brian leaped backward, but not in time to avoid the blow entirely. It landed low on his stomach, leaving a big red splotch on his white skin. He felt no sharp pain, just a deadening numbness.

Brian's muscles quivered, craving the action that would set them free from this nerve-tingling cat and mouse move. He bounded in recklessly and clipped Hayden's broad nose with a sharp right. Hayden's eyes filled with tears. His jaws crunched together murderously as he bulled out suddenly with both hands. The bone-hard knuckles of his left thudded against Brian's brow, and raked downward, bringing skin from the bridge of his nose. His right boomed viciously against the mate's ribs.

AT THE same moment Brian heaved a roundhouse right. It missed the jawbone by toothpick width, sped upward, and splashed against the outer corner of the sailor's right eye. A trickle of blood peeped over the cheekbone, then poured freely down his cheek.

Hayden bounced forward with a roar, hurling his rock-fists with furious abandon. Brian met the charge, slugging desperately. For a full five minutes they stood toe to toe trading siege-guns, laboring for breath. Neither would break ground. Now it was blow and counter-

blow, a savage exhibition of jungle fighting. Willingly, even anxiously, either took a punch in order to land one, until finally their blows were long, slow, grunting deliveries robbed of all their initial crackling speed and power.

And then finally a ridiculous, ineffective pawing left jab of Brian's fluttered against the sailor's face and he sat down with a jarring thump. And at the same moment Brian's legs flanneled under him and he too butted the floor with his hams. They sat staring at each other, the sweat pouring down their faces.

Presently the sailor regained a measure of strength. His battered lips opened painfully, croaked: "Had—enough. Or—you want—more?"

Something about the look of the man made Brian want to laugh. It seemed incredible, but there it was. An insane desire to laugh. He grinned even as he grimaced with the pain it caused his battered features, and croaked back: "I was—just going—to ask you the—same thing."

"Oh," he mumbled, "you were!"

Brian coughed, said solemnly, "I was."

They breathed, they stared, then stirred.

"In that case," said Hayden woodenly, "we might as well—go to town." He lifted himself ponderously to his feet.

"Be right with you," sighed Brian, and creaked upright. The next moment they were at it again—slugging each other viciously for a few minutes, grunting, open-mouthed, trying hard to hurt.

They were both agile for big men. Hayden was stronger, Brian faster, a little the better boxer. The sailor pushed Brian away with both hands, then rushed in with a series of flailing swings. Brian took most of the blows on his arms and shoulders. He waited his chance and cracked Hayden hard on the jaw. The sailor did a crazy little two-step and went down.

Brian knew he could have walked out of the cabin then, the victor on the surface of it. But he also knew his authority wouldn't be established. The sailor wasn't through. He recovered from the blow in a moment, shook his head.

"Satisfied?" said Brian. "Want to quit?"

Hayden shook his head stubbornly. He came up fast.

THEY fought a long time. Sweating, swinging, grunting, bursting into brief slugging storms, then clinching, infighting half-heartedly, getting their wind.

Hayden sweated and swung oftener, forced the fighting. Brian stayed out of reach when he could, slugged when he had to. But the sailor's superior strength began to tell. Finally he caught Brian with a wild left and sent him to his knees.

"You——want to——quit?" sobbed Hayden. His spaced words somehow sounded respectful.

"Can't," said Brian. "Got to——keep on." He rose wearily, his arms hanging loose at his sides.

Hayden peered at him beneath eyebrows that resembled two bloody, black caterpillars. "You're game," he panted hoarsely. "Can quit——when you damned please.

"No," denied Brian. "Got to——keep on."

Hayden raised his fists. "Oke."

Brian raised his left, and poked it out instinctively. Hayden brushed it aside and came on in with a lumbering half-rush, wide open. For a moment Brian couldn't believe it. The heavy jaw was a perfect target. He gathered the last wavering tatters of his strength and aimed a tremendous, roundhouse right to Hayden's jaw. He felt a sharp pain skewer through his hand and fork into his forearm, and at the same time, off-balance, fell forward and down, flat on his face. The next moment Hayden's body, loose as liver, sagged heavily down across the small of his back.

He lay there several minutes, resting, feeling the limp weight of Hayden's body. Then, wearily, he stirred and squirmed laboriously out from under the burden. After a while he sat upright, aware only of the dead numbness of weary muscles. Pain, he knew, would follow later. He looked at Hayden. His face was bruised, vacant, but he seemed to be breathing easily. He waited, gradually becoming aware of the gentle dip of the ship under him.

Finally Hayden stirred, his eyes opened blankly, then focused on Brian's face. "You still——here?" he asked.

"Yes," said Brian. He stared down at his swelling, skinned knuckles, thinking hard. That last wild rush of Hayden's, wide-open, had been too good to be true.

"You——gave me the fight," he said bitterly.

Hayden looked at him, one eye closed, his face working. "Like hell," he breathed.

"You sure?" asked Brian suspiciously.

"Sure," replied Hayden, looking away. He got to his feet, weaved to the door, looking back. "C'mon."

"Go ahead," said Brian.

Hayden wagged his head impatiently. "You first," he said stubbornly. "You won." Then suddenly he grinned. "You look a helluva sight, but wait'll they see me."

Brian grinned back, walked to the door. "I don't know," he said doubtfully. He examined Hayden's face, aware that he felt no bitterness, and seeing none. "I'm not so sure I won. You had me, cold. Then you gave me your jaw for a target."

"You won," said Hayden shortly. "Go ahead out." He flung open the door.

But still Brian hesitated.

"What the hell," said Hayden slowly. "You too stubborn to even win a fight? I had it comin' to me."

Brian made up his mind suddenly. He grabbed the sailor's arm firmly, and side by side they stepped through the doorway.

The men were waiting outside, wide-eyed, puzzled.

There was a few moments of silence, then young George, twitching with curiosity, yelped the question in all their minds. "Who won the fight?"

"Shet yer mouth, youngster," said an old shellback reprovingly.

Hayden and Brian looked at each other slowly, then both grinned. Without a word Hayden walked over and picked up a chipping hammer. "You want all this plate chipped, sir?" he asked in a very loud voice.

For a moment Brian stood transfixed, unable to answer. Then slowly, smiling, knowing at last who really had won, he answered, "Yes. All of it. A good clean job, boys. A good, clean job."

KID MCCOY—FISTIANA'S LONE WOLF

By Doc McGee

Kid McCoy's flour-white skin, good looks and medium size measured him for the set-up category. A more disarming fighter never entered the ring, for, when the bell sounded, you faced a cat-eyed killer; crafty, dangerous, wielder of the lethal corkscrew punch. He was predictable in only one thing—thas his opponent, regardless of size, weight or destructive power, would soon be kissin' canvas.

KID MCCOY!

The strangest, most inexplicable figure that ever strode through the tangled action of the prize ring! One of the shewdest, cleverest and most merciless boxers who ever pulled a leather glove over his knuckles! A man who was universally hated—but who was his own worst enemy! A vagabond lover, a Don Juan, cold as an icicle and hot as a flame—the most contradictory man the ring world ever saw!

Memory brings up a picture of a tall, pallid, curly-haired man. The eyes are restless. They shift here and there, jumping suspiciously from one face to another. Reared in a hard school, the Kid trusts no one, believes in no one. He is a lone wolf, and the lone wolf always bares its fangs to the pack. His mouth is a hard line. It is a cruel mouth, but it has been made that way by circumstances. Under happier conditions it might have developed into a tender one. The Kid's skin is as white as a woman's. The contrasting blackness of his hair and brows gives him a romantic and swaggering touch. He might have stepped from a paiting of the "Mississippi River Gambler."

There is nothing about him to suggest the fighter. He has an ease and gentleness of manner that captivated women. To his enemies, McCoy's manner is an added affront. They declare that it was a pose to throw folks off their guard.

There are, of course, two sides to every story. The Kid had a few friends. Most of the tales that have been told of him were pointed with venom and barbed with anger. They may have been true, but even

truth can be so colored as to change its entire complexion. This story of Kid McCoy will be neither a white-washing nor an apology. It will be an attempt to tell in a straightforward way the things he did, and in the telling paint a portrait of one of the most interesting and most misunderstood fighting men the game ever saw.

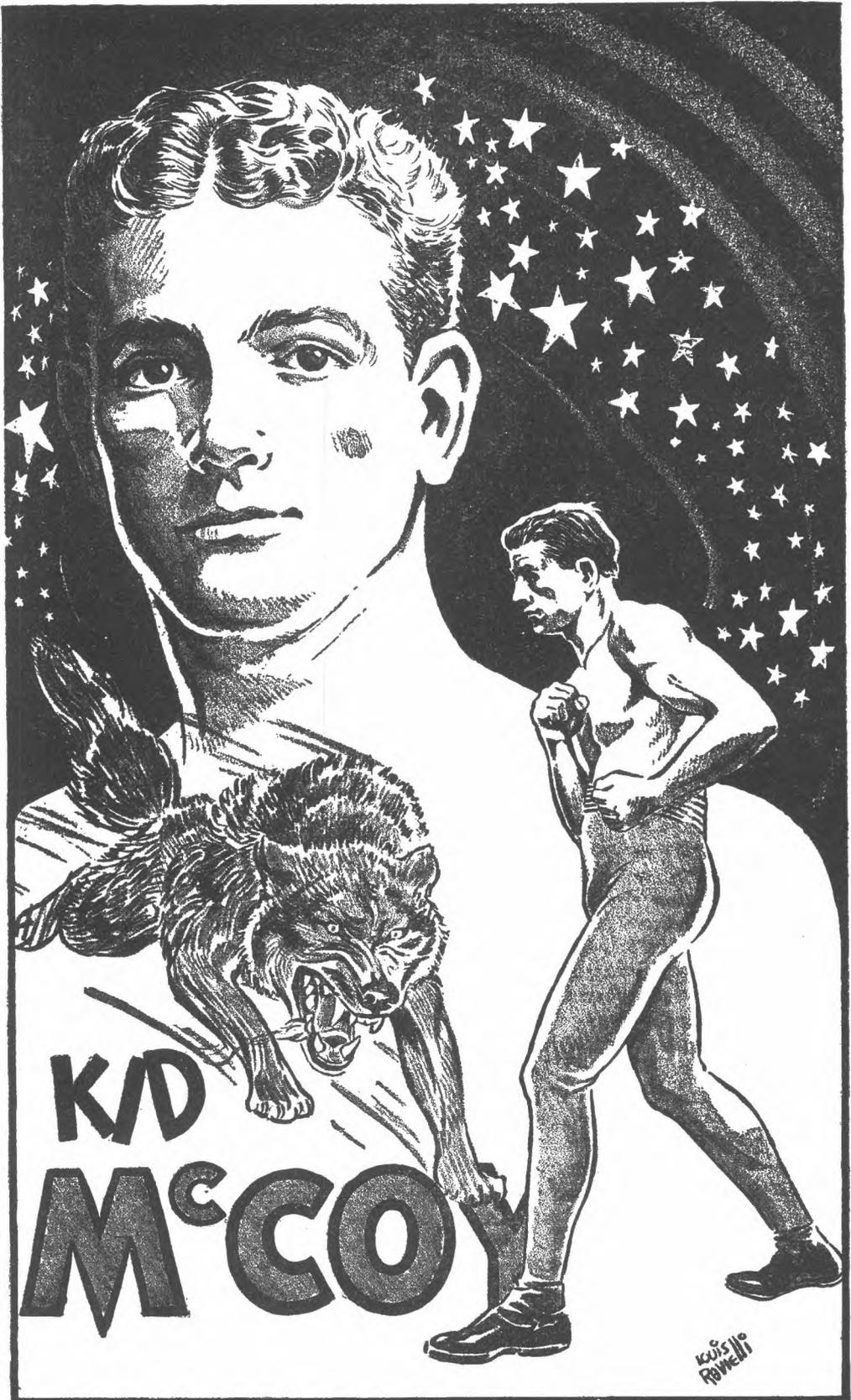
One incident changed the entire course of McCoy's life. It gave him a hard, merciless philosophy of life. It calloused his mind and his sympathies. If it hadn't happened, he might have become an entirely different man. He might have been happier and more successful in the business of living. Because it played such an enormously important part in his life, it deserves a foremost place in his story.

Kid McCoy was born Norman Selby. He was born, also, with a pair of itching feet and an intense desire to see the world. His father's Indiana store was no place for adventure and the dream-thrills that stirred the fourteen-year-old youngster. Like countless other adventurers before him, Norman decided to run away. The call was too strong to be resisted.

One dark night he slipped away from the house, with his possessions in a pasteboard shoe-box, ran panting down to the station, and climbed aboard a freight-train bound West.

WEST!

What boy doesn't thrill at the name—at least what boy in 1888 didn't? As he cuddled in a corner of a box car, and nibbled at a sandwich he had brought with him, young Norman dreamed high



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dreams. Sure, he was only fourteen, but boys of that age got on. The authors of Beadle's Dime Library and Horatio Alger stressed the infallibility of youth. Fourteen might be young—but it wasn't too young! So he thought.

Though life at home hadn't been easy, there had been moments of tenderness. The boy didn't understand just how harsh and unfeeling the world can be—even to a boy of fourteen.

While on his way for the next few days, Norman managed to keep out of the way of brakemen—who are called "shacks" in the vernacular of the wandering boys of the road—and to pick up enough to eat from back-doors. He had no definite plan. He was as vague about his destination as though he were really setting out for the foot of the rainbow.

One cool spring night he found himself in a freight car headed for Butte. Half a dozen men were huddled in it. They were grimy and beard stubbled, and their sweaty, unwashed bodies odorous. The slim, pale-faced youngster was so utterly out of place among them that he seemed almost tragic. Even the tramps recognized that.

"Where y' goin', kid?" one of them asked.

"Butte," said Norman.

"Lissen," the wanderer's voice sank to a whisper. "The shack on this train is a mean guy. If y' got any dough he'll let you ride. If you ain't—Wooie!" He threw his hands palms out in an expressive gesture.

"I haven't got a dime," said the boy.

A man suddenly swung himself through the graying patch that represented the side-door of the car. There was still enough light to see that he was a bulging muscled fellow, with a shock of hair that grew almost down to his eyebrows. He was brutal, simian looking, this shack. The tramps cowered back in their corners, though they had paid for the right to ride.

The brakeman's eyes swept over them disdainfully. They rested on young Norman Selby, fourteen years old, and with the skin of a schoolgirl.

"Oh, ho!" cried the shack. "What baby parade did you escape from? If you got any money, you'd better hand it over."

"I haven't got any," the boy repeated.

A great, hairy hand clamped down on his coat collar. A fist went pawing through his pockets in search of whatever pitiable pennies might be there. The search was unsuccessful. The shack cursed. Then he twisted young Selby around, and rushed him toward the door. He shoved and kicked at the same time, and the youngster went flying out on the right of way. Fortunately, the train was barely creeping along, so Norman escaped serious injury. But his hands and knees were bleeding. There was a cut over his eye.

A sudden, terrible rage boiled up in him. He pulled himself together and rushed for the car. The fact that he was just a half-baked kid, and that his oppressor was a powerful man, never entered his mind. All Norman thought of at the moment was the terrible necessity of getting his hands on the brute who had abused him so.

He reached the door, put his hands on the floor of the car, and swung himself up. The shack was standing a few feet away, swearing at another helpless soul. Whether it was premonition, or whether he heard the scrape of Norman's worn shoes, I don't know. At any rate he swung around, and caught a glimpse of a white, desperate face with bared teeth as the youngster launched himself at the man's throat.

The shack carried a club in his hand—a club used for a variety of purposes, from turning a brake to beating a vagabond. As Norman jumped at him, he swung that stick in a wide and vicious circle. It caught the boy across the chest as he was in mid-air and knocked him backward as though he had been a feather.

He shot through the open door, and landed, half unconscious, beside the track.

FOR a while he lay there inert, scraped and bloody and aching in every bone. Butte was fifteen miles down the shining steel rails. He hadn't a penny. He was hungry and hurt worse than he had ever been in his life. Maybe Alger and the Beadles were wrong. Maybe a fourteen-year-old wasn't old enough and big enough to fight the world.

As he lay there in the sweetly aromatic spring darkness, trying to pull himself together, a great hate was born in the boy

who was to become Kid McCoy. And, with that hate came a queer, twisted philosophy of life that seemed to fit the facts as he saw them.

The thing to do was to be brutal, and not care for the feelings of others, if you were to succeed in life. Norman was ambitious. He wanted to get somewhere. He never would be like those broken down vagrants in the freight car. There you had it. The tramp was kind and warned him, yet he was just a tramp and always would be a tramp. The shack, though—he bossed men. He took money from the trembling muggs who rode his train. There was nothing kind about him. He was a rotter. Tears of hot rage came into Norman's eyes as he thought of the indignity that man had visited on him. Some day he'd get that man; some day when he was grown up and strong. But that was it! The successful were hard. They didn't bother about anyone's feelings. The kindly folk were weaklings—and weaklings didn't get anywhere. . . .

On toward Butte. Five miles . . . ten. . . . His feet ached . . . his shoulders dragged . . . the cuts and bruises burned like fire. That night was a bad one for Norman Selby, and the physical suffering was the least of it. He had started off on a bad track—a track that was to lead him into a labyrinth of adventure and excitement, of trouble and suffering, of loves and hates.

If Norman Selby could have looked down the years then, he would have—Well, since sight of the future is denied, and history is a path that may not be twice trodden, he could do nothing but go forward, his hot young heart surging in his breast. He stood on the threshold of his career—one of the most amazing careers a fighting man ever created.

II

NORMAN was sixteen when he arrived in Detroit, and took a job as dishwasher in a cheap restaurant. This was adjacent to the saloon of Pat Killian, a fight promoter, and the fact that Mr. Killian was in the boxing racket was really the turning point in the boy's life.

He went to the fight club, and watched Pat's leather pushers. They didn't seem

to be as tough as the shacks with whom he had done almost daily battle for the past few years. He told Killian as much, adding contemptuously that he could lick any fighter in Pat's string.

The promoter looked curiously at the slim, pale-faced boy. He might have scoffed, save for the hard eyes of the youngster and the deep-etched lines about his mouth.

No fooling about this. No matter how mild he looked, this dishwasher was nobody's pushover. Being a veteran in this game, Pat Killian was something of a judge of men. He decided that there was real stuff in this kid. So, he invited him into the back room, and suggested that he fight one of the roughest sluggers in the scoffed-at string.

At this time Norman hadn't developed his left hand. For a minute he took a fine pasting from the professional, but absorbed it like a gamester. It aroused Pat Killian's admiration.

"Double up that fist an' throw it in Mike's face like a rock," he shouted, in defiance of all managerial tenets. The Kid did just that, and Mike went down as though he had been pole-axed.

That back-room fight decided Norman Selby that he had been wasting his time. Destiny pointed toward the prize ring. That was the place for him to make a name for himself, and a fortune, as other pugilists had done. He wasn't quite sure as to how he might get his start, but there it was. The road-side battles he had fought was experience enough to start on. By gosh, he would be a fighter!

He'd have to pick out a new name for himself, though. It would break the old man's heart if he knew that his boy had turned prizefighter. Besides, who would take a fellow named Norman Selby seriously? The youngster cast around in his mind for one that would fit.

At that time a bandit named Charles McCoy was ravaging the Middle West, and getting his name into the papers frequently. McCoy! That was a fighting name. Kid McCoy!

Because of his showing Pat Killian decided to give the dishwasher a chance to make good in a regular fight at his club. He picked a hairy young fellow named Pete Jenkins as his opponent.

"I can't give you much," he said, "but it's an opening if you want it. Five bucks for six rounds is the price—an' this guy's hard as a landlord's heart. Are you on?"

"Sure," said the Kid.

Tough, eh? Prizefighters didn't come any tougher than some of the fellows he had seen on the road. The meaner the better, anyway. That was Kid McCoy at eighteen, and without a single professional scrap to his credit. As certain of himself as though he were already champion of the world.

After about three rounds had gone by, Norman found that his small stock of boxing knowledge wasn't enough to lick this fellow. Pete was on top of him all the time, hammering away. He was bigger than the Kid, and a bit contemptuous of him. The jab McCoy had perfected in the Y. M. C. A. gymnasium was brushed aside, and Jenkins tore in swinging. The dishwasher didn't look any too good.

While waiting for the fourth round to start, McCoy decided to change his tactics. Even then he knew that boxing ability was the biggest asset a ring man could have, but, being a clear-headed youngster, he also understood that he didn't have enough of it to beat Pete Jenkins.

So at the start of the fourth, instead of dancing out as he had before, he walked straight at the rushing Pete and let go a right-hander at the chin. It may have been more good luck than good judgment, but the punch landed right on the button. Pete's eyes became glassy. His knees wobbled. The Kid struck again. Jenkins staggered against the ropes, arms hanging by his side.

Pat Killian, who was referee as well as promoter, stepped between them and waved McCoy to his corner.

"You win," he said. "Do you want to kill the guy entirely?"

MCCOY wanted to develop his boxing skill. He started working in Indianapolis with Pete Treator, who looked on him as an apt pupil. Pete saw great possibilities in the Kid's left jab. McCoy always claimed to be the inventor of the jab as it is known today. The straight lead had been in existence almost as long as boxing itself, but this jab was something different. By standing with his body tilted

back a trifle, his left shoulder raised to cover the jaw, and his left arm at full length, the Kid found that he was able to keep Treator away. He had been practicing with both hands, and came pretty close to being ambidextrous.

No one of McCoy's weight around the gym could lay a glove on him, and Treator became more enthusiastic with every passing day. Then the Kid began to engage in private bouts at various resorts around the city. Usually the boys wore two-ounce gloves, but when the crowd wanted a sanguinary affair they were provided with ordinary buckskin gloves, having the fingers cut out. These were worse than bare knuckles. The blows cut as much, but a man's knuckles were saved by the slight covering.

The problem of earning sufficient money on which to live was quite as acute as ever. The Kid went into the paper-hanging and decorating business. That lasted only a couple of days, for a good and sufficient reason. McCoy's boss had a contract to paper the Indianapolis *Sentinel* office. As a matter of course, Norman found more interest in hanging around the desk of the sporting editor than in mixing paste.

That young gentleman became interested in McCoy. When he learned that the assistant paper-hanger was lightweight champion of Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky, but was just naturally pining away for lack of bouts, he offered to try and get him one.

Next day he had a wire from Akron, Ohio, offering the Kid a fight with George Bennett, for a purse of two hundred dollars.

McCoy never did see the finish of that papering job in the *Sentinel* office. He boarded a freight that night, and was in Akron as fast as the engine could take him there.

Though Bennett was the best lightweight in Ohio, he was easy for the Kid. That long left was in Bennett's face continually. It kept him missing and floundering about the ring. He hardly landed a blow throughout the eight rounds, and his nose was fairly spread over his face, while McCoy hardly had his hair mussed.

When the fight was over, the referee came over to McCoy's corner.

"Say, Kid," he whispered, "will you agree to call this thing a draw if we give you the whole two hundred? Bennett don't want his reputation damaged, and is willing to kick in his share to you if you don't crab?"

That was the first proposition ever made to Kid McCoy. It involved no dishonesty on his part. "O.K.," he said. "I need the money."

When the referee announced the decision as a draw, the crowd wanted to kill him. To save his hide, the Kid had to make a little speech assuring them that the decision suited him.

III

THOUGH he had two years of intermittent fighting behind him, Kid McCoy's career really started in 1893. He felt his feet solidly under him then. He began to receive better pay for his efforts. It seemed that he was headed somewhere.

He scored a lot of knockouts, numbering Jim Dickson, Jimmy Conners, Frankie Merritt, and other fairly good men among his victims. Nearing his twentieth birthday, he still had the look of a cherub despite the life of the road. His skin had the texture of a girl's; thick curls clustered on his head; his eyes could take on an immensely tender expression. Yet, his boyish face was no index to his cunning mind. He wanted to go along rapidly, but he understood very clearly that he must improve his armament. This he could only do by consistent work, and consistent study of more successful men's methods.

He didn't come even close to defeat in that year. His record shows a twenty-two round draw with Ike Boone, but records don't tell the whole story. Boone was rated as one of the best men of his weight in the Middle-West. He gave McCoy a stiff argument, but began to weaken, and his friends arranged to have the police interfere when he was on the verge of being knocked out. The bout, therefore, was called a draw, in deference to an ancient custom, though Ike couldn't possibly have lasted more than another round or two.

For the first time in his life Kid McCoy felt affluent. He had several hundred dollars, and had been eating regularly. He wore a well-made suit that he kept pressed.

He could pass among people without suspicion that he was a pugilist. Who would ever imagine that such a mild looking lad could be so vicious a fighter? Women never would guess it, but men who knew men caught something of his soul's hardness at first glance. They knew that Kid McCoy was no one to fool with. You could tell by his eyes and the set of his thin lips.

Being equipped with an adequate amount of brains, Kid McCoy knew that he would have to go through a long apprenticeship to conquer this new and difficult profession he had elected to enter. It was a profession that demanded artistry—physical artistry, but artistry none the less—to succeed. Having entered upon it, the Kid had no other thought than that he would succeed. Given concentration and determination a man can't fail.

In 1893 Bob Fitzsimmons was one of the big pugilistic shots. He had beaten Jack Dempsey, Peter Maher and others. The entire sporting world was talking of his freak build, his awkward skill and terrific hitting power. He was the middle-weight champion of the world, and admittedly the leading contender for the heavy-weight crown. So, McCoy—having cast his eyes about the entire business—determined to go to school to Bob Fitzsimmons.

Fitz was in need of sparring partners. He always was. His punch was a most convenient excuse for much battered mates to move along. So, when Kid McCoy appeared, looking for a job, the champion took him into camp. The Kid didn't look rugged, but he did have speed and a certain amount of skill, and might be valuable.

Now, Bob was a kind-hearted soul. He didn't intentionally hurt his sparring partners, but he failed to understand the extent of his own hitting powers. The Kid took an enormous amount of punishment. His pale face was continually puffed and bleeding. He sported a perpetual black eye. Mrs. Fitzsimmons tearfully protested that Bob was hitting the new boy too hard, but McCoy never complained. He was studying every move of the master. He found out how certain things were done, and why they were done. In the privacy of his rooms he practiced.

Though Fitzsimmons was kindly, he was also thoughtless, and the Kid's life was nothing to brag about. But it was all worth while. McCoy knew that he was improving every day. He was certain that he would continue to improve. Why, some day he might even beat Fitzsimmons. He nursed the thought of becoming a champion. When the training session was over the Kid was a better boxer than ever.

Through '94 McCoy did well. One of his victims was Jack Grace, the globe-trotter, who had fought in practically every country on the globe. Grace was never a top-notch, though an extraordinarily interesting character. He lasted seven rounds, because of the toughness of his hide, and not through matching McCoy's cleverness or punch in any sense of the word.

Most of the Kid's victims are unremembered in this day. They were fellows like Pat Hayden, Joe Burke and Jim Scully, regarded as pretty able men, but not of the timber that is recalled by posterity. One man held him to a draw—Al Roberts, of Cincinnati. That decision rankled in McCoy's heart more than any other. He felt that he had beaten Roberts by a wide margin. It was a different matter from agreeing to a draw, as he had with George Bennett. This was just highway robbery.

I have no record of Al's reactions. He apparently felt that he had a good chance to whip this McCoy fellow, for he willingly signed up for another match. This time the Kid was determined that there should be no slip. If you knock a fellow out they can't rob you of the decision. That was his idea, and he decided that he had to stow Roberts away if he was to be on the winning end.

He worked hard in the gymnasium and on the road, to get in shape. Though even then McCoy was not inclined to conserve his vitality by taking too good care of himself, he was young and able to whip himself into shape on short notice.

Besides that, he had another ace in the hole.

He intended getting himself a first-class second. Many a fight is won or lost by the intelligence or stupidity of handlers. The Kid knew that, but it had never bothered him until now. He didn't intend letting a stone unturned in his effort to

whip Roberts, and he hired the smartest man he could find for the job. This was none other than Shadow Maber.

NABER was an Australian of the school of Young Griffo and Peter Jackson—a marvelously clever boxer, who was recognized as one of the leading welterweights in the world. The Shadow was considerably impressed by McCoy's ability, but felt that his own skill at seconding had contributed a lot to the fact that his boy scored a knockout in five rounds.

After the fight they went down to an all-night barber shop for a shave and massage. They couldn't agree on what Maber was to get for seconding McCoy, the Kid not agreeing with the Shadow's estimate of his own importance. The argument waxed hotter and hotter.

Finally Maber snarled, "Well, if you think you're so hot, I'll fight you for it. We ain't gettin' nowhere gabbin'."

"Suits me," said McCoy coolly, "but don't let's waste it. Everybody knows you, and I'm pretty strong here since I licked Roberts. We can get paid for this."

"Why not?" said the Shadow.

Taking their dispute to the promoter at the People's Club of Cincinnati, they were offered a \$300 purse, and seized upon it immediately. The police, however, were of a different mind, and interfered. They moved down to Memphis, where a more generous matchmaker agreed to give them four hundred.

The battle was scheduled for ten rounds. McCoy, you must remember, had been fighting for only three years. He was a comparatively inexperienced youngster, while Maber was a veteran with an international reputation. On form and past performances, McCoy figured to take a fine lacing.

It was a lightning fast scrap from start to finish. Maber was the cleverest man by far that the Kid had ever faced. Afterward he declared that he learned more in those ten rounds than in all his previous fights put together, and that he used many of the blows in the Australian's repertoire in succeeding battles.

McCoy won that fight because of his youth, stamina and greater hitting power. Through every round he kept charging in, hitting away with both hands. He knew

that he couldn't box with Maber then, and that his only chance was to outpunch the veteran. So, he kept close, hammering away at the body until the Shadow, who hadn't taken the best care of himself, was weak and panting. No welterweight, no matter how hard a puncher he might be, could have knocked Shadow Maber out in ten rounds then, no matter what his condition.

At the finish, though, there was no question as to who was the winner. Even Maber admitted that. He patted McCoy on the shoulder with a wry smile.

"We won't argue about that dough now, Kid," he said. "You win all right. They can't keep you from bein' a champion some day. Wow, what a pastin' you gave me around the body! I won't get over it for a week."

IV

KID MCCOY was called a lot of hard names in his day. They said he was cruel, tricky, merciless; that he was a roue, an insolently self-sufficient wolf of the ring. Few men looked on him as a friend. So surely as he attracted women with his dreamy eyes and deft manner, he repelled men.

He repelled them in spite of the fact that he was a great boxer and a sharp-shooting hitter; that he was game to the core, and had a mind far superior to most men in his profession. They felt that he was dangerous. It would not be well to incur his enmity.

His victory over Shadow Maber gave McCoy more publicity than any of his previous victories. Maber was the first real big shot the Kid had taken on, and McCoy's name began to be heard in cities where he had never appeared.

One of these cities was Boston, where a welterweight named Jack Wilkes had cleaned up in sensational style. It was almost impossible to find anyone in New England who would meet Wilkes, so McCoy was called in. He still rode the rods and the blind-baggage, and talked his way out of fares in the coaches to save money, so that his expenses were very light.

Jack Wilkes was a first-rate fighter, with an excellent record. In Boston he was regarded as a championship possibility,

and McCoy figured that he wasn't a fellow with whom it was wise to take any chances. So he decided that it would be a good idea to trick this Wilkes fellow at the start, and gain a psychological advantage.

He whitened his face, and touched up his lips with a bit of rouge, which gave him an extraordinarily sickly appearance. He walked into the ring with his shoulders drooping, so that he could have posed for the picture of a man ready for his death-bed.

Wilkes looked at him closely.

"Say, is that the guy I'm supposed to fight?" he asked his manager.

"Sure."

"Well, as far as I'm concerned," said Jack, starting to take off his gloves, "the fight is in the alley right now. One punch'll kill that fellow, and I'm not going to take any chance on getting in trouble."

McCoy became afraid that his trick had worked too well. He walked over to Jack's corner, and after a few minutes convinced the Bostonian that he really wasn't as bad off as he seemed. Though still a bit doubtful, Wilkes finally agreed to go through with the match. But there was a feeling in his mind that he oughtn't to hit this kid very hard, or it would be nothing short of murder.

He came out of his corner rather hesitantly. He wasn't ready for the white-faced whirlwind that swept him back to the ropes. A corkscrew left hit him on the chin; his knees buckled under him. He fought back with desperate courage, but he couldn't stem the fury of McCoy's attack. Being strong and game, and not short on boxing ability, Wilkes managed to stall his way through the first round, but early in the second was dropped for the long count.

This was only one of the countless tricks that McCoy thought up to disconcert his opponents. Invariably they were successful.

AFTER he whipped Abe Ullman in Baltimore, the Kid decided that he was ripe for the big towns. He went to New York, looking for matches, but the game was in the doldrums, and no bouts were offered.

Well, a fighter has to fight to eat. But

more than a desire for food was prompting the Hoosier boy. He hankered for fame. He wanted the name of Kid McCoy to be blazoned in the records of the ring.

A brilliant thought occurred to him. He'd go to England. They didn't have such a hot lot of fighters over there, and if he could win the welter and middleweight championships of the British Isles it would be a great selling point when he came back to New York. No sooner said than done. McCoy booked passage, and two weeks later was in Queenstown.

He went to Dublin shortly after landing, and issued a sweeping challenge to any man in Ireland—Pat Scully, then heavyweight champion, preferred. But Scully ignored the challenge completely, and the Kid's funds were running low. It didn't look as though the hunch was so good, after all. Then he hurled a defi at Dan Creedon, who was a really great ringman, but Creedon paid as little attention to McCoy as Scully had. The youngster began to be convinced that there wasn't any use staying in Ireland. Quite apparently, none of the boys were going to give him a chance to show his wares.

So, off he went to London, and the first place he visited was the office of the *Mirror of Life*, a great sporting sheet. The editor wrote of him:

Kid McCoy called at the office yesterday with letters of introduction from our representative in the States. As wide as the poles asunder is McCoy from the typical pugilist, having features of a refined and delicate type, being pronouncedly tall for his weight of ten stone ten. With a representative of the *Mirror of Life* McCoy visited the National Sporting Club to make a match between himself and Ted White, but after waiting from two to four o'clock, and White not having made his appearance, McCoy took his leave. In the evening White turned up at the National, and declined to meet McCoy, thus ending what would have been an interesting match.

McCoy wasn't discouraged. It was hard to discourage him. He felt that if he could coerce White into a match that he would be made, for Ted was the best of the English middleweights. He approached the Briton again, and was told that the champion had no desire to place his title in jeopardy at that time. White added that since there appeared to be considerable public interest in McCoy he would

box ten two-minute rounds provided the Kid guaranteed him against a knockout.

That didn't sound very promising, but he had to agree to get the match. One thing he did specify, and that was the details of the match should be made public. Everyone agreed, but that agreement was not carried out.

It was a tame fight. Under the circumstances, it couldn't have been anything else. Both men were good boxers, but since McCoy was prevented from trying for a knockout, the action was strictly colorless. Tricky as he was, the Kid would have figured out some way to knock out the Englishman save for one thing; he was to forfeit his end of the purse if he stopped White. Being pretty nearly broke by this time, he couldn't take any chances on putting the British champion away.

At any rate, it was a good exhibition, as exhibitions go, and since it was no more than that, McCoy had been assured that there would be no decision. At the end of the bout the referee, Mr. Angell, shouted:

"White wins!"

The Kid turned and stared at him in astonishment. Even though he had pulled all his punches, he had outpointed White by a mile. Thinking that the referee had made a mistake, he said:

"My name's McCoy."

"I know your name, my good fellow," said Mr. Angell in an irritated voice. "White wins!"

Those who said that Kid McCoy was a block of ice, a man without nerves, a fellow whose temper was always under control, didn't really know him. There was a passionate streak of anger in the boy. Now he turned white with rage.

He stood up in his corner, and gave the referee the bawling out of his life. The words rolled out in a gusty torrent, expletives mixed with threats. He called everyone in the club, individually and collectively, highway robbers and second-story men. He offered to fight any man, or any set of men, in the house. He asked White to get back in the ring with him and he'd knock him out in two rounds. His seconds pleaded with him to keep quiet, but McCoy was beside himself with rage. This was his first defeat, and though it was undeserved, it would go down in the

records, and nothing could wipe it out. Finally his seconds pulled him out of the ring, as he went into a peroration that fairly turned the air blue.

That finished McCoy with Great Britain. Not having been given a shot in Ireland, and having been robbed of his only one in London, he decided that he was wasting his time on that side of the water. Some day he'd come back, and get even with this crowd, but it looked like a waste of time right now. After all, the Indiana boy was only twenty-three years old and comparatively unknown. His defeat—as it was recorded—by White, won only a few lines in the New York papers. No one cared particularly; no one except McCoy, who burned and fumed with resentment.

V

KID McCOY was tremendously cast down by the manner in which Mr. Angell had deprived him of a well-merited victory over Ted White. It was the first time he had encountered a situation like this, and it taught him another bitter lesson.

From his boyish viewpoint it seemed that he had been given a setback from which he might never recover. It didn't matter that he had really beaten White. The record books would show quite the reverse.

At a time when he felt most depressed McCoy ran into Jack Grace, the globe girdling fighter whom he had knocked out some time before. Any corner of the world was home to Jack. You could hardly name a country where he hadn't fought. He knew them all; knew who to fight and how much there was in it.

"Don't mind about that bloomin' decision," Jack said. "Everybody knows you can beat that fellow. What are y' goin' to do now?"

"I don't know," the Kid admitted.

Grace laughed.

"I'll tell you," he said. "Take a flier down to South Africa. There ain't no better sports in the world than the British colonials. Man, they'll give you a great reception. Bank on it. They've got a welterweight named Billy Doherty, who they think is the greatest scrapper in the

world. He is pretty good, but you c'n lick 'em. You're a fool if you pass up the chance."

McCoy was a roamer at heart. South Africa sounded like romance and adventure to him. It was the land of diamonds, wealth. Maybe he could clean up there. Who knew? Anyway, he'd go down and take a crack at this Doherty fellow. So, a few weeks after the disappointing White affair, he packed his bags and bought passage for South Africa.

The Kid decided to slip in quietly under an assumed name. True, he wasn't a world-renowned fighting man, but they might have heard of Kid McCoy down there, and if he wasn't known at all the odds would be better. So he signed the passenger list as "Mr. Harris."

There were always a lot of husky fellows going out on these boats, and athletic games—particularly boxing—were arranged to pass the time. They had been out for only a day or two when it was announced that entries were being sought for a boxing tournament. McCoy smiled quietly to himself, and handed his name to the captain.

That officer looked at him disapprovingly.

"I wouldn't go in it if I were you, sir," he said. "They are big men in this tournament, and most of them are excellent boxers. There is Mr. Murgatroyd as an example. He weighs two hundred and fifty pounds and is a tremendous hitter. You, it seems to me, are a bit too slight for these people."

McCoy shrugged his shoulders. "I've doen a bit of boxing, captain, and am willing to take my chance."

"Very well," grunted the skipper. "It is your affair, sir."

Eight men had entered the tournament. Aside from Murgatroyd, there was a big miner named Scott; an Oxford athlete called Threepwood; a thick set Englishman, Wilson; two diamond miners named McInnes and Russell and a gangling, huge fisted Scotchman named MacGregor. The lightest weighed 185 pounds. McCoy was no more than a welterweight, and a good hundred pounds lighter than Murgatroyd, the giant of the field.

The drawing pitted the Kid against Wilson, who was built like a chunk of marble.

The Englishman didn't like that. He protested that it was a shame to make him fight such a skinny little fellow. McCoy smiled palely, and insisted on going through with the match.

It wasn't much of a fight. Wilson, his head down and his arms wide apart, rushed at the American. McCoy feinted with his left, and then shot the right cleanly and smartly to the button. Wilson collapsed like a bundle of old clothes. He was unconscious for five minutes, and there was a lump the size of a hazel nut on his jaw. It was difficult to make him believe that he had been knocked out.

NEXT day the Kid met McInnes, who had won a decision over Scott by his bustling aggressiveness. McInnes went at McCoy in much the same manner as Wilson had. For a few seconds the Kid ran away, poking with his left. The miner was not nearly fast enough to catch him. After two minutes of this cat-and-mouse play McInnes stopped, dropped his hands, and said:

"Ah come on, man and fight."

With that McCoy took a forward step. His left hooked to the chin with the speed of a striking rattlesnake. There was the crack of leather against bone, and the miner lay flat on his back, as starkly unconscious as though he had been struck on the head by a mallet. The Kid looked sadly at him, and then walked slowly to his corner.

The whole ship buzzed with excitement, and McCoy was the sole subject of conversation. Of course, Murgatroyd the giant had knocked out Treepwood and McGregor with ease, but that had been expected. Despite the Kid's amazing victories, no one conceded him a chance with the huge champion. It was ridiculous to assume that this little fellow could have a chance with such an immense opponent. The captain tried to talk "Mr. Harris" into forfeiting the match, but received only a quiet smile for his pains.

It was a great joke to McCoy, but it seemed to the spectators as though there might be a tragedy. They were all present, however, when the slim American and the gigantic Britisher faced each other. In his other bouts McCoy had worn a shirt. Now he stripped to the waist, and a gasp

of admiration for his flat-muscle symmetry rose from all sides.

"No wonder the blighter can hit!" gasped Mr. Wilson, rubbing his jaw tenderly. "Look at those shoulders."

Still, McCoy looked almost tiny beside Murgatroyd. There was a band of fat around the big man's waist, but an enormous amount of muscle spread over his great frame.

The Kid had watched Murgatroyd win his two bouts. In those few minutes of observation he mapped out in his mind the way to whip this chap with the least possible exertion. There was no sense taking chances with a fellow who could hit like that, even though he was a bit muscle-bound. The purser struck a gong to start the round.

The Englishman came out quickly for a man of his bulk. He drew back his right hand and unleashed a ponderous wallop. McCoy went under it, and came up with a smashing left hook to the pit of the stomach. Murgatroyd gasped with agony. His mouth worked like the gills of a dying fish. He couldn't get his breath. McCoy stepped back, and then in again. There was a flash of white arm and brown leather—the crack of the glove against a chin and the giant fell forward on his knees. There he rested on hands and knees, his head wabbling helplessly as he was counted out. And that was the end of the fight.

The passengers made a hero of McCoy, but he modestly deprecated his accomplishments. He had never enjoyed himself more in his life.

Arriving in Johannesburg, McCoy signed for an exhibition bout with an Irishman named Dugan. This, as it happened, was his first introduction to the double-cross. The agreement was that they should merely spar for six rounds without damaging each other.

For three rounds they did exactly that. McCoy had no reason to be suspicious, but he had come to distrust the world. He believed in few people—and where you don't trust you are watchful. Dugan, a reputedly hard hitter, was not a good boxer, and the Kid handled him easily.

Suddenly the Irishman saw an opening. "You're a fine fluke," he snarled a split second before "winding up" for a punch.

The inflection of his voice, the glint in his eyes was warning enough for McCoy. He picked that blow off, and clipped Dugan with a right that spilled the Irishman unconscious on the floor. Tommy was out for an hour. He learned, as others had, that outguessing Kid McCoy was a job only for men with hair-trigger brains.

That knockout created a lot of talk, and the American was matched with Billy Doherty. No one conceded him much of a chance, for Bill was the best fighter they had ever seen in South Africa, and had never come even close to being beaten.

It was a grand fight, for Doherty was good enough to hold his own with the best men in any country.

Before the bout started bookmakers around the ringside were shouting, "Four-to-one on Doherty." An enormously big man entered, and sat down in a ringside seat. McCoy came in, pale and composed as usual. The big man looked at him and his eyes nearly popped out of his head. At that moment the Kid turned around, and caught his eye. He waved a gloved hand. "Good evening, Mr. Murgatroyd," he said.

The big man reached into his pocket and pulled out a roll of bills.

"Five hundred pounds on the American," he called out.

In the ninth round McCoy knocked Doherty to the floor, and Mr. Murgatroyd collected his bets.

VI

THE KID returned to America soon after his victory over Doherty. Whipping Billy so decisively left no one for him to fight in that part of the world. He could have called himself champion of South Africa had he a mind to. Back home once more, he buckled down to work.

He knocked out a couple of men of no particular consequence, and then was matched with Tommy West. West was the most brilliant of the younger middle-weights. A short, thick-set boy with the courage of a lion and a punch in either hand, he had come forward with a rush during his two years in the ring. He had knocked out Texas Bill Smith and Billy Stift, and fought slashing draws with

Shadow Maber and Joe Walcott. The only decision written against him was a close one to the veteran, Scaldy Bill Quinn. Tommy figured to give McCoy a tough battle, indeed.

Instead, quite the reverse was the case. West never had a chance. He carried the fight to the Kid with swirling fists, but couldn't hit the shadowy phantom that glided away from him, and peppered him with a two-handed barrage.

McCoy took the first round by a mile, and had West staggering and bloody before the bell ended it. The finish came a few seconds after the start of the second. Tommy came out too weak to put up much resistance, and the Kid knocked him over with a coldly dispassionate display of workmanship.

Let us go back a step, and pick up an incident in the Kid's life that was tremendously important. It has been muted to this point so that its telling and the denouement might be disclosed at the same time. Before he sailed for England, the Kid decided to follow the experience he had gained with Fitzsimmons by working out with Tommy Ryan, then the cleverest man in the game.

RYAN was a master; one of the greatest boxers that ever lived. I doubt that he ever had a superior in the mechanics of the game—and he could hit, too. In one hundred and twenty-five bouts he stopped no less than sixty opponents, and was fighting the best men of his poundage in the world. No one had to tell this to Kid McCoy. It was because he knew how really great Tommy Ryan was that he had come to learn from him. Bob Fitzsimmons had taught him a lot. Ryan could teach him more.

Tom was not a cruel man. He was intelligent and generally affable, but something about this boy fanned his temper into a bitter rage. He could afford to show his dislike. McCoy couldn't, so long as he wanted to hold the job. And, the Kid wasn't ready to give it up yet. He was learning with every round he boxed. With a real student's eye and brain he dissected this champion and learned what made him great.

He said afterward: "It was a tough grind. They sent me to a cheap hotel

where the board was three-fifty a week. What a terrible dump! All they ever served was hash or ham and eggs, and it got so bad that my stomach turned over every meal-time. In the meantime Tommy was staying at a swell place where he paid thirty dollars a week, and they fed him on juicy steaks and chops and chicken. It used to burn me up to hear him telling what he had for dinner when all I could crowd down my throat was hash."

TWENTY years old, McCoy was then. For more than six of those years he had been beating his way around the country, encountering roughness, brutality, little consideration from anyone. He lived in a world of dog-eat-dog—every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. It wasn't the sort of life to develop his softer emotions. It was bound to build up a protective shell of bitterness and savagery.

The Kid showed a lot of fancy footwork. He had natural speed and had learned how to defend himself. So, though he couldn't hit back hard at the champion—this being the unforgivable sin for a sparring partner—he could, and did, keep himself away from undue punishment.

That angered Ryan.

"Why don't you stand up and take your medicine?" he would shout. "Don't you know that I can hit you whenever I want to, anyway?"

McCoy couldn't answer back. That would have been impertinent, and besides he hadn't collected his salary yet. So, he kept his answer locked behind his teeth, but he persisted in declining to become a chopping block.

"The pay-off, though," said the Kid, "came one day when I was rubbing him down after a workout. He was lying on his back and I was applying alcohol to his muscles, when something I did displeased him. He suddenly reached up and slapped my face. All the blood in my body rushed to my head. I saw red, just as I did that night when the shack booted me off the train. It was only by getting a tight grip on myself that I kept from hitting him right in the middle of his sneering face. I threw the bottle of liniment on the floor, and walked out. The champion didn't call me back. He couldn't

help knowing how I felt, and knew that there would be trouble—and plenty of it—if I stayed."

According to McCoy's recital the party left shortly afterward for New Orleans, where the fight was scheduled to be held. He expected, of course, that his fare would be paid. Instead, Parson Davies handed him a railroad ticket, and informed him that the thirty dollars it cost would be deducted from his salary. That left him fifteen dollars for three weeks' work—fifteen dollars and the hash he had been eating.

The fight was called off because Andy Bowen had died after a bout with Kid Lavigne, so Ryan decided to go to Memphis to give some exhibitions. McCoy said he would accompany the party if he could beat his way, but he was everlastingly darned if he was going to spend the rest of his salary on railroad fare. But Tommy insisted that he travel with the others, and the Kid, boiling with rage and a sense of injustice, went along.

McCoy had done pretty well the year before in Memphis. He was liked there, and the sports who came down to the station gave him a more enthusiastic reception than they did Ryan.

Naturally this irritated the champion.

"You think you're pretty good now, don't you?" he demanded.

"Well, whatever I am I don't think you amount to so much," the Kid retorted, "and you can toss your job down the sewer. I'm done."

With that he walked off.

Good-natured old Parson Davies tried to soothe the Kid's ruffled feelings, and slipped him a fifty-dollar bill. The Parson was a kindly soul, and felt sorry for the harried youngster. Good old Davies. He was one of the finest figures in the boxing game of his time.

I have told of these happenings exactly as McCoy recited them. There are two sides to every story, of course. The Kid could not have been blameless. He doubtless carried a disdainful air about with him, and let Ryan see that he despised him. That must have grated on the older man, for champions are, by the very fact of being champions, somewhat egotistical.

Tommy has always insisted that the Kid made a mountain out of a molehill.

He says that his sparring partner ate at the same table with him at Ed Angelmann's restaurant, and had more steak than hash while working for him.

I don't pretend to judge the merits of this case. The basic point is that the men hated each other from their first meeting; that they grated on each other's nerves; that nothing either did found favor in the other's eyes. It isn't vitally necessary in telling of this story to know whether McCoy was as badly mistreated as he said he was, or if Ryan really acted with consideration. The fact of their intense dislike for each other is quite enough, for the feud eventually developed one of the most famous and dramatic situations in the history of the ring.

VII

THE bad decision in London and the knockout in Johannesburg had neither harmed nor helped McCoy's case in the United States. But when he stopped the very promising Tommy West, though, that was quite a different matter. It brought him into the limelight. The Kid began to figure that, on the basis of this victory, he might talk Tommy Ryan into giving him a chance at the championship.

Ryan had heard about McCoy knocking out West. It annoyed him to know that the boy was doing so well, but his opinion of the other's ability did not rise to any great heights. After all, West was just a kid with less than two years' experience. McCoy hadn't proved himself a championship prospect by cocking a fellow like that.

This was just what the Hoosier wanted Ryan to think. If Tommy thought he had improved too much there wouldn't be much chance of a match. But, if he was a drawing card and nothing much else, that was a different matter. So, the Kid perfected his plans until they were fool-proof. Then he tried them out on his old enemy.

McCoy let his beard grow for a couple of days. He touched up his naturally pallid skin with powder, and drew dark circles under his eyes. He wore his shabbiest suit, with the collar turned up. In short, he looked like a broken-down boy on the verge of tuberculosis. His cough, which

he practiced in his room, had a pathetically hollow note. When he was properly touched up he went to see Tommy Ryan.

Tom's dislike of his fresh ex-sparring partner had not wavered during his absence. He greeted him with a contemptuous grunt.

"You don't look as though you're doin' so good," he said.

"I'm not," agreed the Kid, "but I've got an idea with which we can both make some money."

"What is it?"

"Well, I'll tell you. There's a guy's got a club down at Maspeth who thinks I'm a great fighter. He saw me hang one on Tommy West, and he says I'll have a chance with anybody—even you." McCoy coughed deprecatingly. "Anyway, he's willing to put up a purse, a good one. You can split it any way you like, but I hope you won't make the loser's end too short—"

"We can crack it eighty-twenty," said Tom.

"Well, Tom, you're the champion and have the say. I need money, and even twenty per cent of the gate we'll pull down there'll help me a lot. It's a good break for you, too, for you won't have to do any training for me the way I am now."

"I wouldn't have to do any training for you the best day you ever saw," said Ryan. "All right, we'll go through with this. Get the promoter to come and see me."

"All right, Tom—and thanks."

McCoy went out with the blazing light of exultation in his eyes. Nothing could now stop him from landing on the top of the heap. It was right at the end of his fingers—that crown—just waiting to be picked up. Ryan? A pushover.

RYAN didn't bother with training. He was having far too good a time to waste it in drudgery getting ready for a fellow for whom he held in contempt. The Kid, still pretending to be frightened and overwhelmed at the honor granted him—the honor of having his block knocked off by a top-notch—trained feverishly.

He didn't slight a single element that would bring him to the pink of condition. Had he worked that way for all his fights he would have been practically unbeatable.

But he had a passionate interest in this business. He placed his revenge above winning any championship. A title, especially one as vague as Ryan's was such a weak and futile thing compared with beating Tommy Ryan himself—crushing him, demonstrating beyond all dispute the old champion's inferiority.

When that moment came it would be the biggest of his life, McCoy was sure.

The match attracted a lot of attention. Ryan was a drawing card anywhere as middleweight champion of the world, and McCoy had boosted his stock considerably by that two-round knockout of Tommy West. The Kid trained at the Manhattan Athletic Club, and the members were so impressed that many of them backed him against Ryan. In the meantime Tommy continued to loaf. His contempt for the slim boy who had been his sparring partner was enormous.

To feed that contempt, McCoy wrote occasional letters to the champion in which he begged that the loser's end be made longer, as Ryan was sure to win the fight and he, ~~the~~ Kid, needed money pretty badly.

Ryan was an overwhelming favorite and there wasn't a fan in a thousand, outside of the Manhattan A. C., who conceded Kid McCoy a chance to win. The Kid, though, was brimming with confidence. He thought he could whip Tommy Ryan the best day that gentleman ever walked, and with reports that the champion was doing his roadwork on the veranda that confidence increased.

THEY entered the ring, wearing their bathrobes. They kept them on while the referee gave them their instructions. McCoy was pale as usual. Ryan could only note that the skin was drawn tightly over the cheekbones. It was not until the Kid dropped his robe, and looked at the champion with a sneering smile that Tommy understood what he was up against.

McCoy's muscles fairly bulged with vitality. His stomach was ridged like a washboard. His eyes were bright with health and vitality. No better trained man had ever stepped into the ring. Ryan, on the other hand, was distinctly fat. He had the soft look of an indoor man about him.

"Well, Tommy," said McCoy, "take a

good look at me. I got rid of the cough, didn't I? I haven't been training on hash, either."

For an instant Ryan's self-control was swept away in a wave of anger. "You double-crossin' monkey! Out o' shape, hey, Needed money, hey? You need a wallop on your smart chin, and that's what you're goin' to get. Let's go!"

When the bell sounded, Ryan went out to finish McCoy with the first punch if he could. The Kid knew that was exactly what Ryan intended doing. In the matter of condition, this was the Corbett-Sullivan fight all over again, and the Kid followed the plan of campaign Gentleman Jim had laid down for the New Orleans bout.

THOUGH Ryan was one of the greatest defensive boxers of all time, he also knew all there was to know about carrying the fight to an opponent. None of your aimless rushes and wild swings. Tommy went in, hooking in a short arc, and with deadly viciousness. He was a sharpshooter, but this time he was baffled by a too swiftly moving target. McCoy didn't fight back. He paid no attention to the spectators who shouted that he was making a foot-race of the bout. He knew what was the right thing to do, and intended doing it. At the end of the round Tom hadn't landed more than a couple of glancing blows, and the Kid hadn't done even that much. The difference was that the challenger went back to his corner not even breathing hard, while the champion puffed like a freight engine on a hard grade.

After ten rounds had passed Tommy Ryan was in deplorable shape. The crowd knew he was done. McCoy had known it for a long time. Even the champion himself must have understood how impossible his case was, even though his brave heart refused to admit it.

The Kid could have knocked Ryan out any time after the tenth, had he chosen to do so. But he had a debt to pay. To his way of thinking, it wasn't enough that this man should be stripped of the possession he prized most highly in the world. He must take some of the punishment he had been so anxious to dole out in the gymnasium to a white-faced kid. So McCoy kept pumping blows—cutting, but not

finishing blows—at the battered face and sore body before him.

The fifteenth round was the end. Even McCoy's bitterness was satisfied. There was no need of stringing out the tragedy any further. Tommy shuffled out in a dazed and heavy way to meet his fate. His seconds had been unable to stop the flow of crimson from his nose and mouth. His arms were held low. He was too tired to lift them higher. No more pitiful target ever faced the *coup de grace*.

McCoy walked up to him. The little smile that edged his thin lips had faded. Those lips were drawn in a tight line. His eyes were dark slits in the white expanse of his face. The big moment had come. He was ready for it.

He didn't need to feint. He stood flat-footed before the drooping Ryan, and hooked a terrific left to the pit of the stomach. The champion doubled forward with an agonized grunt, and the Kid whipped a right to the jaw. Behind that punch was his resentment at the world, at the shack on the Butte freight, at the double-crossing and meannesses of life, at Tommy Ryan.

The unofficial champion of the world went down—and out. Even earlier in the fight that punch would have finished him. With his strength cruelly and systematically drained through the earlier rounds, there wasn't a chance in the world for Tommy Ryan to get to his feet.

Kid McCoy had replaced him as king-pin of his class.

VIII

McCoy kept busy in 1897, the year following his victory over Tommy Ryan.

He boxed a dozen times, and included among his victims were Dick O'Brien, who had held him to a twenty-five round draw a couple of years before, Jack Bonner, Jim Hill, George La Blanche, Texas Billy Smith and Dan Creedon.

There followed a string of knockouts over mediocrities. Doc Payne, Harry Long, Nick Burley, Jim Blackwell, John Tierney, Jim Bates, Bert Bolby, Dan Molson and Tom Shea in from one to three rounds. They hadn't any chance with the

Kid and didn't expect to win when they entered the ring. They were nothing but warm-ups, anyway.

Then McCoy signed to box Gus Ruhlin, and immediately a different problem presented itself. Ruhlin was six feet two inches tall, a superb physical specimen. He had beaten Yank Kenny, and fought a twenty-round draw with Jim Jeffries. He had brawn and power, and a not inconsiderable amount of boxing skill.

It was a good, fast fight—but not a particularly thrilling one for a twenty-round-er.

It wasn't thrilling because Ruhlin failed to match the Kid's speed. His giant swings couldn't find the elusive target, and he was completely outgeneralled from start to finish.

When McCoy topped that victory off with one over Joe Goddard, the old Barrier champion, fans began to realize that here was a man well worthy of mingling with the best of heavyweight society. True, Goddard fouled out in the fifth round, but up to that time had been the recipient of a thrashing, and couldn't have gone much further in any event. McCoy was so far and away the better man that there was no question of his victory, even though it had the taint of a foul by the other man.

McCoy began to point toward a match with Tom Sharkey. Tom was a pugilistic sensation. It was conceded that anyone who could beat him was the logical challenger for the title. A knockout over Sharkey was equivalent to stepping into the ring with Bob Fitzsimmons.

SHARKEY and McCoy were almost matched on a number of occasions, but something or other always intervened. The burly sailor had beaten Corbett, Ruhlin and a number of others with the terrific power of his attack, but the wily McCoy had been doing just as well for himself.

There began to be a general demand for a bout between these two.

Sharkey was a mass of impenetrable bone and tireless muscle. He was strong as a horse and apparently nothing could hurt him.

He was fast as a cat on his feet, and had a habit of punching with one hand

after the other so fast that it was hard to avoid his blows. Physically he was a marvel—almost a freak.

Finally they were matched to meet at the Lenox A. C. on January 10, 1899. Of the two men, Tom seemed to take the fight more seriously. He trained hard, working himself into superb condition. McCoy, though he didn't underestimate his powerful foe, looked on the bout with the same disdain that he did all his others. He was quite confident that no one could whip him.

The first round was so one-sided that it was a joke. McCoy was the cat and Sharkey the broken-legged mouse. Tom rushed, feinting clumsily. The Kid danced around him, barely out of reach, spearing him with that long left jab. Tap, tap, tap. The blows kept Sharkey off balance, made him miss continually. Infuriated, the sailor floundered after McCoy, looking incredibly clumsy. Several times they clinched, but each time the Kid tied up his stronger opponent.

Sharkey began to rage. McCoy taunted him in his smooth voice.

"Who told you you were a fighter?" he asked. "You look more like a wash-woman . . . How did you ever beat anyone . . . Here, how do you like this?"

And, tap, tap, tap, the left would keep smearing across Tom's nose and in his eyes.

It wasn't a contest so far. Sharkey was outclassed. He was made a fool of. Everything he did was wrong. Everything McCoy attempted was right. It was a match between a novice and a master.

The second round was not greatly unlike the first. Sharkey kept lunging in, swinging fast and furious. Once he landed a resounding whack on the Kid's ribs, but McCoy didn't stop grinning. Most of the time Tom missed and kept on missing, while the slim youngster raked him fore and aft at will with a barrage of blows. Once Sharkey caught him and tried a little catch-as-catch-can wrestling, but McCoy slipped out of his reach without any damage.

"Well," said the Kid to himself, "that's that. There's no use stalling around any more. In the next round I'll go out and fight this big fish—finish him off as soon as I can."

HE came out for the third in quite a different manner. Instead of flitting here and there he stood flat-footed, the right hand cocked. Sharkey looked at him in a puzzled way. What new trick was this? There was something behind it. But, anyway, it was better to throw punches at a standing target than one that flew out of your way like a blasted will o' the wisp.

Tom rushed. The Kid stabbed a hard jab in his face and slipped away. Three times more that operation was repeated. Sharkey's face was twisted in a scowl. Despairing of catching the nimble-footed Kid, he stopped in the middle of the ring, and waved for McCoy to come to him. That was an invitation the latter did not need. He circled around the stolid sailor like a chicken-hawk. Sharkey watched him grimly.

Suddenly McCoy stepped in. His left fist went out like a projectile, twisted a little and landed smack on Tom's chin. The "corkscrew" had gone into action.

Up went Sharkey's heels in the air, and over he flopped on the flat of his back.

McCoy stepped back a pace, the cold smile still on his lips.

The sailor pulled himself to a sitting position, shook his head a couple of times to clear it, and jumped up. He was dazed and flustered. He waved his arms aimlessly, and not knowing what else to do, rushed.

The Kid, sneering, jabbed to get the distance, and punched him on the jaw again—this time with the right. Up went Sharkey's heels. Down he went again. Hard. Imagine that. He, the toughest of the heavyweights, who took Jeffries' thunderous punches for twenty-five rounds. He was on the floor, knocked down by a middleweight!

Still, he wasn't built to stay on the floor. He came up groggy and ripe for the knockout.

Then—*bong!* The bell stopped them.

McCoy has always insisted that the round was cut short to save Sharkey from a knockout. It may be so. I can't swear to it one way or the other, but newspaper reports of the fight next day gave color to the belief that McCoy hadn't been given any the better of it.

No man ever had greater resistive powers than Tom Sharkey. In his minute's

rest he threw off the effects of those blows. The dash of water over his head and face freshened him up. At the start of the fourth round he was as fresh as he had been at the beginning of the fight.

He was furious, mad with rage. He became a whirlwind of blows. Despite the fact that he had been made to look so clumsy by McCoy's great speed and marvelous skill, Tom was a fast man on his feet, and dangerous with either fist. The Kid knew that. He knew that Sharkey could hurt him if he landed. Why take chances? He could win as he pleased, and there was no sense in taking unnecessary risks.

So, for the next four rounds Sharkey rushed and rushed again. McCoy slipped away from him like a globule of quicksilver that you try to hold in your hand. When Tom tired and sought to rest for a minute, McCoy teased him as a matador does a bull. The tough sailor was getting weary, for all his fine condition. The Kid was tiring a bit, too, because he hadn't taken the same care in training that his rival had.

When the bell started the eighth round, McCoy had won all the preceding seven. The only way he could lose was by a knockout, and the chances against that were a hundred-to-one. McCoy strolled out, and waved his hands in Sharkey's face as though he were giving him a shampoo. Tom gritted his teeth, and made a wild swing. He missed, of course. The Kid laughed and let Sharkey clinch.

"Are you tired?" grated Sharkey, as they separated.

"Not half as tired as you," he answered, flicking his left into the sailor's face.

At that instant Tom smashed an uppercut into McCoy's groin. It was a frightful blow, and palpably foul. The Kid went down as though he had been shot through the body. He suffered the most excruciating agony. The pain robbed him of his strength. He had been fouled, but that didn't matter—the referee was counting over him. Through the nightmare he heard the beat of the numerals.

WHAT did the counting matter? What did anything matter? All that the Kid could be conscious of was the pain that tore him to shreds. His face was

twisted into a grotesque mask. His body writhed and twisted on the floor.

But there was no quit in him. He was all courage. Despite the crippling blow he managed to pull himself erect, to guard himself against the Sharkey rush; even to hit the sailor with a right hand that had been robbed of its power. Then the bell came to his rescue.

The Kid staggered to his corner. He was all in, almost helpless. He sank on his stool, gasping for breath. His slim, sensitive body couldn't react from pain as quickly as Sharkey's did. He had been hurt, and the hurt lasted.

Through the ninth round McCoy weathered the storm only by as superb a display of defensive boxing as was ever seen in the ring. His speed had gone. The snap was out of his arms. Sharkey chased him from corner to corner, hurling frightful blows at him. But the Kid blocked and rode with them like a master. In his weakened condition the pace was too fast. He was losing his remaining strength by the second.

Sharkey wanted to get at the Kid's stomach. He hunched his shoulders and waded in. One crack down there would finish the slim young man completely. McCoy knew it, and covered that soft spot, and he slipped and slithered out of the way of the typhoon. But Tom couldn't be brushed away with a jab or a weak hook now. The McCoy punches were like feathers. They didn't even disturb the sailor. But, try as he would, he failed to get by the guard that was bracketed across McCoy's stomach.

In the tenth round Sharkey suddenly shifted his attack. He shot a vicious left to the chin. It landed, and McCoy went face down on the floor. There was a roar like Niagara in his ears. He was so dizzy that he lost all sense of direction. The floor of the ring rolled under him like a tempest of waves. Everything was dark. He didn't know in which direction to face when he regained his feet—if he ever did. This was the end. Even the shattered Kid knew that. Nothing short of a miracle could save him now.

The blackness shredded into gray. The roaring tuned down to a mere drone in his ears. He hadn't heard the count, and had no idea of what it was, but suddenly

he was on his feet again, and saw the squat bulk of Sharkey leaping toward him.

Instinctively he tried to cover, but you can't cover yourself from something that you see only vaguely through a mist. He tried to cover his jaw with his tired arms, but it was like lifting heavy iron bars. He couldn't get them up fast enough, and Tom nailed him on the chin with another tremendous wallop.

This time the lights went out altogether. He fell like a sack of wheat, heavily, inertly.

It was the sheerest formality for the referee to count over him at all.

Kid McCoy had suffered the first knockout of his career, and suffered it unjustly. As a plain matter of fact he should have been the winner on a foul. But the record book is unemotional, and shows only what happened—not what should have happened.

IX

THE most talked about fight of Kid McCoy's life was one with Jim Corbett. Unfortunately, it has always been under suspicion, despite denials on the part of both men, that any dishonesty was practiced. The belief that it wasn't on the level ruined boxing in New York for years. It alienated such men as Big Tim Sullivan, the political boss of New York, and George Considine from both Corbett and McCoy. In short, that bout—whether it was honestly fought as the contestants claim, or dishonestly, as others assert—was the most harmful event that happened in boxing in many years.

Perhaps it is unfair to such a man as Corbett, whose career otherwise was without a blemish, to intimate that he would take part in any bout that was not entirely honest. McCoy, a picaroon of fortune, an adventurer who had fought on three continents, might have been looked on with a more oblique eye. Still, he had pride in his ability and reputation; a high regard for the fame he had built with his fists.

McCoy never had much use for Corbett, though he didn't hate him as he did Tommy Ryan. The Kid felt that the man who had beaten John L. Sullivan was a poseur. He said as much, and his criticism came

to Corbett's ears. That started a sort of feud.

Both men were expert boxers, masters at their trade. There may have been a question of professional jealousy involved, too.

Great as they were, they had their own distinct styles. McCoy scouted the idea that Corbett was a better boxer than he, and Jim resented the impression that the lighter man could hit harder.

After Corbett lost his championship to Fitzsimmons, a bout between him and McCoy would have been ideal. Neither man was averse to such a meeting, but various details intervened. There is always difficulty in pitting outstanding figures against each other, and the reasons are usually financial rather than that one man fears the other.

There was a lot of argument before a formal match was arranged between McCoy and Corbett. Jim was never a great hand at rough-and-tumble fights. He always kept out of them as much as possible, not that he was afraid but because he felt that he lowered himself by getting into them. It is a matter of history how he evaded Charley Mitchell's attempt to force him into a scrap in a theatre lobby, and how he knocked the Englishman out in three rounds of a regular ring-battle at Jacksonville later.

The Kid and Jim struck at each other in the newspapers and at long range for a long while. Each expressed his opinion of the other pretty freely, but the orbits of their existence kept them from meeting personally.

Then, quite by accident, they ran across each other in the Gilsey House. Both men had sharp tongues, and were excellent at repartee. Corbett was the bigger by twenty pounds or more, but size never bothered McCoy when it came to a mill. For a while they ripped each other to pieces verbally. Then the real trouble started.

One of Corbett's retorts got under the Kid's skin. Though he didn't usually lose his head, he did this time. He punched James J. Corbett in the mouth—and the battle started. It was a riot! For action, if not cleverness, it exceeded their later meeting in Madison Square Garden. There isn't much room for boxing skill in a fight of this sort. They just slugged—

and McCoy was the harder and better hitter in that instance.

For ten minutes they wrestled and punched their way around the room to the intense excitement and joy of the spectators. Then the Kid floored the former heavyweight champion of the world—knocked him stiff just as the police arrived.

THE fight between McCoy and James J. Corbett was one of the most discussed of the day, and is still a matter of controversy between old-timers. It ruined the friendship between Jim and Big Tim Sullivan, then the dominant power in New York politics, and caused unpleasant talk among everyone interested in the game.

Corbett had failed in his effort to win back the heavyweight championship of the world. After out-boxing James J. Jeffries through their entire match, he was knocked out in the twenty-third round of a sensational battle. Jim's name was on every lip. He became the most prominent man on Broadway, and more popular than he had ever been when he held the title.

When it was proposed that Corbett box McCoy twenty-five rounds at Madison Square Garden an enormous amount of interest was aroused. These two were unquestionably the cleverest big men in the game. Jim had an advantage in weight, but the Kid was nine years the younger man, and that was an element not to be overlooked. Besides, the bitter feeling between the men, that had culminated in their rough-and-tumble, promised to make the fight a savage one.

A few days before the bout a rumor that McCoy was going to lay down became common chatter on Broadway. Everyone was talking about it. Even the sportsmen on the Pacific Coast heard of the supposed "frame," and Harry Corbett, Jim's brother, wired to find out what it was all about. The ex-champion declared that so far as he knew there was nothing to it. He declared McCoy could gain more by beating him than by working hand-in-glove with crooked gamblers, which was unquestionably true.

The betting clique then pulled a fast one. Some of the heaviest bettors in New York were tipped off that the talk of McCoy quitting was merely a blind; that Cor-

bett was really to lay down, and the wise ones would sink the works on the Kid. Big Tim Sullivan was one of these, and he bet thousands of dollars on the Hoosier veteran. When it became known on which man he was placing his money a flood of commissions appeared following his lead, for Sullivan was one of the "smart" crowd. He was supposed to be "in the know."

The night of the battle arrived in due time, and with it a vast crowd at the Garden. Everyone was wildly excited, and no one knew exactly what to expect. There was plenty of betting, with both sides believing that one man or the other was going to quit—and that they had a cinch in winning their bets. The general public expected plenty of action.

Corbett always declared that the bout was honestly fought on both sides. McCoy also insisted that no business had been done, but the story that the fight was a fake has persisted to this day. Rumors have a way of outlasting denials.

THE first round was probably the most brilliant exhibition of boxing ever seen in any ring. Such feinting, footwork and speed has never been matched before or since. Each man was trying to feint the other into leading—which is one of the finest points in boxing—and, being masters of the craft, neither could be drawn into leading. McCoy was superb, and Corbett was wonderful—but that round, more than any other, convinced the bulk of the fans that the fight was really being faked.

Neither man landed a single blow, and when McCoy and Corbett went to their corners a buzz of discussion arose. Men began asking each other what it was all about. Big Tim Sullivan, huge and impressive, sat in his box smiling and nodding to friends. He had a fortune on McCoy, and everyone knew it. His confidence made those who had bet on the smaller man feel certain that things would go their way.

The second round went much the same as the first, though Corbett did land one rattling right-hander that shook the wily Kid. Dazed a bit by it—for contrary to general opinion, Corbett was a hard puncher—McCoy slipped out of trouble and gave another grand exhibition of foot-

work, running and jabbing, and keeping out of harm's way. Outside of that one blow not a single damaging wallop was landed.

The crowd became restless. Scattered hoots burbled through the smoke-filled atmosphere. Were they to have twenty-five rounds of this stuff? Scientific boxing is all right in its way, but the fans wanted some slugging, some knockdowns and a bit o' blood for their money.

By the end of the third round there wasn't anything to choose between the rivals.

No damage had been done. Both were fresh and vigorous and apparently confident. They were certain of their skill. There was, however, this point to be considered. Several times Corbett had forced McCoy to lead. When two clever men are pitted against each other, the one who draws the other out is inevitably the winner. The fact that Jim was doing this wasn't noticed by the average ringsider. It was too technical for any but experts.

There wasn't enough action to enthuse the crowd—or, at least, action of the sort it wanted to see. Though they were seeing one of the really great boxing matches of all time, that was na compensation. They wanted a *fight*.

CORBETT forced McCoy to do the leading in the fourth round. The Kid had intended making Jim do that himself, but hadn't the Californian's patience. The impatience of the crowd had nothing to do with it. McCoy remembered how he had flattened his enemy in the Gilsey House brawl. He burned with impatience to repeat the feat, and laid himself open to trouble.

The first real action of the bout came in the fifth—and unfortunately it was the sort of thing that convinced an already suspicious audience that the thing was a frame-up.

McCoy, the cold, imperturbable master of ring craft, rushed from his corner at the start of the round, and fought like a madman. He threw haymakers with both fists, reckless of how he exposed himself to Corbett's accurate counters. That looked bad enough in the first place. The Kid had the reputation of being a nerveless soul, whose equanimity could be shat-

tered by nothing in this world. To see him go suddenly beserk was more than faintly suspicious.

What most people didn't know was that, under his calm and polished exterior, Kid McCoy possessed a streak of passionate anger that made him see red. That fury made lots of trouble for him in later life. It ruined him as a matter of plain fact. Now, whether true or assumed, his temper flung him on the horns of defeat.

Corbett claims that he made McCoy lose his morale. The Kid never offered an alibi, though he said that he was honestly beaten. As he rushed in, Corbett centered his attack on the stomach. McCoy's training had been more or less perfunctory, and he wasn't in shape to stand that kind of drilling from a big fellow who could hit. Apparently he couldn't stop that barrage of lefts and rights to the pit of the stomach.

Suddenly he crumpled, and fell to his knees, hunched forward as though to ease the pain along his belt line. His pale face was as expressionless as ever. His eyes were narrowed, and the corners of his mouth drooped.

Corbett stepped back into a neutral corner, watching his foe groveling on the floor.

He bent forward a bit at the waist, nervously eager to go in and finish his rival the instant he came to his feet.

But Referee Charley White—"Old Eagle Eye," they called him—didn't count over McCoy. He walked over to Corbett, tapped him on the shoulder, and said, "You win."

A roar of disappointment rose from the audience. To their way of thinking the fight hadn't been much from the start, and that White should end it so abruptly without letting McCoy at least get up once, annoyed them. Everyone began talking "fake."

The newspapers came out as flat-footedly as they dared.

The referee told the reporters that McCoy was too weak to continue; that it would have been murder to let the thing go on. The fighters themselves vociferously declared nothing was wrong, but rumor has a fleet pair of legs, and with a head start, catching up is almost impossible.

X

McCOY was greatly disturbed over the furor caused by his fight with Corbett. Even to so self-possessed a man as he, the continued implications in the newspapers, and by everyone he met and heard, was unpleasant, indeed. That sort of thing would upset a man of ice. So he decided to go to Europe.

This visit was different than his first one when he was robbed of the decision over Ted White in their never-to-be-forgotten match. This time he had lots of money. In spite of all the rumors and gossip extant, he was admittedly a great fighting man.

McCoy could have been booked for more fights and theatrical engagements than it would have been possible to handle, but after a sparring tour of the provinces with Charley Mitchell—and a financially lucrative trip it was, too—he decided to return home. He was hungry for his own country, and he wanted to patch up matters with Julia Crosselman, who had divorced him after the Corbett bout. In short, he simply couldn't stay away any longer.

The Kid brought back an expensive dog and a large money present for the ex-Mrs. McCoy. They became reconciled, and after a period of enjoying the Broadway lobster palaces, went to Jersey and were married again. This brightened up the scene for the Kid.

In addition, Martin Julian, Bob Fitzsimmons' brother-in-law and former manager, signed McCoy to a contract. Julian, believed the odium of the Corbett battle had been at least partially forgotten, and that they could make a lot of money together.

The Kid's first start under Julian's management was against Fred Russell in Philadelphia. Russell was a six-foot-three-inch mastodon, with an enormous reach and a deadly wallop. McCoy was no longer a youngster. He had passed the thirty-year mark, and because of the pace at which he lived, was really much older than that in a physical sense. The fresh, youthful look had passed from his face. Crow's-feet picked their way around his eyes. He was an old man as fighters go, even though he hadn't suffered a great deal of punishment during his lengthy career.

Russell, though, wasn't the kind of fighter to give him trouble. Big and clumsy, he never saw the day he could have hit the Kid with a handful of sand. McCoy didn't have his old-time speed, but he had enough to keep out of Fred's way, and bluff him with the right hand, when he tired under the pace. As a matter of fact, the Kid won that bout by so wide a margin that some of the experts began to wonder if the old fellow had come back again. He looked good. There was no getting away from that.

IT is hard for any fighter—particularly one who has been as successful as Kid McCoy—to realize that he is on the down grade. I guess the idea began to dribble into the veteran's brain bit by bit. He didn't want to admit it, but he had to. Not that he was through. He wasn't, really. McCoy was still able to beat a big majority of the men of any weight, but that wasn't enough. He had been at or around the top too long to be satisfied with a subordinate role. But there is nothing a man can do about a thing like that.

In 1903 he fought only twice. He out-pointed Jack McCormick in another no-decision match in Philadelphia, and then was pitted against Jack Root for ten rounds in Detroit. Root was no youngster at that time. He was nearly twenty-eight and had been boxing for more than seven years. During all that time he had never been beaten, and had whipped, among others, such fine ringmen as Alex Greigains, Frank Craig, Kid Carter, Tommy West, Billy Sift, Australian Jimmy Ryan and Dick O'Brien. The only time he had been held even was in a six-rounder with Tommy Ryan. This Root was a formidable fighter, and a much better one than he has been given credit for by his successors.

Of course, McCoy, in his thirteen years of milling, had lost only to White, Sharkey, McCormick and Corbett. The first two were questionable, and McCormick's a palpable accident. It may be that you have your own opinion of the Corbett go. So, with the breaks or a little less conniving, McCoy might have gone through this long stretch without having been beaten at all.

Most of the fellows McCoy had been

FIGHT STORIES

fighting for the past couple of years possessed either bulk or a wallop, but were not noted for speed. Root was just the reverse. He was like a ballet-dancer on his feet and was a sound, if somewhat to conventional, boxer. Though he didn't have the instinctive genius for the game that characterized McCoy, Jack was a first-rate man, and had taken good care of himself. That was the answer. His physical condition was unimpaired. The Kid had tossed his stamina to the winds.

No fight ever told that age-old story with more dramatic completeness. For a couple of rounds McCoy held his own with Root, flaring out with occasional bursts of brilliance that made Jack look like a lumber-footed novice. This was the real McCoy, the champion. But, his body couldn't maintain the pace his mind and heart demanded. He slowed down. Exhaustion touched his arms and knees. Root began to get to him.

McCoy didn't quit, and wasn't out-classed, but he was quite thoroughly and convincingly whipped. There wasn't any argument about it, even in McCoy's argumentative mind. He knew he was whipped, and he went over to Root and shook his hand in hearty congratulation.

"I think this was my last fight," he said. "Nobody can keep going forever."

The Kid believed it at the time and, as a matter of fact, did not appear in the ring again for a year. Getting some financial backing, he opened a jewelry store on Broadway with a stock worth more than a hundred thousand dollars. It seemed like a safe bet that the sporting fraternity would buy their diamonds of a man they had applauded so much. They didn't at least not as consistently as they had been expected to at any rate, and the store didn't fare so well. In his spare time McCoy exercised and boxed a little in a nearby gymnasium, so when the business petered out and he was offered a bout with Jan Plaacke he was in a mood to listen. He needed money, and apparently it was to be had only in the ring.

XI

JAN PLAACKE was the biggest fighter who had ever stepped into the ring. The only one since Plaacke's time who ap-

proached him in bulk was Primo Carnera. Plaacke was even bigger than Carnera, tilting the old dial on the scales at almost three hundred pounds.

He came from Holland, this placid giant, with none of the fighting spirit that animated McCoy into passionate attack. He had a round, almost baby face, but his overwhelming bulk and the fact that he had beaten everyone who faced him in Europe, attracted the attention of the promoters and public in this country.

The big, baby-faced Plaacke had been talking about what he was going to do to the little man. That annoyed McCoy. It might be a good idea to cut this fellow up a little to teach him a lesson. First, though, he'd find out just what fighting sense the Dutchman had.

The spectators laughed a little, though some were a bit apprehensive, when the men faced each other in the center of the ring. The veteran looked so tiny compared with his rival that it seemed a most one-sided match. Those who had seen the Kid in action were not fooled, though. He had trimmed other big men. Maybe he'd get by this giant from Holland.

The bell rang.

McCoy danced out from his corner in the crouch that made him more than a foot shorter than Plaacke. The giant, standing upright in the traditional manner, with his left arm prodded stiffly before him, looked at the Kid in a rather puzzled manner. He didn't quite know how to hit this little chap.

"Hey," said McCoy suddenly, pointing to the floor, "look there. Your shoe lace is untied. You might trip."

Plaacke, caught off guard, looked down. The corkscrew left ripped toward his chin. It landed on the mark. The giant swayed under the impact like an oak tree struck by lightning. He was dazed. A film was before his eyes. For a moment he didn't know what had hit him. Certainly it could not have been this little American.

Before he could pull himself together McCoy was on him like a cat. He hit out right and left, throwing all his power into the punches. There was no guard to block them. The giant lumbered pitifully into them. He couldn't get his hands up. He couldn't stop the stream of rapier-like blows that scarred and tore him.

Plaacke's pink skin was cut in a dozen places. One eye began to close. His nose dripped blood. He reeled about the ring, trying to fend McCoy off. Occasionally he would throw a wild and desperate blow that would have knocked down a steer—had it landed. But the cold-eyed, speedy American was in and out like lightning. None of Plaacke's punches came even close to landing. McCoy battered away until the end of the round, and Herr Plaacke groped his way to his corner like an abused, pink-faced giant baby.

His seconds worked over him desperately. This was the man they had expected to win the heavyweight championship of the world; to crush the best of the American heavyweights under his tremendous bulk. And here he was, hopelessly cut to pieces in the very first round he had fought in the land of dollars—beaten by a man who weighed one hundred and twenty pounds less than he did.

When the bell sent them out for the second round Herr Plaacke stumbled toward his opponent. He was still so dazed that he didn't know where he was. In short, he was just a helpless target for the most accomplished and merciless sharpshooter in the game.

McCoy didn't have any pity on him. Up from the time he was a kid no one had pitied Norman Shelby. Why should he give the big Dutchman a break? So he walked in flat-footed, and cut him into ribbons. The ring was a shambles, and Plaacke, game, but out on his feet, was still enduring the beating when the referee stopped it.

Plaacke had come over with a fanfare of publicity. He had bet most of his money on this fight; in addition to being ruined as a fighting man, he was broke. Next day he went back to Holland—and he went back on a cattle boat. His spirit had fled with his money and ambition. He would have been given another chance against a less accomplished artist than Kid McCoy, but his spirit was spoiled. He never fought again.

THAT victory was an enormous satisfaction to McCoy. It put him back in the limelight again. His defeat at the hands of Jack Root was forgotten. Once more he was on the big time. The custom-

ers wanted to see him. When the customers are in that frame of mind the attraction can collect, and the Kid, as usual, needed money. It never stuck to his fingers very long.

The victory over Plaacke forced a match between McCoy and Philadelphia Jack O'Brien at the Second Regiment Armory during the following month. O'Brien, one of the cleverest big men that ever stepped into the ring, was a hot favorite in his home town.

The seats were scaled at from one to seven dollars, which were high prices for a third of a century ago. Since the speculators were a perpetual nuisance even then, and had possessed themselves of blocks of the best seats, the sportsmen had to pay several times that amount for seats. At the last minute the management crowded one hundred and fifty chairs into the aisles about the ring, and charged ten dollars for them. They were filled a few minutes after being put in place.

Both men arrived in Philadelphia from their training camps early in the day, and kept to their hotel rooms until it was time to weigh in at three o'clock. Both were a bit under 158 pounds.

Bert Crowhurst, sports editor of the *Bulletin*, was announced as the referee. McCoy objected. He wanted a New York man. O'Brien wouldn't have anyone but a Philadelphian, and the Kid finally capitulated. He knew that Crowhurst was on the level, and it didn't matter much to him who was the third man in the ring. Still, it was always a good idea to put the other side on the defensive.

McCoy took it easy in the first round. He didn't have a Plaacke opposed to him, but a smart, capable boxer, though not a hard hitter. O'Brien, knowing that the Kid could punch, took no chances, so the action was approximately as tame as in the Corbett fight.

At the start of the second it was evident that Jack had been urged by his seconds to go out and make a battle of it. He started with a fast left. The veteran went under it, and came up with the famous corkscrew. It caught O'Brien on the jaw, and swept his legs out from under him. As he went down the packed Armory broke into a howl of excitement. But the younger man had a world of vitality. The

punch shook but did not hurt him. He disdained to take a count, bounced to his feet and tore after McCoy. He fought more wildly than is usual for a clever man, and the Kid took advantage of it by making him miss, and battering away at the stomach.

Jack was still wild in the third—wild on the attack, that is—but protected himself well. McCoy decided to get his goat if possible. When they went into a clinch he would smack the palm of his hand against O'Brien's nose, or heel him under the chin. Referee Crowhurst warned him, and the Kid finally desisted.

O'Brien got in a slashing right-hander to the heart, and another to the stomach. McCoy winced. His training had been more or less casual. Blows like that took something out of him. He bluffed his rival with a stinging right, but Jack came in close and hammered the body again. By this time the veteran was tired. He couldn't block those wallops as he usually did. O'Brien's youth was beginning to count.

THE fourth round was full of action, and there wasn't much to spare between the men. Jack did most of the leading. He carried the fight to his rival two-thirds of the time, but, though McCoy was apparently hanging back, waiting for a chance to land a decisive punch, he did counter enough to get an even break. Twice O'Brien landed jarring right-handers to the jaw, but McCoy came bustling back with left hooks that evened things. At the bell they were mixing at top speed. The Kid had forgotten his weariness and his intention to take things easy. This was a fight—in this round, anyway.

It was the last real savagery of the evening, much to the disappointment of the fans. Both men were pretty tired by this time. Instead of going at each other with the viciousness that characterized the previous round, they stalled, trying to get back their energy. Whatever fighting was done, though, was to McCoy's credit. He landed one sharp uppercut that set Philadelphia Jack on his heels; a right-hander full in the face, and another right to the mouth that brought a blotch of crimson to the younger man's lips. Then there was a lull, and the crowd, in the manner of all

fight crowds, began to hoot and jeer. It didn't stir the men out of their passiveness. The Kid was too old in the game to pay any attention to either cheers or hoots. Neither meant much to him.

The final round was faster. Both made spirited rallies, without doing any great damage. Two greater defensive fighters than O'Brien and McCoy couldn't have been found, and when a pair of that type goes into the ring the customers can't look for too much action.

UNDER the Pennsylvania laws no decision could be given. There was a difference of opinion among the spectators and newspapermen. Most of them felt that a draw would be about right. Others insisted that the fact of O'Brien's greater willingness to lead should give him the verdict, but the McCoy adherents pointed to the second round knockdown, and the fact that the Kid had shown the better hitting power all through.

Though neither man was given any vast credit for his showing, McCoy was satisfied. He had brought himself back into good enough shape to step along with the best young middleweight of the period—and one of the best of all time.

His next fight, and the last one of the year, was with Jack Twin Sullivan, the bald-headed star from Boston. It was scheduled for twenty rounds, and twenty rounds is a long distance for a man of McCoy's age, particularly for one who hadn't taken any better care of himself than the Kid had. But he needed money, and financial pressure will drive men into lots of things they don't hanker for.

Sullivan was a smart ringman and an inveterate gambler. He might have become champion of the world, instead of Tommy Burns, except for staying in a stud poker game in Nome and missing his boat back to the States. In 1904 he was a veteran, having been in action for seven years—strong, intelligent, able.

McCoy had realized that if he didn't take more care of himself he would go to pieces. His fight with Root had taught him that needed lesson. Getting into reasonably good shape, he had done well enough with Plaacke and O'Brien. Why not pass up all the old temptations, and really train?

He did. For a month the Kid worked like a slave, on the road, and in the gymnasium. There was a desperate sort of grimness about him. Twin Sullivan stood as an omen. If the Kid was beaten there wasn't any use in going on. He might as well hang up the gloves for good and all. But victory—well, there must be something of the old McCoy left if he could win from a man of Jack's calibre.

The fight was bitter from start to finish. Sullivan was Irish, and as hard-boiled as you make 'em. He could box and hit, and twenty rounds was not an unaccustomed distance for him. It was for Kid McCoy. He hadn't gone that distance since he whipped Choynski in Frisco in '99, and most of his bouts since had been six or ten rounds.

McCoy rated himself along perfectly, though. With his new-found energy, which was backed by vast experience and ring intelligence, he boxed his way through to the decision. He had beaten greater fighters than Jack Twin Sullivan, but no bout—save the one with Tommy Ryan—meant quite so much to him. It was the symbol of his comeback; the triumph over appetite as well as a top-notch fighting man. It meant that Kid McCoy was still in the game; that he had not been shaken out as unfit. There were some battles left in the old dog. He'd show 'em.

XII

ABOUT a man like Norman Selby—a roamer, an adventurer, a man who lived by his wits as he did—many stories are sure to be afloat, and a good percentage are certain to be pure invention. At least, with only a tiny basis of truth, they developed into monstrous things. Since he had many more enemies than friends, it is obvious that most of these tales were to his discredit.

Most have to do with his cunning or savagery; how he outguessed that chap or punished the other. Certainly there was little mercy in him. In his formative years mercy had been denied him. He grew up to feel that it was a sign of weakness. You didn't let up on the other fellow unless you were afraid to go the limit with him.

But it is a fallacy to assume that Mc-



Coy deliberately punished all his opponents. When he cut a man to ribbons, instead of finishing him off with a merciful wallop, he often had good enough reasons for doing so. There was the case in his fights with Tommy Ryan and Jack McCormick.

McCormick was a burly, hard-hitting heavyweight, with no great pretensions to fame save his ability to punch. Having scored a lot of victories around Chicago, he was named as an opponent for McCoy when the Kid reached the Windy City on one of his tours.

The Kid was never fooled when it came to picking someone he was to box. His brain was a card-index of fighters, their strength and weaknesses. He knew that McCormick had a wallop that no sane man would want to sample, but he also knew that Jack was painfully slow. The Kid had been having a good time on this trip. Training had been allowed to sluff off, and as a result McCoy wasn't in any too good condition.

"I'll take McCormick," he said, "if he'll go along nice and easy. Nothing rough. Just a gentlemanly affair. *And, no double-crossing, or I'll knock him dead.*"

It was agreed by all hands that the fight shouldn't be rough. McCoy, of course, decided to keep his eyes open, and see that a repetition of the Tommy Dugan affair was not attempted. But, in this case he was pretty certain that things would go according to schedule. He knew the crowd, and by gosh, they wouldn't try to put over anything on him.

THEY started nicely enough. There wasn't any undue roughness, and yet they coasted along at a good enough speed to keep the audience interested. This was just an exhibition so far as the Kid was concerned. The way he felt with that belt of fat he couldn't have gone six rounds at top speed. He had a lot of friends at the ringside. They were shouting and cheering. The Kid was filled with a sudden warmth toward humanity. Nice kid, this McCormick. Swell crowd out there.

They went into a clinch, fiddled about for a few seconds and then broke. It was the one moment of his life when Kid McCoy was completely off his guard. Never again was he to relax so completely.

And in that second Jack McCormick shot his deadly right to the jaw. It caught the Kid where the beard begins to turn the other way. A million stars exploded in his brain. The lights went out completely. He felt himself falling into a bottomless pit.

McCoy came to himself with a start in his corner. A dejected second sloshed him with water and ran a sponge around the back of his neck and through his curls.

"What happened?" he asked.

"The big bozo flattened you with a right when you were comin' out of the clinch."

McCoy's pale skin turned a shade whiter. His eyes narrowed. He looked across the ring to where McCormick, laughing loudly, was shaking hands with his hilarious friends. The Kid reached for his bathrobe, pulled it around his shoulders and walked across the ring to his late opponent.

"Congratulations," he said in an icy voice. "I suppose you'll give me another shot."

"Sure," said McCormick. "I found out tonight that I can lick you any time we start. You may have some of the boys buffaloed, but you never did fool me."

"Well, let's try it again, anyway," said McCoy.

Jack was so elated by his victory that he completely overlooked the method by which it had been won. He hypnotized himself into believing that he was the greatest fighter of the period. He developed a complete and utter disdain for Kid McCoy. Of course he'd fight him again, and finish him off as quickly as he had the first time.

New York bid for this bout. The promoters reasoned that McCormick must be a great puncher, and McCoy would be out for revenge. A return match should be a wonder. Though the Kid was yearning for revenge, and Jack for further glory, they were not oblivious to the financial details. New York offered more than Chicago, and New York should have the fight.

This was one instance where McCoy cruelly punished a man, carrying the bout to bloody and unnecessary lengths when he could have stopped McCormick in any round he designated. Time after time he had the big fellow reeling on the edge of unconsciousness, only to clinch and hold him up and whisper biting words in his ears. Both of Jack's eyes were closed. He fairly streamed blood, but McCoy refused to put over the finishing blow, and the Chicagoan wouldn't quit. In the eighth round the referee intervened and stopped the slaughter.

Even this did not entirely convince McCormick. He fought the Kid in a six-round no-decision bout some years later. Even the beating that had been administered to him couldn't make him forget the thrill he had when he stiffened McCoy with his whaling right.

Time didn't mellow the Kid. He had never forgiven McCormick, and when he got him into the ring again repeated with an artistic and merciless hand the trouncing that had shocked New York. Jack was still on his feet at the end of six rounds, but wasn't a bargain at any price.

On such occasions as this McCoy did deal out unnecessary punishment. Most of the time, though, he was interested in finishing a rival as quickly as possible. Pride in his hitting ability demanded that. But the Ryans and the McCormicks were due to take as much from him as they could

without collapsing. That was his idea of an even-handed distribution of justice—and such justice is never shackled by mercy.

ONE of McCoy's greatest fights was with Peter Maher, the greatest hitter of his day. A big fellow, six feet tall and tipping the beam at 190 pounds, Maher had plenty of beef to lay behind each punch, and the knack of timing. He had been fighting for twelve years when he met Kid McCoy and had knocked out Joe Godfrey, Frank Craig, George Godfrey, Joe Choynski, Frank Slavin and Joe Goddard, and had waged great battles with Fitzsimmons, Sharkey, Jim Hall, Ruhlin and others.

There is an idea rather prevalent among the ring followers of today that Maher was just a big, clumsy fellow with a wallop. He wasn't. Quite the reverse was true. Peter knew how to handle himself in the ring. He knew pretty well how to protect his chin until age slowed him up too badly. If he hadn't known how to protect that chin would he have been able to go twelve rounds with Bob Fitzsimmons; twenty with Gus Ruhlin, and varying distances with other fine hitters? Not a chance.

McCoy hadn't a high regard for Maher. He figured him a pushover for a chap who could box. When he looked at the tall, rugged Irishman with his bristling black mustache, he grinned sardonically. Huh! What if the big mick could hit? There was nothing to be worried about.

He didn't know the half of it. The first round wasn't half over before Peter reached McCoy with one of the smashing right-handers for which he was famous. Fortunately for the Kid he was going away or it would have knocked him dead. As it was, everything turned black before his eyes. His knees buckled under him. The ring whirled in a vast circle. But, dazed as he was, McCoy was still a ring general. He clinched and held, ran and ducked. Maher didn't know how desperately he had hurt the slim young man. If he had known he would have thrown caution to the winds and beat him down with an irresistible avalanche of blows.

When the Kid came out for the second he was still a little weak. The grogginess had not cleared up. Maher was continually on the aggressive, and not even McCoy's superb cleverness could keep him entirely clear of the Irishman's vicious punches. He weakened steadily. His mouth and nose dripped blood. His body reddened under the attack. He became weaker with every passing moment.

Even a slow thinker like Peter Maher couldn't fail to see that he had his wily opponent on the run. Apparently there wasn't anything to it. He kept punishing McCoy with his drives to head and body. It didn't look as though the Kid could possibly go the limit. His apparent frailty was more emphasized than ever. The blood made the whiteness of his cheeks almost ghastly.

Going—going—going—

Who would give two bits for the chance of Kid McCoy when he came out weakly for the fifth round? Who believed that he had any chance to go more than a few extra minutes with the deadly hitting Irishman? What price cleverness now?

Maher, his face grim, charged in for the kill, his mustache fairly bristling with hate and eagerness. He didn't know that McCoy was as dangerous as a wounded rattler. To his way of thinking the fight was over, except for the formality of the finishing blow. This pale, blood-splotched man reeling away from him—broken and staggering under the beating he had already absorbed—couldn't have any threat left.

The Kid had come back almost to the ropes. Suddenly he braced himself. He hooked with the corkscrew left. It was like the dying stroke of a rattler. The soggy leather smashed into the pit of Maher's stomach. He gasped, the breath whistling between his suddenly parted lips. Those lips took on a bluish tinge. His arms dropped suddenly as though all the strength had gone from them.

In the split second of time that it took for McCoy to step in and lash his right to Maher's suddenly unprotected chin the crowd saw that the end had come for the Irishman. He had seemed almost a certain winner. Now, he was just as certainly a loser. McCoy never missed finishing a man when he had him in the

shape Peter was in.

The Kid didn't miss now.

He whipped the right at Maher. It landed on the exact spot where it would do the most damage. The Irishman went down like a sack of potatoes. He landed on his back, his arms flung wide, and lay there, glassy-eyed and unmoving, and the referee counted him out.

Peter was called a quitter, and a black mark was added to his reputation. It *wasn't* quitting. He simply couldn't take a punch like that and retain consciousness. His physical make-up did not include cement in his jaw bones.

It was lucky for McCoy that Maher did not possess an iron jaw. If he had, there would have been a knockout charged against the Kid then and there.

XIII

THE Kid's battle with Joe Choynski at the old Broadway Athletic Club on January 12, 1900, was not only one of the fistic classics of ring history, but proved more than any other his great courage and resourcefulness. The fight lasted only three rounds, but every second was crammed with action, slugging and knock-downs. The men fought at such a terrific pace that both were on the edge of exhaustion before the finish.

The first round was a whirlwind. The men disliked each other, and wanted to put over a finishing punch as quickly as possible. They disdained defense, and fought at a desperate pace. Since both were tremendous hitters it is difficult to see why they took such chances, and the only explanation is that each was confident of landing first and with the greatest steam. They whaled away at each other in such desperate fashion that the crowd was howling its approval at the finish.

But that first round wasn't the story. It wasn't even the beginning of it. When the bell sent them into action for the second there was a murderous slugging match for a minute. Then Choynski exploded a right under the Kid's chin, and down he went. But McCoy's resistance threw off the effects of the punch. He came to his knees and coolly took a count of nine. With the Kid once more on his feet, Joe was on him like a catamount,

whaling away with both hands. The right landed again. Down went McCoy for the second time, a drip of blood under his chin where the leather had rasped away the skin. This time he was hurt. His knees were trembling, but his brain retained enough of its clearness to force him up again.

The crowd yelled for a knockout. McCoy started to retreat, but his feet were lead; his arms dragging. He tried to cover himself; there was no chance of letting an effective punch go this time. The physical mechanism was going back on him. Looked bad, mighty bad!

Choynski kept crowding, throwing punches with both hands. He was excited with the nearness of victory, wanted to get it over with as soon as possible. For a spell McCoy evaded him, but it couldn't last. He lacked sufficient strength. Again a Choynski punch knocked him head over heels—and there he was squirming around in the resin dust, and Joe looking down at him as though he were a worm.

Weaker than a half-drowned kitten, three-quarters licked, the Kid still had enough coolness to take "nine." But the spectators didn't think the count mattered. One more wallop would finish him. He was a gone goat right now. Let him get up and see what happened.

They saw all right. They saw McCoy flattened for the fourth time. Referee Johnny White started the count all over again. At first the Kid didn't hear him. At six, though, he wriggled around, and just as ten was issuing from the referee's lips, struggled to his feet.

At that moment the timekeeper, Joe Dunn, banged the gong in spite of the fact that there were still fifty seconds of the round left!

THE crowd was in an uproar. Some thought that the round had ended; others that McCoy had been knocked out. Arguments and battles began all over the house, spluttering up like little fires.

Choynski's seconds shouted maledictions and complained that their man had been robbed, while the Kid's doused him with water. The upshot of it all was that Dunn did ring the bell again, and again the boys went back to their job.

That period of rest, of course, was the

saving grace for McCoy: The effects of the knockdown had passed. His wonderful vitality boiled up in him again. He finished the round strong and confident once more, but was too tricky to let Joe see it.

He staggered like a drunken man going to his corner. Throughout the minute's rest period he lay like dead on his stool. The bell sounded. He was shoved to his feet, and stumbled forward, hands hanging by his sides.

Choynski drew back to let go the finishing punch. The Kid suddenly stiffened, and drove a vicious corkscrew left to the other's chin. Down went Joe. But he was tough as raw-hide, and had no idea of staying there than McCoy himself. He came up fast; then they began bouncing each other on the floor.

First one and then the other would be felled with pile-driving blows, and time after time it looked like curtains for whichever was the fallen fighter at the moment. The fans, on their feet, screaming in hysterical excitement, lost count of the knockdowns. It seemed impossible for two men to continue such a pace. One or the other must crack.

Just as the gong sounded for the end of the round McCoy's left fist looped to Joe's chin, and down went the gallant Californian—dead to the world.

Bedlam broke loose again, Choynski's backers claimed that he had been struck after the bell. The Kid's swore that it had been fair.

McCoy, streaming blood from nose and mouth, walked to his corner, now the coolest man in the house. Fury had passed. He was in full control of himself once more.

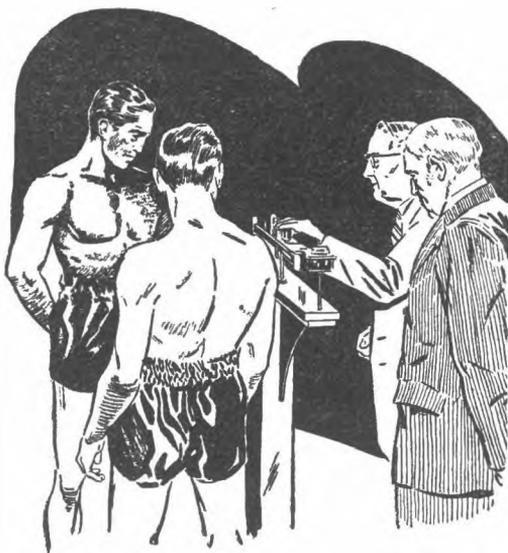
Choynski's seconds rushed into the ring, picked him up and carried him to his corner. One of them bellowed at the referee, "Choynski wins!"

"Choynski nothing!" said Johnny White. "Don't talk so much, but have him ready when the bell rings."

"McCoy fouled him!" shrieked the second.

"There wasn't any foul. That punch was on its way when the bell sounded."

He pushed the second out of the way, and walked over to Joe's corner.



"You'd better bring that guy around quick or he's goin' to lose the fight. And, don't let me hear any more gousin' about a foul."

McCoy, bright-eyed with anticipation, sat looking across the ring at his rival. Choynski's head had fallen back on his shoulders. His arms hung by his side. He was still unconscious despite the frantic ministrations of his seconds. That punch had back of it all the fury in Kid McCoy's heart and it had done its job very well, indeed.

The bell sounded.

McCoy arose and walked with as brisk a step as he could muster to the center of the ring. Joe lay on his chair, still unconscious despite the drench of ice water on his face and neck.

"Send your man up!" shouted Johnny White.

His answer was a blood-smeared soggy towel that came sailing through the air, and landed at McCoy's feet. It was the age-old symbol of defeat.

While McCoy, his legs buckling under him, walked back to his corner, the crowd was almost mad with excitement. There were some hoots mingled with the cheers, for the backers of Choynski insisted that their man was hit after the bell, and so had won on a foul. But their claim was ridiculous. The fighters were battling savagely. Neither had turned to his corner. It was a fair punch, and Referee

Johnny White acted fairly and with cool, quick judgment.

XIV

IF ever a man tried many lines in pursuit of a living it was Kid McCoy. Starting as a tramp, dish-washer, tailor and paper-hanger he graduated to the prize ring and became a champion. When he no longer could hold the pace, and had spent all his great earnings in the chase after pleasure the needs of the body were still imperative.

He owned a jewelry store, the Kid McCoy garage, a rathskeller and an automobile agency. In 1907 he became a partner in the Peabody National Detective Agency with Lieutenant of Police Frank Peabody. He ran a sanitarium and was an actor on the stage and in the movies. In 1921 he even shipped as a second mate on the old water-logged *Lizzie V. Hall*, a schooner that had been built in 1878, though he didn't know a stanchion from the mizzen-mast.

McCoy thought too much about women. He was married nine times, though three of his marriages were to the same woman. There is nothing to laugh at in this. There is rather a hint of his abiding loneliness; of his wistful search for happiness. He was reaching out for a golden something that never materialized. He remembered his patient, hard-working mother, her tender sacrifices, her love. He wanted love, this brittle-surfaced, cold-eyed man. I think it really meant more to him than anything else, but it seemed always to elude his searching fingers, just as happiness and the sort of success he wanted escaped him.

THE "corkscrew" I've mentioned was a left hook to either head or body. The Kid rolled his arm with the punch, a roll from the elbow to the wrist that gave an added snap and deadly effectiveness to the blow. The idea for it came to him, so he claimed although some deny that it originated in McCoy's mind—one night when he was examining the rifling of a pistol. It

seemed to him that if that rifling had the effect of hurling the bullet with such speed that a similar effect might be gotten with a blow. He studied and practiced, and the result was the corkscrew, one of the wickedest punches ever known.

It was only one of many in the Kid's repertoire. He developed the jab as it had never been seen before. He had a sweet right cross. In short, there wasn't a punch that McCoy didn't have at his service. Backed by his remarkable eye and judgment of distance it was no wonder that he became one of the really great hitters of all time.

That he adapted, invented and developed these blows is a tribute to McCoy's mind.

He was naturally a student, and if his leaning in that direction had been applied rather to the details of his business than to books it was no more than is true of many a successful executive.

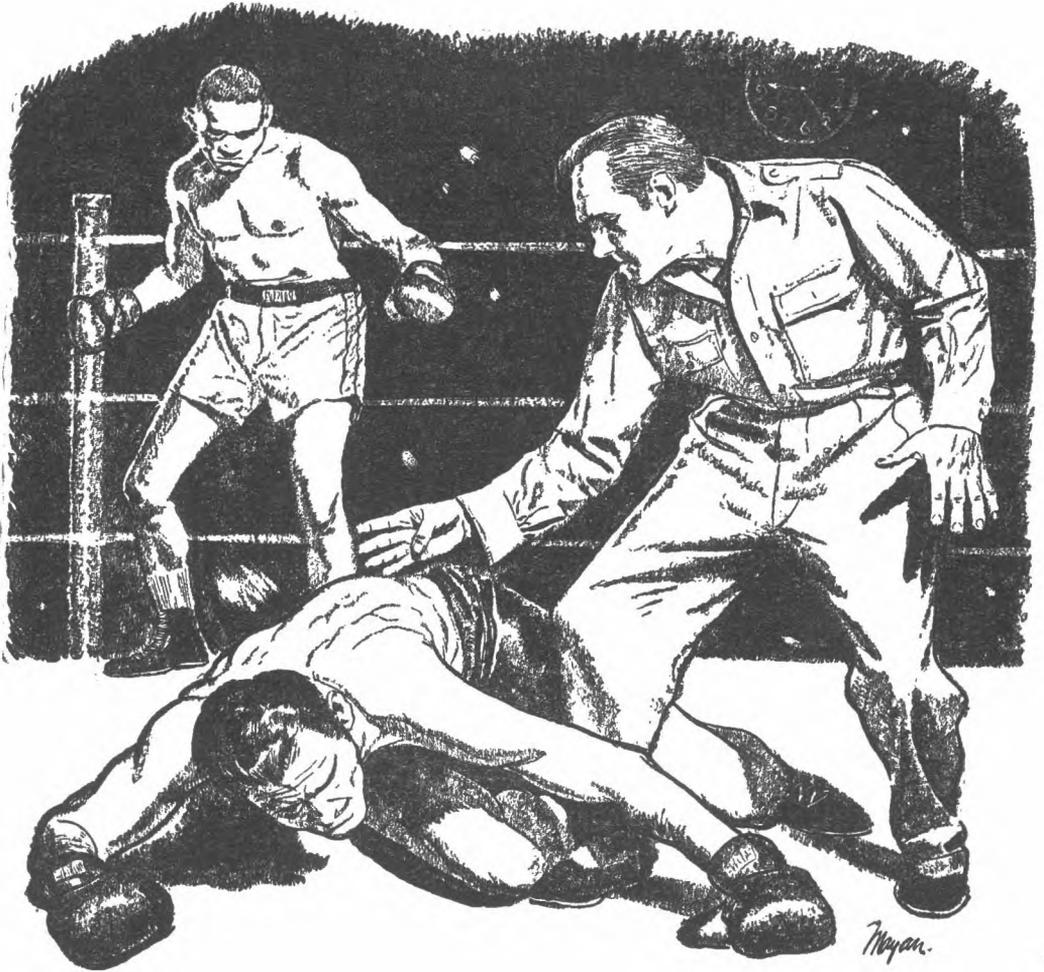
As a matter of fact, the Kid did like books, even though he didn't get much chance to read. He antedated Tunney in his expressed admiration of Chaucer, Tennyson, Browning and other classicists.

The man's life was a continual tragedy, an everlasting reaching out for an ideal that he never achieved, a repression of the better things in his nature. With the right start and the proper training he might have become a real success in his profession after his ring days were over.

MCCOY never found real happiness. There was a sensitive spirit under his brusque exterior. It was blunted by the passing years and the experience those years brought with it. With all his hot search for happiness, it always eluded him.

He made a fortune, and spent it all. In 1922 he was declared a bankrupt, but he was bankrupt in more than money. He had spent all his enthusiasm, vitality and sincerity in a search for the happiness he never found.

Kid McCoy died as dramatically as he had lived . . . he was found a suicide in a shabby hotel room in Detroit, April 18, 1941.



ONE FOR THE BOOKIE

By Joe Brennan

Tonight the ring was a swimmin' hole . . . awaitin' the big dive in the main event. Only trouble was there were a few last minute changes—and not even the fat-wallet boys knew who was going to splash the tank.

“SPIT ON my deck once more, Farr,” I tell the skinny guy, “an’ I will put a swab in your hand.”

This combination fight manager and promoter, Chuck Farr, is a wrongo from way back. And he ain’t apt to change at this late date. He tosses his cheroot stub into the harbor.

“Listen, Tuffy,” he goes on out of the side of his mouth, “what right you got to pass up an easy five thousand clackers like this? You own a bank?”

What right? I think, as I go on sand-stoning the hatch on my cabin cruiser.

“Look, I got birthdays packed on me till I grunt like a piano-mover in a swamp. What’s more, your fighter, Batelo, carries a spring billy in each hand.”

“Okay,” he breaks in, shoving his kady to the back of his shiny dome, “so you’re thirty-one, mebbe thirty-two. As heavy-weights go, that ain’t ancient.”

I stand up and suck in some San Pedro breeze from the offshore side. This Chuck Farr can sure smell up the air like a goat farm.

“Farr, my days are numbered in this daffy punch-for-pay business. Just a

couple more against these Phil Falldowns, an' I hang up the mittens for keeps." *The hell with this racket*, I think to myself, except I need the dough to get set up right in business.

Farr touches me light on the arm. "For ten heats with my Batelo you can clean up more'n you would against a dozen Peter Popovers." He wipes at his mouth, which looks like a torn pocket. "An' you don't have to go no full route. You can drop nice an' easy into a soft corner on the canvas anytime after the fifth. Just so long's it looks kosher."

"I would need a tommy gun to last five with your 'Poundin' Portuguese,'" I tell him. "He's no Dumbo Dive. He is sudden death with the brakes off."

He rubs at his bald head and has that look as though he's tilting the pin-ball machine again. "I think you'n me can do business, all right. Five gees ain't suc-cotash for a little romp in a burg where you ain't known."

"What burg?"

"You huff an' you puff in Balboa Beach. They're havin' their big regatta on the fourth. We trap 'em all that evenin' in their new stadium. The place'll be sloppin' over with sportin' swells from ever-where. An' with Los Angeles only a whoop an' a holler away . . ."

The guy looked to be losing his mind with the very dream of it. Funny about this schlemmiel, he don't seem so bright on the outside, but he can sure see a dollar.

All this time I'm sort of fouled up with thinking.

The promoter's beady eyes blink like a bird's. "What's the matter? Somethin' wrong with Balboa? It's maybe too rural for the likes of you?"

"No, not that. It—— it's just that . . ." I swallow a little and finish with, "I'll take the bout."

"Now, you're cookin' with high octane, Tuffy." He's flapping his arms like a crane ready to take off.

By this time I'm leading the bag of bones off my craft. It rides better without him.

"You can scam now," I say. "Dave an' I will see you at Schwartz's Cafe at noon. We'll scribble our John Hancocks then."

HE'S GONE, and the air gets a chance to sweeten up. I clomp down the ladder into my foc'sle.

"Did I hear my good name used in vain?" asks Dave Freund from the bunk. He's big people for so small a space.

"Look," I laugh, "for the free lodgin' you're gettin' on my boat I got a right to mention your name."

"Whistle the brabble, Tuffy."

"Well, we're fightin' the Poundin' Portuguese on the fourth at Balboa Beach. Open air."

I don't get no farther. Dave is sitting up suddenly. My crack has made him pause like a woodpecker at timber line. His jaw waggles.

"W-w-we're doin' business with Chuck Farr?"

"Who else? He's got the one man who can make the turnstiles rattle like snare drums."

"You takin' a rifle in there with you, Tuffy?"

"What've I got to lose," I ask, "outside of my dental work an' maybe my life?"

"For how many coconuts, Tuffy? You know Batelo's tougher'n either end of an alligator."

"Five thousand."

"You should demand a bigger gob. Outside of the champ, who else is there but you an' Batelo?"

"Maybe, Dave, this young Batelo won't murder me — not completely."

"You been out in the sun too long." He stands up and reads me the way his blue eyes can. "Come, let's talk sense. You can't mean this."

I grab a squat on the opposite bunk. It's plain I got to sell my own manager a bill. It's never been easy. He's the Tiffany of them all as a manager. He handled me almost right up to the crown—where I took over and handled myself all the way down again.

I got reasons, Dave," I say. "This gore-galore will be in—in my home town an'..."

He pushes at his thinning grey hair, and his eyebrows skip up. "I thought you were from San Francisco."

"There's the gaff in it," I explain, trying not to show the shame that's chewing at me from the inside. "I was raised in Balboa. My parents are dead, but I still got a kid brother there. My square moni-

ker is George Rammage. I dropped the *mage* years back when I went East an' turned pro."

Dave's eyes are on Memory Lane. He laughs with, "Then I found you an' hung the 'Tuffy' onto you!"

"Anyhow," I go on, "I got disgraced in Balboa an' pulled out for New York."

"Yeah, go on, if you don't mind."

"Well, Dave, I was amateur; goin' great guns. Win, win; couldn't lose. Balboa was always a fight-nuts little town. Then the National Golden Gloves at Hollywood. All of Balboa was back of me to win the title. They went into hock to bet on me."

"So?"

"So I blew a decision that I had in my hip pocket."

"How?"

"Just laid down. Did a Barney in the third round. Nosedived from a punch that couldn't've knocked your derby into a fedora."

"How come you did it, Tuffy?"

"I listened to a professional fight manager who secretly owned my opponent. He wanted his fighter to turn pro with a .1000 batting average. I refused to join his stable, but I did lay down for a lousy fistful of dollar bills."

"How'd they know? How'd they know?" Old Dave is banging his fist into his palm.

"As a actor I am a third rate brick layer. The dive smelled from here to Smetzigahaba. They got one whiff of it and cut off my water."

"They gave you your just desserts."

"Sure, sure, I know. But, now, after telling you, I feel as honest as three pints to the quart. You get it, Dave?"

Dave nods his keglie head up and down. "Of course, Tuffy. An' it just proves to me again that you are good people inside."

"Tuffy!" comes a voice from outside. "Tuffy, guy!"

I GO topside and find Lonnie DeLara, Schwartz's pretty cashier. There she is up on the wharf with her long legs and tidy feet. She's a neat little package with disturbing red lips; damn disturbing.

"Hello," she says, smiling like a basket of puppies. "I've always wanted to see your little ship."

"Hold on," I tell her. "You're banging on the wrong man's door. Schwartz wouldn't appreciate this. Go back to him. That's where the tall cane grows."

"But, Tuffy, I've told you I would be coming down here to surprise you one of these days."

"Yup, an' I told you it would be no dominoes. Schwartz is a right guy. I respect him, so . . ."

She must've heard a movement below decks. She cocks her ear and says, "Why, you've already got someone down there!"

"Yeah," I say. "Yeah, I have. An' she's some doll. Just what the doctor ordered. Now you better scram."

The way she walks back along the wharf is something to see. Her lines move under that white silk like a gull drifting in a sunny sky.

Back below, Dave greets me with, "We almost had company, didn't we? Sounded like the girl at Schwartz's eatery."

"It was," I admit.

He smiles. "She sure seemed all for you, Tuffy. How come you told her you had a lady visitor below here? Don't tell me I swish when I walk!"

"Dave, it's just I like that girl too well—and she belongs to Schwartz. He's a three-ply gent. They're as good as engaged. Yet, she's ready to chisel on him at the drop of a hat; my hat."

"Maybe I'm in your way here," Dave says on a dead note.

"Forget it," I grunt. "But, on the level, Dave, wouldn't it be somethin' if we could go some place where we could get away from all this larceny? Seems that the whole world is as wrong as a smile on a pallbearer."

"Oh, I dunno," he sighs. "There's a few foursquare slobs around if you look hard enough."

"Name one!" I yowl, good natured. "Just one, outside of yourself!"

"Well, you'd head my list, kid."

"Me? Why, I'm goin' off the board for Farr, Batelo an' five thousand smackeroos!"

Dave is clear out of his sack once more. "I have my doubts about that, Tuffy. What's more, it'd take something bigger than that to make you do a deliberate el foldo!"

"Here's the dope," I tell him, and I can

hear my own breathing. "Balboa people threw the book at me when I was a kid. I needed help then, not the kick in the slats they give me. Now, I just want one crack at them; to gouge them good. They won't know me after all these years. An' if I don't do it, someone else'll climb in there with Batelo an' do the gouging."

"I don't want no part of it!" Dave groans.

"I need you, Dave," I go on. "Just to be in there to help me from dyin'. There's no man like you on cuts. You want me to bleed to death with some other knuckle-head in my corner? Please, Dave, stick with me for this last shot."

"You're tough. You're smart. You can handle yourself."

"Look, Dave," I keep hammering. "I want to come out of this thing with my brains—what's left of them. I want to go into this boat buildin' business I been tellin' you about. Can I do it if I wind up hobbin' on my heels?"

He looks away and has pain in his face over my making the deal without him. But something softens him up.

"Okay, Tuffy, I go into the firin' pit with you. But for free. I won't take one kopek off'n you for it." He looks up into the solid bar of gold streaming down through the hatch. "You know, sometimes I—I sorta feel like I'm your dad . . ."

"Dave," I explain, "that one splotch on my record has been eatin' at me all these years, thanks to Balboa not findin' a little forgiveness in its heart for a kid. One more splotch can't make the pain much worse!"

"You came close to the top, Tuffy. You been up there. You didn't miss it by much."

"I'd've done better," I point out, with something grabbing at my throat. "Only I had this thing hanging over me. It's too late to clean it up now. I'd have to be back at the beginnin' to do the job right."

"You could be all right again, Tuffy, if you had a purpose. All you need is something to soup you up."

"A couple of straights?" I say, trying to be funny.

"Naw, naw. Somethin' from the inside like the thing that made you collect that Purple Heart in North Africa."

AT SCHWARTZ'S busy layout I pass up Lonnie DeLara as though a dam has broke and I'm heading for the hills. Over in a corner Chuck Farr nails me. He knows enough to not ask why Dave Freund ain't with me.

"You're showin' good sense in grabbin' this," he rasps. "You got the right point of view."

"Sure," I pipe, "like the condemned man who had a point of view only to have the hangman take it away from him in the mornin' with a rope."

Farr cackles like the hyena he is. It grates up and down my spine.

"Now, look," he says, leaning across the table, "these Southern Californian's aren't interested in total strangers. They've seen my man Batelo, but they don't know you." He's pointing his bony finger at me. "So I'm settin' up a ring in the outskirts where you'll do your trainin'."

It's a kick in the stomach because I am already wondering will the old-timers there recognize me. But a mirror back of this ganef tells me that the years and the lumps have made a whale of a change. Even my nose now looks like a relaxed boxing glove.

"You got the cards," is all I can say. "You're dealin'."

The open air training spot we got on the peninsula is a vacation paradise, except that I got to trade punches with sweaty meatballs who just move in like boxcars and grunt with the massaging. It's not gentleman's work.

It's a healthy turnout of free admissions that watch my daily workouts. I look at them one day from the ring and say to Dave, "Comes the night of the fourth an' I square accounts with this mob. I gouge all Balboa good an' proper!"

He shakes his old grey noodle. "That don't sound like you, Tuffy. You goin' bitter?"

It's just all strange faces out there to me; a sea of them. Five rounds of slamming with the sixteen-ouncers and I walk to the ropes. Big mouthsful of that Pacific wind bring me back to life.

"Nough for today," Dave says, pulling the mouth-piece from between my teeth. Then, smiling that nice way of his, adds, "Lookit the lovely-lovely out there who's been watchin' you perform."

Sure thing, there's a sweetheart ten rows back who's drinking me in with wide eyes that make you gulp. The young guy with the dark glasses must be with her, judging from the girl's jacket he has across his knees. I wonder how the sign: TUFFY RAM TRAINING HERE DAILY could possibly trap such a vision.

She drops her eyes quick when she sees me gawking. That's all over, a cluck with holes in his head. The kid gets up and comes to the ring apron.

"Pardon me, Mr. Ram, but the lady with me is our town paper's editor, Miss O'Hara. Would you kindly let her interview you for the sheet?"

"Sure thing, kid," I tell him. Then I raise a glove to this Miss O'Hara. "Right after I shower off, miss!"

The smile of thanks she tosses me has hypoes of adrenalin in it.

Showered off and smelling like a rose, I'm happy about this little taffy-haired visitor. But I'm wondering can I hide certain things a man don't make words of? There's electric in it when we shake hands. I been interviewed plenty when I was near the top but this is something special. *She* is special.

"Mr. Ram," she smiles, "this ought to help the gate." There's a faint tinkle in her voice like those glass Chinese gizmos my mom used to have hanging on the porch.

"Miss O'Hara, if it don't help one button's worth, it's still a pleasure for Yours Truly." And that is pretty bright talk for me.

FROM there on she asks me the usual run of mazzaza. I soak her up. She's beautiful, clean as a trout and very young, and like a graceful star boat in the sun. Her eyes are brave and honest.

Do I like the game? What do I lay my success to? How I occupy my spare time? I'm blue at knowing such a girl is not for me, so I want to answer them questions in this disorder: "It stinks; I'm on my last rubber legs; an' I shrink human heads."

But she is too lovely for bitter cracks from a slob like me. It would be sort of the same as spitting around flowers.

At the end of it I ask, "Maybe, Miss O'Hara, I can take you to dinner?" And

I'm holding my breath like I'm under water.

"Well," she answers softly, "Donny Ramage, our circulation department boy here, came with me, but . . ."

"Sure, sure thing," says the kid quick-like, "you two go to dinner. I have work to do."

I'm left with lockjaw. *A kid after my own heart*, I think. *And my brother!* It just goes to show you!

I trained a week in that funny little outdoor arena. Friends by the carload. A guy begins to think he's worth his salt. It's "Hello Ram!" and "Harya Tuffy?" and "We're bettin' you to win, champ!" Even "champ" they call me.

Miss O'Hara becomes just plain Harriet to me. Has me at her home for dinner with her folks. Real people; solid right down to the ground. I learn to love her like I love the idea of quitting the flattened-nose fraternity. I'm happy when she's just standing near. And I am not use to being happy. She says the things that make a man feel like stomping around proud as though he owns a fleet of shiny white fishing boats. "You're our man, you know," she says. "We've all adopted you because we believe in you." Stuff like that.

Two days before the big cuffy-clatch, Farr sets up in the betting business in Balboa. In no time he's yapping at me in my dressing room.

"I see you got these yahoos down here all in love with you," he says.

The way he's wetting his lips it's clear as a frosty night that he's spoiling for trouble. Dave chucks me a quick wink and a knowing smirk.

"Okay," I say. "So the locals appreciate class." And I wonder why I even jaw with the pelican. Make the mistake of shaking hands with him and you got to count your fingers.

He taps me on the chest. "You sellin' them on yourself for a reason? You tryin' to work angles?"

"Look, Farr," chimes in Dave, "you want a packed house? You want the locals to have a favorite? Right! So Tuffy has made them crazy about himself. Can you lose?"

"I can lose if your fighter crosses me up!" the guy hollers.

I suddenly *do* get ideas. Not like me either, because I am not too bright.

"How many you seat in that stadium, Farr?" I ask.

"Eighteen thousand. Whatta you care? You get your five grand guarantee even if we only play to the ushers!"

"Your take will be many a hatful," I go on, now all tightening up inside. "I want my dough now, so's I can collect a hatful of somethin' besides lumps."

Farr has flecks of saliva on his mouth. Dave's lips are spread like breathing ain't easy.

"You get your moola," squeaks Farr, "after you have give us five or more good rounds. Rounds that look like a shootin' match. Not before!"

"Farr, you can't afford to let me take a runout powder at a time like this. You got the town all cocked and primed for a killin'."

"What you got in that chowderhead of yours?" he yells. He turns to Dave. "Whyn't you put this punchy tramp of yours in a straight jacket till fight time? He's a menace!"

"He's got somethin'," says Dave. "Tuffy has got to protect his own interests. Farr, all over town your tramboes are chunkin' in their dough on Batelo. Tuffy has every yahoo here believin' he'll take your Punchin' Portuguese. Now, Tuffy'd like to get his own little five grand down, too."

"On Batelo?"

"On who else? Even if the bout was on the square, Tuffy knows he'd need the cops, the firemen an' the lifeguards to help him beat Batelo."

Farr turns his buzzard eyes back to me. I purse my lips and nod wiser than a treeful of owls.

"Mebbe you're not far wrong at that," he says. "For a punch-drunk, mebbe you got a brain or two."

"I want it today," I tell him. "I got only two days to get my lettuce placed."

FARR and one of his henchmen bring the swag to me in the afternoon. He counts it out and gripes, "Just don't try nothin' cute on this deal."

"Don't tell me," I crack, "that it's possible to out-fox you in this pig-stickin' racket. Why, I'm even back of the Farr-for-Dog-Catcher movement."

He looks at Dave and fetches only a snort. He sees he's as welcome in our room as sand in your spinach, so he va-moosees.

Dave ambles over to me. "Tuffy, I'm not quite sure I got you figured straight. What's eatin' at you? You got O'Hara heart trouble?"

"I got that, too, Dave. An' think of all these nice Balboa people bettin' their socks on me . . ."

"It aint' a bad burg, Tuffy. They love you here. You're their hero. Why, even at the Elk's smoker the other night, the town's best amateur mittman boxed under the moniker of 'Young Tuffy Ram!'"

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, that kid Miss O'Hara has workin' for her in the news office."

"With the smoked glasses covering up the black eyes?"

"No one else. He was the goods, too. Full of scrap as a plate of hash. I'd like to handle him if he wants to turnpro someday."

I just shake my pumpkin head and say, "He couldn't fall into sweller hands."

Dave has a proud look on him at this. He comes close to me and his hand grabs my bicep. "Tuffy, I smell that you're goin' straight on this fight. You're shootin' square."

"True as twelve to the dozen," I admit. "It guts me to think that my layin' down would net that Farr bird a harvest. I want to retch when I think of him bilkin' all these nice Balboa people."

"Ten'll bring me twenty, Tuffy, that you'er bettin' that whole five grand, too."

"Yup, that's the kind of weed I been smokin'. I got ching-chong- Chinaman dreams."

He don't mutter no more. His hand just squeezs mine and he slips me a nutty little hug. Those who don't know us might think we are a couple cupcakes.

THE regatta is poetry pure poetry. Sleek yawls, sloops and ketchs on a sunny bay—everything a sailing man loves. But what I have on my arm is even sleeker. You guessed it.

Harriet points with her dainty hand. "And those are what you intend to build?" Her fingers press hard on my forearm and her eyes mist up a little. "Oh, Tuffy," it

will be such a lovely business! So clean!"

Right then I swallow while thinking on the larceny of my present trade.

"M-m-maybe," she stammers, "you'll set up shop right here . . ."

The thought of it gives me aches inside. Sad ones.

"Harriet, after tonight's brannigan in the stadium, Balboans will probably ride me out of town on a pole."

Her soft eyes sweep me. "Even if you lose, Tuffy, you'll do it like a hero, with banners flying."

How I could stand an armful of her right then! She's something solid and real to hang onto. For the first time in my life I am afraid of a fight. Afraid of what will come after it. Mostly after it.

"It'll be a fight before it's over," I promise her. "I will give Batelo a rough go for his dough."

She's close against me as we watch star boats skim like toy ships on a park lake. I don't look down at her. I don't trust myself.

"Tuffy, shouldn't you be in your hotel room now? Sleeping or, at least, resting?"

"Just being here with you Harriet, is resting." And, brother, she'll never know how I am sinking into her deep vitality right in that second.

DAVE climbs in ahead and spreads the strands for me to hop through. Imagine, Dave—who wears rubbers on wet days and answers to the name of "Fatso"—helping me into the ring! Well, it's all part of the old argle-bargle of the ring racket. Makes the fighter look important.

The roar of the crowd out there in the half-light sounds like V-J Day all over again. A pleasure, because most of it is for me. But it's the wide smiling eyes of Harriet down there in the first row that mean life itself to me. Yes, there's something, too, about the young guy at her side that gets inside of me. I'm his brave beezark, you see. Sort of a knight, or even a king, maybe. It's great while it lasts. The kiss Harriet blows to me is pure platinum.

"The rosin box," says Dave, pointing to a neutral corner. I go over and scuff-scuff while gandering the Portuguese

who's climbing through on the other side. His bathrobe is swung open, and I can see he is stacked like a dray horse.

I throw a little smile for my pals, Harriet and the kid. I will give them honest rounds, I think. No matter what. And I wonder am I going to be parted from my appetite this night. I still have the noises in my head from the last knucklefest.

Nazi-hearted Farr wanders around ring-side. He's soaking up the big-shot promotional stuff. To tell him in advance that this bout will now be no Barney would give him a chance to copper his bets. And that would break my heart up like a dish. I would like just the interest back on the dough he has detoured me out of. He is sand in my throat.

Back in my corner, Dave and a good hired hand, Izzy, are hovering over me like mother hens. This is the time when a fighter feels maybe he is somebody. He is a fine racehorse worth so many bucks an ounce on the hoof. No favor for him is too much.

"Dave," I say, "will you warn Batelo that this is a shootin' match? Will you tell him I'm takin' no dive?"

Dave's jaw flies open for a second. Then he manages to say, "Tuffy, I'm prouder of you ever' minute." With that he shambles over into enemy territory.

When he returns he's got happiness all over him. "You're right, Tuffy. That was only fair."

Already my slate seems cleaner. I don't feel like I even been double-parking.

"Lay back an' be loose," Dave goes on, shoving me careful onto the stool. "Yeah, relax," echoes Izzy, a good man with the towel and the water. Dave shoves the collodion, styptic pencil and adhesive tape into the patch pocket of his jacket. "Remember, Tuffy, you let him make the fight. You play like a weak footballer; defense stuff all the time—waitin' for the other slob to fumble."

"Yeah," I say. But I think, *Let enough of Batelo's leather-salutes sluice off my conk an' I will do the fumblin' all the rest of my life!*

Dave's practised eyes give a quick survey to the buzzing mob. "A good house, Tuffy. A sweet house. There's Russian rubles out there till you wouldn't believe it."

"Look, Tuffy. That's the kind of mob will turn out for my 'Young Tuffy Ram' when he finishes school." He sees my eyes bug a little, and he smiles, "Sure, tonight the new an' better edition asked if he could fight for me after graduation. That's bad?"

"Well, blow me down!" is all I can grunt.

There's yammering going on in the center of the ring. Brokedown fighters whose ring sizzle is back of them are being introduced. Also, some new ones who are on the climb and haven't yet collected their lumps.

Izzy suddenly points at the opposite corner. "Look, boss, Farr must be losin' his mind."

Sure enough, the vulture's skinny neck is craning up from ringside, and Batelo is giving him a earful. The red has drained from Farr's face.

I reach for Dave's belt and pull him close. "Remember, pal, now that this is a on-the-level shindig, you're gettin' your usual cut."

He shakes his grey head with, "I told you I was comin' into this one for free; that still goes. Anyhow, I got two grand down on you for this affair."

I swallow hard on that one. "You what?"

"Don't fret, Tuffy." He gazes at the mob and finishes up with nodding at Harriet and Donny. "You see, you got a purpose this time; something inside. Your fightin' will be fightin' with a soul in it."

"IN THIS CORNER," the announcer blats, "we have, at one-ninety, that g-r-e-a-t heavyweight who went fifteen rounds with the champion last summer—Tuffy R-a-m!"

I get up, dance a little of the rigadoun, and raise my hands to the crowd. Everything's different. Nothing seems like the old garfunkel of other times. I feel, you understand, like I'm working for every Balboan out there. A feeling that seems to squirt from the heart.

"Judas Priest!" laughs Izzy. "What are we, the champ?"

Dave says, "They've hocked their pants to bet on us!"

I got more of a worry load on me than I ever lugged before. A plater in a claim-

ing race; that's me—with a hundred and ninety pound backache!

"And in this corner . . ." goes on the announcer, "at two-twelve, the leading challenger for the heavyweight crown—the Punchin' Portuguese, Nino Batelo!"

There's screams and catcalls, according to how the bets are laid. They know how this ring butcher works. There will be no frolic tonight.

That smart old look of a general takes over on Dave's face. Only, this time there's something of a prayer mixed in with it. "Look, Tuffy, a last quick review of our plans. You got the one chance. You stay in reverse gear an' box nice. Retreat. You let him snort an' rush till he's out of gas. As long as he's got a full head of steam you can't buck him. When he's lost his old whammy, we'll see can he fight on defense."

Fancy plans, all right. But I wonder will Batelo's tomahawks to my beard make the plans sound like St. Francis' sermon to the birds?

We're called to the center for the usual mazzaza. The crowd settles back into a low steady hum and waits for promised leather explosions. Referee Kennedy gasses to us sixteen-to-the-dozen. He's full of warnings and don'ts. Batelo breaks in with, "Save your ear static for countin' over Ram when I dump 'im!"

It's an old gag with whiskers on it. The Roman gladiators probably wisecracked the same just before they started hacking each other with cold steel.

"That's not clubby," I grin to Batelo. And I know maybe he ain't far wrong.

"Shake hands now," Kennedy snarls, "and from here on in you're on your own."

Waiting in the corner for the starting bell has always been a lonely business. Tonight it is something else. I got friends; pals I can't let down.

Standing below the ring apron in my corner is Farr. His beak of a nose is stabbing at the air as he's trying to tell me some bilge. His bony claws open and close. I know what the chatter is so I just wave him off with, "I'm squarin' some old accounts this time."

The bell claps and Batelo is crowding over to me. For expression, his brown face is the same as the seat of your pants.

A single-purpose brain; to splatter me over the scenery quick. He's a southpaw; hooks with his fork hand. I step back from a long right jab. Sidestep and bob. I get inside his first hook and stab him to the spareribs. He bites at the air a little, then gives it to me good with both hands. We lock up.

"Break!" hollers Kennedy.

I drop my hands and step back clean as a hound's tooth. *Plop!* Batelo's overhand left creases me to the mouth. It's nothing short of dealing from the bottom of the deck.

My lips start ballooning. I move around. He roars in again and I bring my two hands up inside, the only way to fight a brawler like him. He twists and breaks away. He slashes and chops. A sting over my left eye says I have a brand new slice up there. I shuffle back and weave.

My vision blurs. Claret running across your eyeball will do that. The bell is sweet music to my buzzing ears.

Squattin' in my corner, Izzy stretches my waistband to help with the breathing. Dave works magic on the eye-cut. Referee Kennedy waltzes over for a squint. "It's gonna be okay, Dave tells him.

I'm wheezing some, but I am in shape. I got a good motor that I don't ever abuse. My eyes don't travel to Harriet. I know it's been a 10-cent fight so far.

"Let the schlemmiel bring it to you," says Dave. "Back off faster an' counter."

"Dave, can I do anything else? That hooligan has only one gear an' it's all forward!"

I slide out for the second. The big bundle of muscles meets me more than half way. I back-pedal while he bulls me around. He holds his left high on his chest, all cocked and primed. It's a booby trap. I watch it, slide back, and keep stuffing him with sharp left hand. Over in my own corner he traps me, but good. He's got what I ain't got; youth! The everlasting bounce of youth. Locked in that corner mess I can feel his blacksmith strength. He's a ten-ton truck. I try to punch my way out of trouble. What a going-over he hands me!

The audience is strange and silent. An empty stadium you'd think.

I LOWER my head and work both arms like pistons when he pins me on the ropes. He blackjacks his forearm across the back of my neck and all but sends me bye-bye. Before I can come out of it he unloads an assortment of elbows, wrists and thumbs that have me on Silly Street. When the ref finally hauls him off I feel like I went through a windshield.

He's piling in again, taking free Sundays at me, batting me around like a fungo. I think I am going to die, no fooling. The best I can do is fence in my skull and mush with my arms — and hope lightning don't hit.

A fight ring don't give a refugee no longitude or latitude. He has got to receipt for some belts no matter how fast he scats. I duck and weave and feint. A sizzling left goes by my nose. I ride one with my shoulder. It's all the same as a two-by-four on your bones.

In skittering away I crack him sharp to the temple. Seems I see his eyes glaze a little. *This murderer, I think, is not used to being hit. He has been blasting out opponents too early, fast and often.*

It makes me feel better inside. Tonight I got pride in my work. It's like it used to be when I had dreams of someday wearing the jewels; broken dreams that'll never be mended.

I fade back as far as the ropes'll allow. I'm just outside a blistering left. *Splat!* He clops a heavy-duty right to my nose that spreads it like it has never been spread before. I will be wearing it pompadour hereafter. I'm blowing big red bubbles, side-stepping, shuffling back, weaving. I wonder why they don't give us more light in the ring, it's that dark. Everything's foggy and running together. My lame brain keeps blaring two things: back off! Counter! It gets worse while it lasts; and it lasts.

Back to my corner. Out again. Back to it. I lose count I'm so balled up. My left eye is shut tight; the right one is going fast. Everything is thunder. I don't hear no bells no more. Seems about every half hour the ref steps up, turns me around, and shoves me toward my corner. And each time fat Dave and skinny Izzy meet me and lead the way. A nightmare if ever there was one. And there was one; this is it!

It's the beginnin' of the seventh," says Dave as I slump onto a fuzzy stool. The tenth and final looks a mile away. Izzy is pouring the cool water right down my spine. It's more important than the Congressional Medal of Honor. "From here on," Dave continues, "you don't take one backward step except mebbe to get leverage into a punch."

..I got holes in my head, I think, if I just take one step forward! But I nod, "Yeah," and I know I will march in. Can I make worse even worse?

The bell. I go out to the wars again. Batelo lumbers off his stool. I rush into him with both fists churning. We are two buzz saws. He hooks his left mitt around the back of my neck, pulls forward and rakes the laces of his right glove across my eyes. I try to straighten up and he butts me to the face with his bullet head. It slices my lips inside my mouth and I swallow the blood so he won't see it.

I buckle into him again and get a gander at his quick surprise. I got no whip-pet-like glove brain, but I keep on jamming lefts and rights into that ugly puss till it starts falling back. It's the surprise I keep smashing at. He's in reverse gear and he wobbles a little. The crowd is now a zoo on the loose.

I'm eating plenty of red leather, too, but we're marching the other way now. I'm close on him and can hear his ragged breathing. It's best that I can hear him, because I sure can't see him clear. Soon I will need radar.

He busts another right hand into my mouth, and this time the blood comes out, down my chin. We punch it out, and I'm still moving forward. That bell is a lovely thing again. My feet choo-choo to the friendly corner. I don't know can a man be so tired and go on living! I am a candidate for the Old Soldier's Home.

"Eighth comin' up," Dave says as he takes my mouth-piece and gives me a bite of lemon. "You're makin' him fight a new kind of fight, Tuffy. An' he's too shot to change it."

"I—I should've done this," I pant, "when I was fightin' only one guy in here.."

Izzy chuckles soft a little, but that's all. I guess it's a sorry joke, anyhow.

The ten-second buzzer, then the bell.

They come too fast. The stool is a homey place. I can't get hurt on the stool. I get my feet beneath me, and Dave's hands lift under my armpits with a forward shove. Anything to save gas.

I meet Batelo when he's still in his own corner. The popping of gloves brings a solid wall of noise from the mob. Barging into him this way I find he is robbed blind of his old ka-slam. His joints are hinges that work good only one way. When he can't get set to punch, his punch is no longer a ball bat. A sweet thing to find out.

Still, I'm getting bushed. A rocking chair would be heaven! *Maybe Dave's wrong*, I think. *Maybe I can back off a little and recharge my batteries.* I quit crowding for a second. Batelo gets set. I catch it on the whiskers. It's a pip, a left hand, grooved. You would think I'd fouled a clothes line in the dark. I've had a private earthquake all my own. I'm on the deck, and Kennedy holds four fingers up for me to see. It would be lovely to stay down where the gloves can't bite at me no more.

But my ragged brain reminds that Harriet and a slew of friends are out there in the dark believing in me. It's all spilling through my mind . . . How many fingers, ref — eight? One more's all you'll allow? Right, I'll be climbing up if I can make it!

I'm up and leaning into Batelo again. His soggy gloves slosh into my chops from all angles. But I'm shoving him back, and it takes the slam out of them. He's not so tough now. He begins to look like he's been bobbing for apples in a tub of red paint.

The bell again. Seems that he wobbles a little as Kennedy breaks it up.

"There's no other way," moans Dave quietlike to me while he works like a demon. Izzy is massaging my gams which seem deader than the dodo.

I wonder can I even pile out there to meet the butcher this time? "I'm shootin' the works," I say. And I wonder, What works? What've I got left? It's brave talk—thick talk.

The same lift, the same strong shove. And I'm back to the troubles. I press in and level. Batelo goes back from my clout to his face. His own belts sluice off my

head. I keep on pitching, leaning in. Back, back he goes. I can't find him except for the sound of his grunting and wheezing. I follow the noise and chop at it, smash at it. Then I'm flailing nothing but air. Better yet, I stumble over him. He's down. I must've measured him for a shroud. Kennedy is shoving me back and screaming, "Scat! Scat!"

I wobble to one corner. The ref don't like the one I picked. He comes over, pushes me to another and leaves me be. By lifting the mouse draped over my left eye I can see a shadowy arm over there in the middle rising and falling. *He better not get up*, I think. *I got no more of that stuff left.*

The referee is back again. He's hiking my glove high into the air. Am I rich! I got two of everything! I'm wrapped up in more arms than you got hairs on your head. Everybody wants me; the radio announcer, Dave, Izzy, people I don't know. Before I blubber into that mike I get a quick flash at Harriet and the kid standing right below me. It's enough for me. It is worth dying a couple times over like I just did. All I can do is nod a tired smile their way.

Dave, the magician, finally clears our dressing room of all the guys who think I am Houdini. I got friends from hell to breakfast.

"That's the last of 'em" he puffs as he closes the door and hooks the latch. "Now,

let me at those cuts, Tuffy."

He has the hands of a mother when it comes to working black magic on pain. Izzy cuts gauze from my dukes. I'm dying by the inch in waiting to see my Harriet O'Hara who will be in the front office.

"I wonder, Dave, will I ever be the same?" I say.

"You will never fight a better fight than those last two rounds, Tuffy."

"You mean I will never again fight a fight!" I chortle through my shredded lips.

His hand stops working for just a little, then goes on probing. "Uh, yeah, I guess you're right."

"With the little jack I got left in the bank," I explain, "I open me a little boat building shop right smack here in Balboa."

"Say," he laughs, "with the ding-dong-dinero you cleaned up on the bets you're fit to retire!"

"But I didn't bet on myself, Dave."

"Y-y-you bet on Batelo?"

He's crazy with excitement while I nod yes.

"An' then you blasted him out anyhow?" he groans, coming right out of his pants.

"Dave, look," I say. "I'm home again. I squared myself away with a lot of people including myself. Balboa people respect me. You see, Dave, I'm an honest slob inside, but I never allow this slob's sentiment to interfere with how he lays his bets."

ALL-AMERICAN FOOTBALL MAGAZINE

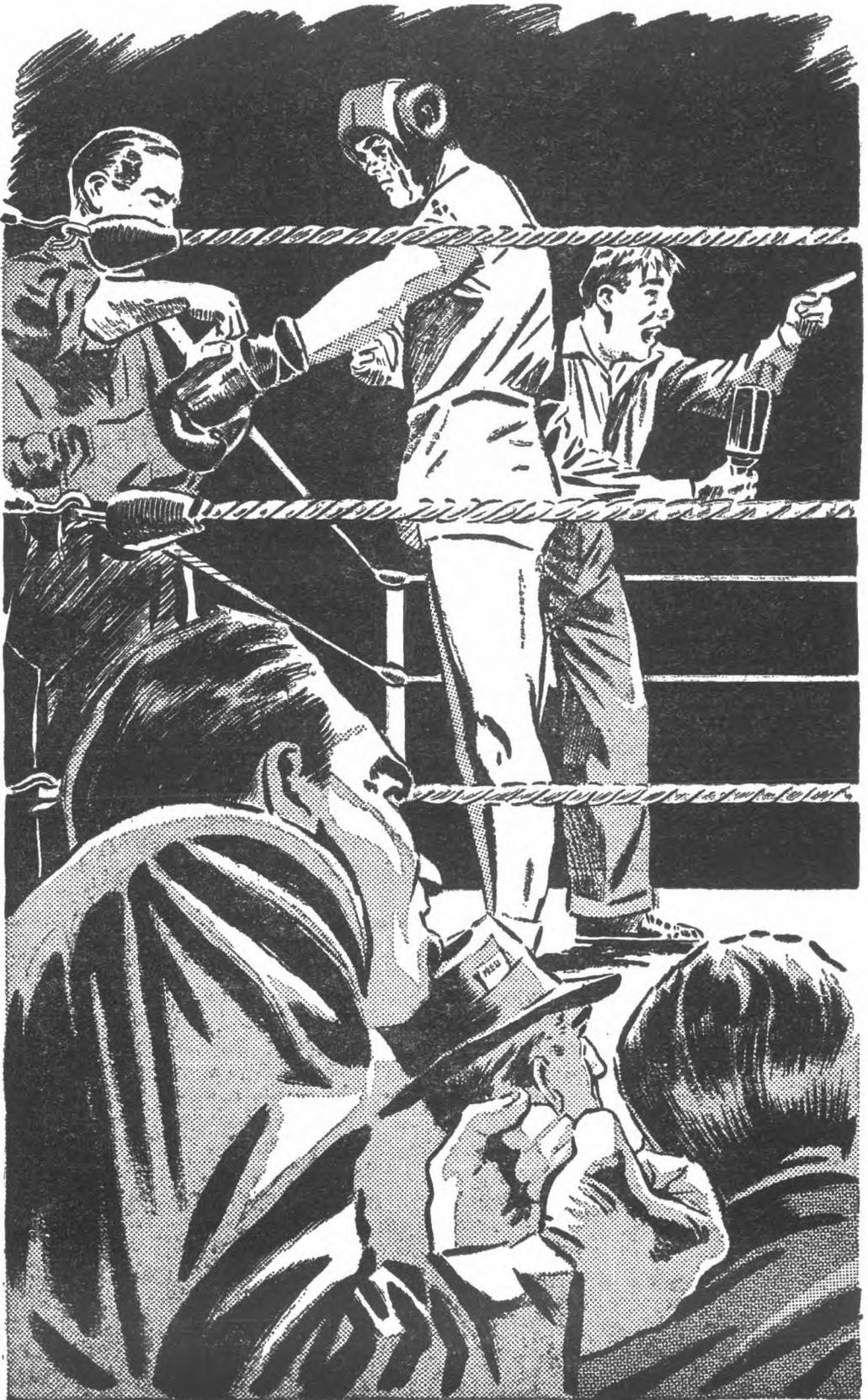
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FICTION AND FACT

ON SALE NOW AT YOUR FAVORITE NEWSSTAND



RING THAT SIREN!

By Les Etter

A lot of guys, especially those in the fight racket, have been neatly trimmed since Delilah first gave Samson the treatment. With skirt-silly muggs like Mickey Hale the gag still works as though it were thought up yesterday.

I LEAPED into the training ring as I saw the blood stream down from Mickey Hale's right eyebrow. I swung the water bottle like a club at the ugly mug of K. O. Wilson.

"Get out, you slob!" I yelled. "Get out before I brain you!"

Wilson backed away, fear and guilt written all over his pan. "Aw, what's eatin' yuh?" he mumbled. "It was jus' an' accident."

"Accident, hell!" I roared. "The kind of an accident Coke Harris paid you for Now get!"

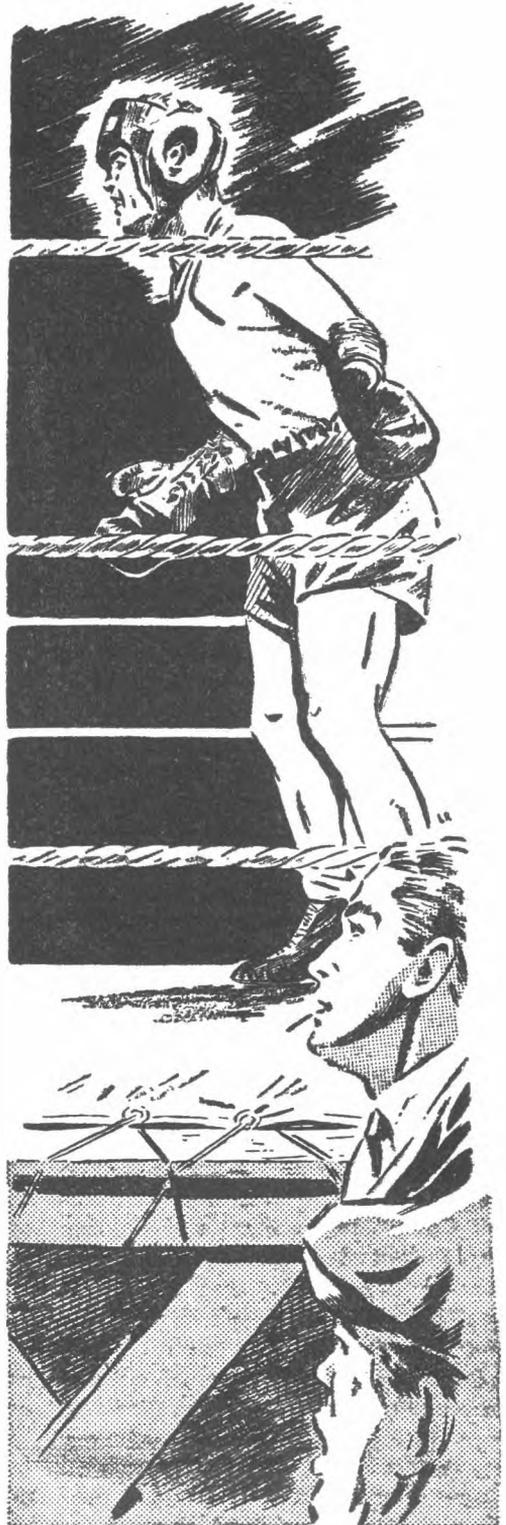
The guy got.

Mickey Hale, the ranking welterweight contender I'm training for a title shot at Tommy Frisco, the champ, laid a glove on my arm. "Easy, Doc," he said. "I'll take care of the monkey."

"He's taken care of," I said. "Unless he wants a busted skull. Let's see that eye."

Wilson's bullet head had made a nice mess of the eyebrow. Coke'll give him a bonus for that, I thought. The cut wasn't deep, or too bad, but it was important, with the title scrap only a week away. I went to work pronto.

Joe Bulger, Mickey's manager, stumbled through the ropes, pale and shaking.



"Get out, you slob," I yelled. "Get out before I brain you."

"Now what, Doc?" he fumed. "What is it this time?"

I told him while I worked. "One of those accidents," I said, "The kind that happens to guys who fight Coke Harris' boys."

Joe swore. Like me—Doc Carnahan, who'd been training Mickey since he began to look like a big timer—Joe Bulger had been having the whirling willies ever since we hit Oil City for this fifteen round title scrap.

Oil City was the champ's home town. And Coke Harris, his manager, was political boss of this rich but rotten burg. With his mob of crooked politicians, gunmen and chisellers, he was Mr. Fight Game himself in this corrupt community. Sid Melzow, the so-called promoter, was just a stooge.

Sure, we wanted Tommy Frisco, but we didn't want him in Oil City. But it was either there, or else. Joe Bulger pulled every string he knew to get it in the Garden or Chicago. But Coke and Tommy were in bad both places.

"No more boxing until I give the word," I told Mickey when I'd cleaned the cut. "It should be O. K. by fight time."

When Mickey headed for the dressing room, Joe asked flatly, "What's the low-down?"

"What do you think?" I asked bitterly. "This Frisco will open up that cut like an oyster. Once he does, well—they got their own referee, ain't they?"

We looked at each other.

We'd walked into this wide open. We should have figured this K. O. Wilson. The signs were up. It was a sucker pitch on our part. The first day we'd landed in Oil City there were at least a dozen boys of the right size working in the gym. But nobody was boxing that day, they were through, or they didn't feel good. The second day it was the same. We'd have brought a couple of guys of our own but they made us put up a five grand appearance forfeit, as well as insisting we do our training in Oil City for two weeks before the fight. To help the gate they said. But we were very short of ready moola.

When this Wilson, a middleweight, showed up we could have kissed him. He was a codd, sneering guy, tough and ex-

perienced, a guy who could and would take a punch. There was a featherweight who came around, too, a crooked-nosed guy who was fast as a streak. Things looked up that day.

We didn't even worry when we saw that this Wilson was pretty raw—the kind that uses laces, thumbs and elbows, and who wasn't above hooking in a low one, even in the gym. But we knew that his best in that line was violets compared with what Tommy Frisco could do.

Tommy Frisco, the thirty-one-year old champ, didn't want any part of us. Not that he wasn't good. He was the smartest, cutest, dirtiest gloveman in the business. And where he left off Coke Harris began. Besides, the guy could punch like hell. He'd held the title for five years, and he and Coke had milked it dry. But they wanted to retire with it, so why give us a break? They could fight us in Oil City, with the deck stacked against us, and then they could go outside and pick on punks like Blinky Wilson and Al Nadeau. That was cash in the bank. They weren't silly. But they were crooked as hell.

Like I said, we weren't worried about Wilson. Mickey always was his own best policeman. Even this day when the mug got so raw in the first round that I hollered at him, Mick just spun him in a clinch and winked at me. Then he shoved him away, belted him with a couple of body hooks and brought up the right, short and inside. It clipped Mr. Wilson on the chin. Mickey held him up until the bell rang.

I figured that would take care of the cute stuff. K.O. Wilson was a perfect gentleman for two minutes of the next round. Then, as he and Mickey rolled along the ropes in a half clinch, his bullet head jerked upward. That's when I grabbed the water bottle.

I was still sore as hell when I saw Duke Salter, sports editor of the *Blade*, sauntering toward me, a nasty grin on his face. Salter was a scrawny little guy with a fishy eye and big yellow teeth. He was the perfect type for the *Blade*, a crummy, blackmailing, racketeering sheet that made decent newspapermen grit their teeth every time it was mentioned.

"What gives, Doc?" he sneered. "Can't your bum protect himself? Or do you Big

Town guys go around conking sparring partners for showing up your meal ticket?"

"It was deliberate," I snapped. "If you'd been watching, you'd seen it yourself." Then my big Irish mouth got the best of me. I knew Salter's reputation as a friend of Coke Harris. "That is, if you wanted to see for yourself," I said.

"Yeah?" The color crept into Salter's pasty face. "So I'm a Home Towner, huh? I heard that crack about Coke Harris, too. So we're just a bunch of bushers out here, hey? Wait'll you read tomorrow's *Blade*, pal!"

Joe Bulger snapped, "O.K., Doc." And then he took Duke Salter's arm and walked away, trying to square things. I knew he hated Salter's guts, too. But business is business, even in this business.

MICKEY HALE was the closest thing I've seen to Harry Greb. Both in and out of the ring. He was a blond, flat-muscled kid of twenty who never stopped punching or moving—forward. He was a hard hitter, and he could box with the best when he chose. But he'd rather mix it, and he never cared what the other guy did. I loved him.

Mick had only one trouble—dolls. But that wasn't the first time that had happened in the fight game. Harry Greb had had the same trouble only you'd never have known it in the ring. It was the same with Mickey. He loved to dance, and he could dance and tear around all night and still show up at the gym, or in the ring, next day, fresh as a daisy. The guy's stamina was amazing.

He wasn't good-looking. Fighting the way he liked to, you couldn't help but get marked up some. But he had a slow, shy smile that twisted his homely features so that you couldn't help but smile back at him. And outside of the ring, the guy liked everybody.

Sometimes I used to give him hell. But he'd listen patiently a while and then he'd say: "Aw now, Doc. You know I fight better when I'm relaxed. Besides, what's this other guy got except two arms and two legs? Excuse me now, please. I got a date."

There was a pause in this routine once.

7—Fight—Fall

That was when Mickey first met Gloria Thurston. Up to then he could take dames or leave 'em alone—individually. After he met Gloria things were different.

Gloria was blonde, golden and all that, with blue eyes you could dive into and come up smiling. She had the figure, the personality—everything, including brains. She was the only daughter of Senator Charles Rockwell Thurston. She also was her father's secretary.

Mick met her in a night club the time he polished off Abe Ross in two rounds in Washington. She was with her old man that night. Colonel Thurston was a tall, white-haired distinguished looking gentleman, one of those oldtimers who always wore a Texas hat. He was senator from the state in which Oil City was located, and a redhot sports fan. Boxing was his special dish.

Senator Thurston also was Coke Harris' bitterest political rival. He'd had a tough fight on his hands from Coke's handpicked candidate in the previous election due to the fact that Oil City is the largest city in the area. The Senator was a scrapper, though, and he didn't seem to like the way boxing was run in Oil City.

I'm only a trainer. But long ago I learned to count my blessings in this fight racket. So I let well enough alone on this Gloria deal. I never did know what caused the break-up. This Gloria had the right kind of class, and while he was going with her, I always knew where Mickey was, and he behaved like a perfect little gentleman. Not that Mickey ever was a bum, just a lighthearted, carefree kid, the kind who believes the world is his oyster and enjoys opening it up.

The first I knew about the break was the night the kid fought Tiger Rawlins, the Texas Tornado, in the Garden. I knew something was up. Mick was restless and moody all day. Usually he's lighthearted as a summer breeze the day of a fight.

I went out to the center of the ring with him. In keeping with his reputation as a Texas badman, the Tiger sneered at Mickey. "Hi yah, Romeo," the Tiger said.

Mickey's eyes travelled up and down Rawlins, slowly, kind of hungry-like. He

never said a word. Next thing I knew Tiger Rawlins was on the canvas, spitting blood and teeth. He staggered up at the seven count, only to run into another right. He was game, or dumb, so he got up again. Mickey weaved in and plastered him against the ropes. The referee jumped in then, and they took the Tiger away to the hospital. Joe and I were scared stiff but Mickey just sat there, pulling on his clothes slowly, his eyes just narrow slits, his face drawn and pale. He never mentioned Gloria again.

But he was a changed boy after that. He hit the high spots harder than ever, but he was hitting opponents in the ring just as hard. So what could we do?

When we heard about that five grand appearance forfeit, Joe screamed to high Heaven. All Mickey said was: "Forget it, Joe. If we got anything left, get it down on me to stop the slob in seven. Let's make it interesting."

Interesting?

Say, we didn't even know the meaning of the word until we hit Oil City.

We reserved a suite at the Schuman, Oil City's most exclusive hotel. And right away our troubles began. Maybe we should have know better than to stop there. We might have known that Coke Harris would have a finger in anything as lucrative as the Schuman.

As soon as we arrived, Sid Melzow, our big, oily promoter pal, called a press conference, giving us all of ten minutes notice. The press gang was O. K. with the exception of Duke Salter and his photographer, a huge, sloppy guy with a pimply face and a mouthful of cheap wise-cracks. Joe handled the newspaper guys swell. He'd been a sports scribe himself before he became insane enough to qualify as a fight manager.

The photogs brought some classy-looking babes along to pose with Mickey. It seems that his reputation had kind of preceded him. I didn't go for that stuff myself, but as Joe always says—what the hell, publicity's publicity, ain't it?

Salter got pretty nasty and sarcastic, but we knew the pitch on him. The *Blade* was really Coke Harris' party sheet and the Duke was his chief bugler. So Joe just kind of ignored his dirty cracks. The *Blade* photographer, taking a cue from his

boss, started sounding off while he was taking the kid's picture surrounded by a bevy of beauties. Mick is no sissy but a couple of the fat boy's suggestive cracks got him. I saw his color rise.

He said: "Listen, Fatso, just take the picture, and thanks. I'll stand on my head for a picture any time which is more than you can do. But I'll do it without any cheap sound effects."

That got a laugh from the other cameramen and silenced Fatso. I felt better.

The dame angle got me suspicious, however. A lot of guys, especially in the fight racket, have been trimmed since Delilah first gave Sampson a treatment, but the gag still works like it was thought up yesterday.

There was a brunette there, with big dark eyes, sort of warm and foreign looking. She had a chassis of more than passing interest to any male under eighty, and Mick was only twenty. And very susceptible, I might add. Not that I blamed him in this case. If I'd been—well, skip it.

Anyway, she was giving Mickey the age-old business and Mick was taking it like a man. So I got professional in my interest. A trainer should know about things like this. I edged around quietly to one of the photographers and said: "Who's the brunette—the one talking to Mickey?"

"Oh," said the guy. "That is Marie, the manicurist here in the hotel. She is very photogenic, although this is the first time she ever posed for a picture for any of us. What's this guy Hale got, anyway?"

"Too much, I sometimes think," I sighed. "Much too much."

II

THEY PULLED another fancy twist on us that first day. There was a big party that night across the court from our room. It was getting plenty noisy, so as soon as we saw the spot was some kind of a banquet room, Joe checked with the desk to see if we could be shifted to quieter quarters. The clerk was polite but sorry. The hotel was jammed. Perhaps in a day or two.

Five minutes later somebody from the party called our room. A slightly tipsy

voice said to bring Mickey Hale. Some girls at the party wanted to meet him. I told them Mickey was in training, that he already was in bed. The guy cracked that wasn't the way he heard it—the way Mickey trained. What were we trying to do, high hat the party? He hoped Tommy Frisco would knock Mickey's head off and serve it off a platter. I hung up. We got three more in a row and then I fixed it with the switchboard. Ahhhh—Oil City!

We're all reasonable guys and we've been around, plenty. But that party kept getting noisier and wilder, and every five minutes some drunk would stick his head out the window and yell insults at us. About two a. m., Joe called the desk and complained. But all he got was apologies and polite regrets.

Some of Oil City's business elite were having a party, a very special affair. You understand, of course, the hotel could not afford to offend these, well, ahem, very special guests.

"Yeah, and what about us?" Joe said. "We're guests, too. There must be other people around here, too, who'd like a few winks before daylight."

"Sorry, sir," said the clerk. "I have my instructions."

"Who from?" Joe yelled. "Coke Harris?"

There was a gasp and a discreet cough from the other end of the wire. The receiver clicked.

The clerk must have spilled it. A few minutes later we got a whole barrage of catcalls and Bronx cheers from across the court. Then there was a lot of yelling and noise in the hall. Somebody banged on our door insistently.

"We wanna see Mickey Hale!" someone yelled. "We wanna see what the big shot looks like before Frisco gets through with him!"

I was boiling. Tommy got up, sore as hell. I yanked open the door, all set to pitch a right hand. Instead, I banged it shut and quickly twisted the key. Then I wondered if the door would cave in.

If those half dozen big, tough yeggs were samples of Oil City's business elite, then murder and mayhem must be the city's principal industries. They were hands-in-the-pockets guys. They whanged away at the door, kept yelling insults. And

I had an idea they weren't so tight as they pretended.

Mick was fit to be tied. Joe and I wrestled him back to bed. He wanted to go out and take those guys apart. But a blackjack or a gun butt is a tough handicap. Either one is tough to work against with bare fists, even if your mitts are the best in the world.

The Schuman was no place for us. And then I got an idea. A flash, just like that. And cussed myself for a dummy that I hadn't thought of it before.

Buster Glick, the oldtime bantamweight, was a swell little guy I'd done a lot of favors for—especially when he was winding up his career—usually on the seat of his pants. Buster, I'd heard, was managing some kind of a hotel in Oil City. I found him at the Belmont. And I was surprised to find that the Belmont was a small, exclusive residential hotel.

Buster was dressed to fit the part. Aside from a slightly flattened nose and a few scars, the little bald man with the shoe button eyes, might have been any successful businessman. He was glad to see me, but he was worried, too.

"Doc, I'll tell you," he said slowly. "We have a nice place here. We don't cater to trouble."

"You've named our needs, chum," I said. "You have three guests. You want the rent in advance, Mister?"

"It's not you," Buster said in a low voice. "It's them. How come you let them drag you out here? Don't you know the kind of breaks you get in Oil City?"

"Well?" I said.

"Oh hell!" Buster Glick said. "Bring your luggage over right away."

Finally we flew a couple of guys in from Chicago for Mickey to work with. He'd laid off boxing for three days and he had to get some work. But we weren't taking any more chances, expense or no expense. The featherweight who'd showed up the day K. O. Wilson came stuck. We checked his connections. He was O. K. The two Chicago kids were the goods. We started to make up for lost time—Mickey wearing a headgear and a special bandage over the eye—and these guys instructed where to shoot.

Mickey began to sing in the shower again. But it wasn't all on account of

the sparring partners from Chicago either. I looked at his fingernails, and I followed him to the Schuman one afternoon.

"You're a swell flatfoot," Mick said. "Walking behind all the way from the gym. Why didn't you walk over with me? Marie . . . Marie Cardini . . . this is my trainer, Doc Carnahan. Tsk . . . Tsk . . . look at the nails on the man!"

Marie, the manicurist, gave me a big smile. Brother, she was a looker, all right. When she flashed that smile . . . poor old Mickey, I thought. Poor old Doc!

Then these old eyes which have been looking over the scenes for quite a few years, picked up something on the girl's face. When she bent down to go back to work on Mickey's nails, there was a tightening, a faint sign of hardness, the kind of line that experience, and only experience, puts on a woman's face. But when she flashed that smile, you'd never notice it.

Marie came to the gym with Mickey every day. She said she could get off for an hour or so in the afternoon. She seemed like a good kid, although one afternoon when they came in I noticed a new sparkle in Mickey's eyes. And I could detect the faint odor of champagne cocktails. I began to develop a slow burn, but I decided to hold off until after the workout.

Mickey, never too hot in the gym, really turned it on for his girl friend that afternoon. He batted our Chicago boys all over.

And he made the featherweight look like he was tied to a post. He dropped him once and left handed him all over. The newspaper boys all raved about the workout. It was his best in Oil City.

The cut still was an angry welt but it was healing. It was too much to hope that Tommy Frisco wouldn't get to it. But if Mickey could get by for five or six rounds without getting it tapped, things might even up.

That night Mick brought this Marie Cardini to dinner at the Belmont. We usually ate up in the suite that Buster Glick had lined up for us. Even Joe, who disliked women on general principals, since he'd been thrice-married, thought she was all right.

"If Mickey has to have girl friends every place we go, why can't he pick 'em

like this one?" Joe said. "They're all poison but this one's the least poisonous I've seen for a long while."

I'd been watching Joe perform for Marie during dinner, so I said: "I'm surprised at you. I didn't think Mick would ever have a chance with her after listening to the line you were handing out."

Joe glared. Even his bald spot glowed.

But by that time Mick and Marie were downstairs to take a turn on the dance floor, much to my disgust.

A FEW nights before the fight Buster Glick was waiting for me in the lobby of the Belmont. I could see that he had something on his mind. He led me back to his private office.

"What do you know about this little Cardini number, the one that Mickey's running around with?" he asked.

"Nothing," I answered. "But brother, she's a better deal for the kid than some of the numbers he's chased. You should see the trouble I've had."

"So I've heard," Buster said drily. "But did you know that this Marie is really the ex-wife of one of our better gunmen, Rocky Tolliver, the guy who is in stir on a bank-tapping job?"

All I could do was look at Buster.

"I thought she looked familiar so I checked on her," Buster said. "Not that it's really anything against her, except that my information is that she's more or less the girl friend of a guy you know—Coke Harris!"

I tried to think that one over. Finally, I said, "But she works as a manicurist. You'd think that—"

"Yeah," said Buster. "And lives in an apartment that her salary wouldn't even begin to pay the rent for. And drives a very nice little coupe."

That was something, and Joe Bulger thought so, too.

"We better talk to the kid about it right away," said Joe. "The fight's only two days away. If she's gonna pull anything, now is the time to put a crimp in it."

"On the other hand," I said thoughtfully. "Maybe we ought to talk to her rather than Mickey. He's going to be upset about this and we got enough to worry about the way it is. Besides, if the

dame knows we're wise to her, she'll maybe lay off."

"Maybe you got something," Joe said. "Let's try her first."

We went to the barber shop but we were told that it was her day off. We went to the gym and she wasn't there either. Mickey was, and he was in high spirits. The newspaper boys all were buzzing about how good he looked. They began saying that his eye probably wouldn't bother him at all. But that didn't fool me. I knew better. Frisco would go to work on that cut early. We'd be lucky to get by with it at all. Mick's best chance was to go after the champ early, wear him down in a hurry, keep him on the defensive. The longer the fight went the better chance it had of being stopped by that cut eye.

I asked Mickey about Marie after the workout—his last hard one before the fight. "Her mother's sick," he said. "She went home for a day. She'll be back tomorrow, or at least in time for the fight. We got a big party planned for afterwards."

Joe and I exchanged glances. What did the dame have up her sleeve? Whatever it was, she'd have to act fast. This was Wednesday night and the fight was Friday. But Mick turned in early and slept like a baby.

"Well," Joe said. "This is one more night out of the way, and we know where he is."

"They still got time," I said.

"Yeah, but what can they do?" said Joe. "They can't get away with tripping him in the lobby and cutting his eye again. Or doping his food. What can the dame do if we're with him all the time?"

"That's the point," I said. "We've got to stick with him."

"Why don't you break the news to him?" Joe said. "Maybe that'd make our job easier. You know that except for that Thurston babe, none of them ever meant much to Mickey."

Next morning after we'd had breakfast and taken a stroll, Mick and I were sitting upstairs in the room.

"Heard from Marie?" I said casually.

"No," said the kid. "She'll probably call this afternoon."



Mickey knew how to wow dames.

"By the way," I said, also casually. "Did you know that she had been married—to Rocky Tolliver, the gunman, who used to be Coke Harris' right hand man?"

Mickey never batted an eye. "Yeah," he said. "She told me all about that. She picked the wrong horse. She was just a silly kid then."

I was the guy who blinked. Smart girl, this Marie. But clever old Doc Carnahan was going to see what else the kid knew. "I don't want you to get sore," I said, "but some of the boys say that she is tied up with Coke Harris."

"A lotta rumors get around," Mick said carelessly. "Don't you believe that. She hates Harris. She blames him for Rocky's troubles."

"Well," I said. "I'm glad you know. I was worried. A lot of things can happen before this fight, and there's lots of Frisco money around."

Mickey had himself a big yawn. "A lot of things are going to happen after the bell," he said. "All of them to Frisco. There is one guy I can take. Besides Marie doesn't like him either. He's tried to date her and he's kind of a fresh guy."

My old dome was whirling. Either Joe and Buster and I were all nuts, or this dame had our little Mickey all fattened up for some kind of a big kill. Joe was amazed when I repeated the conversation.

"Mick has never been too dumb where women are concerned," he said. "Maybe this dame really is carrying the torch."

But I'm stubborn. The ex-Mrs. Tolliver

ver nee Cardini, hadn't sold me yet. There was something, to paraphrase Mr. W. Shakespeare, rotten—and it wasn't as far away as Denmark. "If she's carrying a torch," I cracked. "It's to burn him down."

"A pessimist," said Joe. "Just a damn' pessimist."

WE went down to weigh in and Mick tipped the scales at one forty-six. The champ was a pound heavier, two inches taller, and there was a tint and glow to his olive skin that told of perfect condition. He was a curly-haired, dark complexioned guy with a granite face and slope shoulders. For all his years in the ring he hadn't been hit much. Only his nose gave him away. Lean, fast and dirtier than hell, I thought. And also a hitter.

Mick kept looking around. He was nervous and restless. I knew what the score was. He was waiting to hear from Marie. He didn't even hear the cracks that Tommy Frisco made to the newsmen. They were calculated to rile him and they drew laughter. But Mickey only shook his head impatiently and hurried into his street clothes.

We got back from the hotel but there still was no call from Marie. The kid got more and more restless. He called there a couple of times but there was no answer.

"Something's up," I said to Joe in the hall. "I feel it in my bones. That dame isn't stalling for nothing. We better stick pretty close."

Mickey was restless and moody. He listened to radio programs, read the newspapers, and looked out the window. Jack wrote some letters and made some long distance calls.

"I'm going down for a couple of cigars," I told him. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

I got my cigars and started for the elevator.

Buster Glick came across the lobby and we talked about the fight. He said he'd heard that Senator Thurston might fly out for the fight.

"That might be a break," he said. "Old Colonel Thurston would make political capital out of anything they might pull. Especially if they tried to stop it. The

referees are all appointees of Coke Harris' crowd."

We gabbed for maybe ten or fifteen minutes when I looked across the lobby and saw Joe Bulger sitting on a davenport talking to some guy. I said, "Excuse me," to Buster and walked over to Joe.

"Where's Mickey?" I said.

"He was getting ready for bed. I figured you'd be right back anyway," Joe said.

"How long you been down here?" I asked.

"May ten, fifteen minutes," he said. "I thought——"

I didn't wait. The lobby was full and the elevator service was slow. I tore out of the car when it reached the twelfth floor.

There was a sheet of hotel stationery clipped to Mickey's door, neatly folded. It read: *Can't sleep. Marie called. Back in an hour.*

I unlocked the door and took a fast gander around. Everything was just as we left it. Besides the note was in Mickey's handwriting. There could be no question about that.

I started out the door and almost bumped into Joe.

"Well," I said, "He's gone."

"Gone where?" I handed him the note.

We hit the elevator again and got hold of Buster Glick. He checked with the doorman. The big guy in the shiny buttons said, why yes, he'd seen Mickey walk across the street and climb into a Buick convertible. Yes, a woman was driving it, but there didn't seem to be anybody else in the car.

We looked up Marie Cardini's address. "At the risk of being a chump," I told Joe. "I'm taking a cab out there."

"Me, too," said Joe, and his face had lost a lot of its usual florid color.

We took a cab and got out there very fast. I checked my watch, however, and they had a good forty minute start on us. It was a very swank apartment house, not the kind you'd expect a manicurist to live in.

There was a white-haired elderly woman on the switchboard. She was the dignified, old maidish type. I asked for Miss Cardini's apartment.

She said: "Miss Cardini just left, not over ten minutes ago."

"Did she say where she was going?" I snapped.

"Who was with her?" Joe blurted.

The woman looked alarmed. We both caught on quick. Both Joe and I have been taken for cops before. We're that type. And it sometimes helps, like it did now.

"You're not officers, are you?" she asked, hesitating.

"Could be, lady," I said quickly.

Joe said: "What did this young guy look like?"

"Why, I believe he was wearing a gray sport coat. Miss Cardini only nodded to me. She was having a little—er, difficulty, with the young man. He appeared to be—well—a little intoxicated."

"Intoxicated!" Joe and I both yelled in the same breath. The old lady looked at us, scared to death.

"Get me the Belmont," I said, as soon as I could think again.

I told Buster Glick what had happened. "Try the Club Orientale," Buster said. "That's a hang-out for that mob. That's where they could get away with almost anything, short of murder. Or else try the Midway Inn, or maybe the Hollywood, or the Trailside Inn—" He named half a dozen spots. "I'll watch here and you might check me in half an hour," he said.

III

THE CLUB ORIENTALE was on the outskirts of Oil City, a large, white two-story building with a huge neon sign on top. We paid the cabby his fare and then Jack tore a ten dollar bill in half and handed it to the startled guy.

"The other half's yours if you wait—that plus the fare back downtown and a tip. We won't be long."

"We hope," I said.

The cabby nodded vigorously. We went in and found a nicely furnished joint with a bar on one side, and a large room with a dance floor on the other. We walked through the bar and we didn't see anybody we knew. A husky, hard-eyed waiter found us a table for two. We or-

dered a drink and looked around. The crowd wasn't too large but we couldn't spot Mickey or Marie.

Joe nodded his head toward a plush-carpeted stairway leading to the second floor. A waiter was going up with a tray-load of drinks.

"I'll go up and take a look," he said.

Joe went upstairs and the big waiter hurried over. He had our drinks. I noticed he kept staring anxiously at the stairway. We're warm, I thought, we're plenty warm.

"The other gentleman?" the waiter asked.

I tried to be delicate. "The men's room," I said.

"Oh sir," said the guy. "He'll not find it up there." He pointed toward the end of the room where two brightly-lit signs proclaimed the location and the sex of these night club necessities.

"Well, he'll be back in a minute," I said carelessly.

The guy moved away. He looked back, watching me. I tasted my drink and sat there until he had moved toward the kitchen. I got up and walked toward the men's room and then turned and hurried quickly upstairs.

The hall lights were dim. On either side were a row of small, private dining rooms. The doors to most were closed but through them came the sound of laughter and conversation. I walked swiftly down the narrow hallway, turned a corner and there was Joe. He stood listening outside a door, and he motioned to me.

"I thought I heard Marie's voice," he said. "I'm not sure."

Just then the sound of ice clinking in glasses and soft footsteps came from somewhere behind us. A waiter, bringing more drinks to one of the rooms. If he turned the corner he'd spot us. I tapped very gently on the door, turned the knob and pressed. I tried to look a little tight. I was ready to excuse myself if I was in the wrong place.

I wasn't.

What I saw made me step quickly and silently inside. I felt Joe move in right behind me.

It was the most beautiful frame-up I ever saw.

Mickey was half-sprawled, dead to the world, on a leather seat, behind a table loaded with empty glasses, bottles and the usual debris. A very woozy looking blonde was draped against him, her hair hanging in her eyes.

I couldn't tell who she was until big Fatso, the *Blade* cameraman, said: "Listen, honey, pull your dress down off your shoulder more...that's right. Now pull his shirt collar open and jerk his tie loose. He doesn't look stiff enough." The fat guy giggled.

Marie was wearing a blonde wig and she had a lot of heavy make-up on. You'd never have recognized her in a photo.

Marie said in a cold hard voice: "Listen, fat boy. If he was any stiffer we'd have to embalm him. I must've over-loaded that mickey at the apartment. If it wasn't for Jake I'd never even got him up the back steps. Even then he fell on his kisser and cut his eye again."

Fatso's broad beam was turned toward us. He was squinting through his camera and he very amply screened us.

Fatso said: "Coke ought to give you a bonus for that. I wonder where he is?"

"Never mind," Marie said impatiently. "Let's get going. What the hell kind of a photographer are you, anyway? I'm tired of wrestling this bum around and you already got three shots. And I got blood all over my coat. Come on, let's go!"

I said: "Where are you going, Mrs. Tolliver, to join your husband in the can?"

Marie straightened slowly, her eyes staring. She didn't even scream. She just said: "Huh?" And then she slumped forward in a dead faint.

It was Fatso who screamed, shrilly, like a woman. But he didn't scream long, or too loud, because Joe had a hand on his throat. Joe said: "I'll take the camera, buddy." He lifted it gently from Fatso's moist and nerveless hand. He pushed Fatso down on the bench and shut the door and locked it.

I shoved Marie's inert form aside and looked at Mickey's eye. It had been reopened. There was dirt in the cut and the cheekbone was skinned. He must have fallen limp as an empty sack.

We had to get him out of there. We got him on his feet but his legs were

rubbery. He began to mumble and his face was fish-belly white. I knew all about mickeys. He was going to be awfully sick for a few hours. That and the cut over his eye just about finished us. Even if the *Blade* wasn't going to run pictures showing how the challenger got ready for a championship fight. Even if we got into the ring, and even if we squawked, those pictures would have finished us forever. We'd have a hell of a time alibing a deal like that.

Joe frisked Fatso for more plates. I wanted to talk to Marie but she still was out like a light. So I decided to forego that pleasure. We had to get out. We started for the door, holding up Mickey.

There was a knock. Joe eased Mickey down, and I whispered in Fatso's ear.

"Who—who is it?" the fat boy asked weakly.

"It's me—open up." I'd heard Coke Harris' voice before.

I jerked Coke in through the door so fast that his greasy black hair flew straight up. Then I slapped him into a corner. He was a short, fat guy, about forty-five and plenty tough. But he was too surprised and dazed to do anything right then but stare. I frisked him and took a snub-nosed revolver from his pocket.

"Your girl friend's all right, Coke," Joe said. "She just fainted with delight at the sight of us."

Coke was white with rage as I made him lead the way to the backstairs. I was right behind him, the gun jabbing his back through my coat pocket. Next came Fatso, supporting Mickey. Joe brought up the rear, helping hold up our boy. We left Marie, still out, locked in the room.

At the bottom of the stairs a guy stepped out of the shadows. I nudged Coke hard.

"Just a pass-out, Willie," Coke said.

"O. K., boss," Willie answered.

The cabby was still waiting. "I thought you musta died," he said.

"Some of us almost did," Joe said.

They put Mickey in the cab. I told Joe to keep Fatso with him for a minute. Then I walked Coke behind some bushes on the lawn.

"What're you going to do?" Coke asked nervously. "Let's be reasonable, now, Doc.

We can call the whole thing off. We'll give you back your five grand. We'll——"

He never finished. I said: "We got all the fat boy's plates. So there'll still be a fight——if I have to hold Mickey in the ring. We owe you a lot, Coke, and here's the first payment——"

I'd shifted my gun to my left hand. I hit Coke Harris full on the chin with my right hand, swinging as hard as I could. He flew backward into the bushes and lay still.

"Mickey'll clean up the rest of the debt tomorrow night," I said. But Coke didn't hear me. Then I threw the gun as far as I could in the other direction.

I hurried back and then Joe whirled Fatso around and booted a dropkick off his beam. Then Joe jumped up and down on the camera a few times and booted it after him. He put all the plates in his pocket.

Mickey was sick several times before we got back to the hotel. But Buster Glick was waiting up for us and he took us to his private suite and made black coffee while I swabbed the eye. I knew then that we were sunk. I wasn't worried about Mickey's being sick. He was in good shape, a few hours rest, and he'd be O. K. But Tommy Frisco could name the round with that eye.

We got ready to take Mickey back to our own rooms but Buster said: "Let him sleep here. It's O. K." Then he said, "Oh, I fotgot." He pulled a telegram out of his pocket and handed it to Joe.

It read: ARRIVING FOR FIGHT FRIDAY. WANT TO CHECK ON RUMORS ABOUT IT WITH YOU. SEE YOU AT ONCE ON ARRIVAL.

Senator Thurston.

"Maybe it isn't in the bag yet," Joe said.

Mickey's eyes were bloodshot and he was still sick and reeling when he woke up. But after I'd forced some breakfast down him and taken him for a walk he began to look better.

All he said was: "What a sucker I am. But watch me tonight!"

What had happened, he said, was simple enough. Marie had called him just after Joe left the room. She seemed very worried and wanted to see him right

away. He thought it might be in connection with her mother's illness. So she picked him up at the side door of the hotel. The rest was easy. They went to the apartment where they could talk. She suggested they have a drink——just one——while they talked. After that nothing was very clear. I filled in the rest for him. His color came back very rapidly as I talked, a nice, deep shade of brick red.

IV

THAT NIGHT fifty bucks couldn't have bought you standing room in the Oil City Stadium. When the door opened and Senator Thurston walked in with Jack and a couple of guys I'd never seen before, the wave of sound was enough to bust your ear drums. The prelims were on and the crowd really was tuning up.

I shook hands with Colonel Thurston, and then he introduced the big guy with him, a guy with a square jaw and piercing gray eyes——somebody I knew I'd seen somewhere before.

"Meet Johnny Luff," the Colonel said. "Formerly of the FBI, now in charge protection for race tracks." Johnny Luff. Now I remembered. He was the guy who had cleaned up the Benninger gang of bank robbers and murderers; the guy who had solved half a dozen kidnappings, who had made this innocent pastime no longer fun for the thugs who tried it.

"Johnny has been retained by me," Senator Thurston said, and there was a frosty twinkle in his eye, "to do a little checking around Oil City."

He introduced the other guy as Luff's assistant. Joe beamed at me. "At least," he said, "There'll be a chance for us to get into the ring with whole skins."

Colonel Thurston stuck out his hand to Mickey. "When this is over, Mickey," he said. "I'd like to talk with you. I have rather an——er, ah——urgent matter to discuss."

There was a bigger roar from outside. Somebody hollered that Tommy Frisco was in the ring.

Colonel Thurston threw up his hand. "Luck," he smiled, and the three men hurried out.

"This is it, Mickey," I said. And then



Grudgingly, the announcer called up Colonel Thurston.

we went up into the night air and climbed in the ring.

Colonel Thurston was at the ringside. The announcer, grudgingly, I thought, called him up with a dozen other celebrities. He wished both men luck, and then walked over to the referee.

I was just heading for Frisco's corner to watch them put on the gloves, and I heard the Colonel say to the ref:

"I'm sure this will be a nice, clean fight, with such a competent official as I know you are, in the ring. It would be too bad, to have it stopped unless absolutely necessary. But I know that this just can't happen with you as referee. I wish you luck." He stared into the official's eyes and he was not smiling in that instant.

Coke Harris' referee smiled back feebly. He looked kind of sick.

I went back to our corner and pulled the robe off Mickey and the gong clanged loudly.

Tommy Frisco came out fast and snapped a fast left at Mickey's eyebrow. Mick was looking for it and brushed it aside and bounced a right off Tommy's ribs that did no damage. Tommy jabbed twice more at the eye and was short both times. Mickey weaved and circled and suddenly jumped in—squarely into a grooved right hand shot that dumped him

into the ropes. Instantly the crowd was on its feet.

Frisco jumped in now, punching like a machine gun. He spun Mickey with a hook, missed with a right and caught him with a left high on the head that really shook our boy. But Mickey, blue eyes gleaming, punched furiously at the body. And after a clinch which they fought their with big red splotches. They punched way out of, Frisco's body was marked each other furiously along the ropes and at the bell, each swung three or four punches after it had sounded. The crowd kept it up all during the intermission.

Three rounds went by, fast, beautiful rounds. Mickey kept his hands high and his head low, and he kept stepping up the pace. Tommy hadn't got a chance at his eye yet. But I knew it couldn't last. Sooner or later, in one of the swift, punching flurries, Frisco was going to get that eye. Mickey knew it, too, and he was trying his darnedest to make those heavy shots to the body take their toll now.

But despite his thirty-one years, the welter king could go. Mickey's shots were glancing, or Tommy was going away, and he was peppering Mick with point-getting shots.

Suddenly, midway in the fourth, it happened. Tommy plastered Mick with three

beautiful left hands as the kid tore in. The third one glanced off his skull at the exact edge of the right eyebrow. Instantly a thin, red line appeared, and a moment later the blood cry went up from the crowd.

Tommy threw a cyclone of leather at Mickey's head. But Mick dove into a clinch and they tugged away along the ropes right above our corner.

"How'd you like that one, kid?" Tommy said. "I got you now!"

"Like hell!" said Mick. He drove a left hook deep into Tommy's body. "How was that?" he said.

The punch bent Tommy almost double and instantly Mickey ripped in a right uppercut that dropped the champ to his knees. He was up instantly ripping both hands to the head, with Mickey swinging back as fast as he could.

I found myself yelling my head off at Mickey. Because the eye was beginning to stream blood now as these two wild men stood flat footed and pitched torrid leather at each other.

And then I was screaming again, but for a different reason. One of Mickey's right swings had opened a cut under the champion's left eye. And now both of them were bleeding. There would be work in Frisco's corner at the end of the fourth.

Round five was a blood-and-thunder brawl. When it was over, Mickey had both eyes cut. Joe was shaking so that I shoved him out of the ring. He was spilling things and simply getting in the way. The champ had dropped Mickey for no count with a beautiful right hand shot to the kisser. And Mick had knocked the champ into the ropes with a swishing left hook that sounded like somebody beating a carpet.

"Forget that head stuff!" I snapped between rounds. "Peg him in the guts!" I kept thinking of those thirty-one years. You can only take them in the midsection so long. And then your legs begin to bend.

I WAS worried at the end of the sixth. And I was scared stiff at the end of the seventh. The champ knew what he had to do now. He was letting Mickey come on. His left was raking Mickey's eyes. The laces, the thumb, the twist of a

neat, cruel glove. I worked like mad between rounds. But I knew that Mick's eyes would be closed tight long before the fifteenth. That would be the end—legitimately.

The buzzer sounded for the eighth and I climbed down. My foot landed in the water bucket and I stooped to pick it up. The terrific, smashing roar of the crowd straightened me with a jerk.

Mickey was on the floor, rolling under the ropes. His face was perfectly blank. At six he staggered up while I screamed at him to take a nine count. He was down and up again and down before you could say it. The last punch must have cleared his head a little because he took nine seconds on one knee, nodding toward me that he was all right. He got up and tincanned until the bell. But the blood was pouring from both cuts now.

The referee looked at us uncertainly. He glanced appealingly toward where Colonel Thurston sat. There was no expression on the Colonel's face. The ref next glanced furtively at Coke Harris. Coke's eyes were savage but he saw the faces of Colonel Thurston, and of Johnny Luff turned toward him. He knew the score; the deck wasn't stacked all on one side now.

Finally the ref came over and looked at the cuts. "Stop this and I'll kill you," Mickey said. "Go back and tell Coke that I'm strong as a bull."

The ref looked at me, misery in his eyes. "You heard what the man said," I snapped.

Mickey was leaning forward, ready for the bell, when I heard it, too. We both turned our heads. I knew that voice.

"Mickey!" screamed that voice—the voice of Gloria Thurston. "Go get him, Honey!" We stared at Gloria Thurston, blonde and lovely, back in the fifth row.

"Oh Geez!" Mickey said.

The kid was in Frisco's corner before I could get down from the ring apron. Frisco saw him and braced to meet the storm. They swirled around the canvas like a pair of pit bulldogs. There was no sharpshooting by Frisco now. He was fighting for his title, for his life. But he kept his head. Experience moved his feet this way, twisted his body into protective cover. He was battered from rope to rope,

but he was still standing. As the inhuman avalanche slowed, he sidled to the center of the ring.

I hated him in that instant. Hated and admired him. His face was puffed and bleeding. His body was a mass of welts. But he stood up there, straight and proud, a champion, fencing off that deadly stream of leather, cool and dogged. He was tough and he was dirty, but he was ready to ride all the way, and he was a man.

"Two more," gasped Mickey. "It'll take two more. He's tough."

"Watch yourself," I said. "He's playing for the big one. He's not through."

I glanced across the ring. Harris' eyes were black with hate. I saw the blue lump I'd put on his chin showing up under the glare of the white-hot ring lights. I made motions. Coke could only look back . . .

Tommy Frisco leaned forward, sneering, and spat on the canvas. The bell, and Mickey got up and walked out. Tommy shot a left. Mick went under it and dumped a right hand to the body. It should have killed Tommy. It smacked into the liver and Tommy's face twisted and his legs went rubbery. He clutched at Mick like a drowning man. And then, when he could gasp again, he roughed my boy wildly in a clinch. He threw the works, laces, thumbs, elbows, a knee, and he even tried to butt. But Mickey's head was too low.

They broke. But this time Tommy stepped in so quick with a smashing hook that he knocked Mickey into the ropes before he could get his hands up. The mouthpiece skidded across the canvas and as Mick stared at it stupidly, the champ whanged him again. Mickey Hale's eyes glazed, and I knew that this was it . . . the end . . . Frisco's tortured muscles tensed. He tapped Mick's nose deftly with a jab. The right hand...the right hand...down the groove...

But Tommy was too hasty. Mick's head bobbed back and then he slumped. The full impact of the champ's knuckles caught him on top of the head and then

skidded off. Mickey stumbled forward. He saw the champion's jaw, wide open . . .

Mick swung three left hooks. Then he braced his feet wide and swung a right hand—a right hand like the rankest of all amateurs. The champ fell back heavily, his head bouncing. His legs thrashed once and were still. Mickey staggered to the ropes and held on.

Coke Harris got up and walked up the aisle. He did not even bother to help pick up the man who had helped make him—who had helped build up the machine which controlled Oil City. I looked closely at the sag in his shoulders. I knew now that Senator Thurston had nothing to worry about.

I wrestled Mickey through the ropes and into the aisle finally. But I had plenty of trouble. Principally from a blonde girl who was kissing him and being kissed back and who was getting blood all over the gray ensemble she was wearing.

She kept saying it over and over, and it didn't make sense. "Mickey, oh, Mickey!" Very nutty.

We started to go into the dressing room when the Senator grabbed his daughter to keep her from wandering in where angels ought to know better.

"When he gets some clothes on he'll be out," smiled the Senator. "Now you wait here."

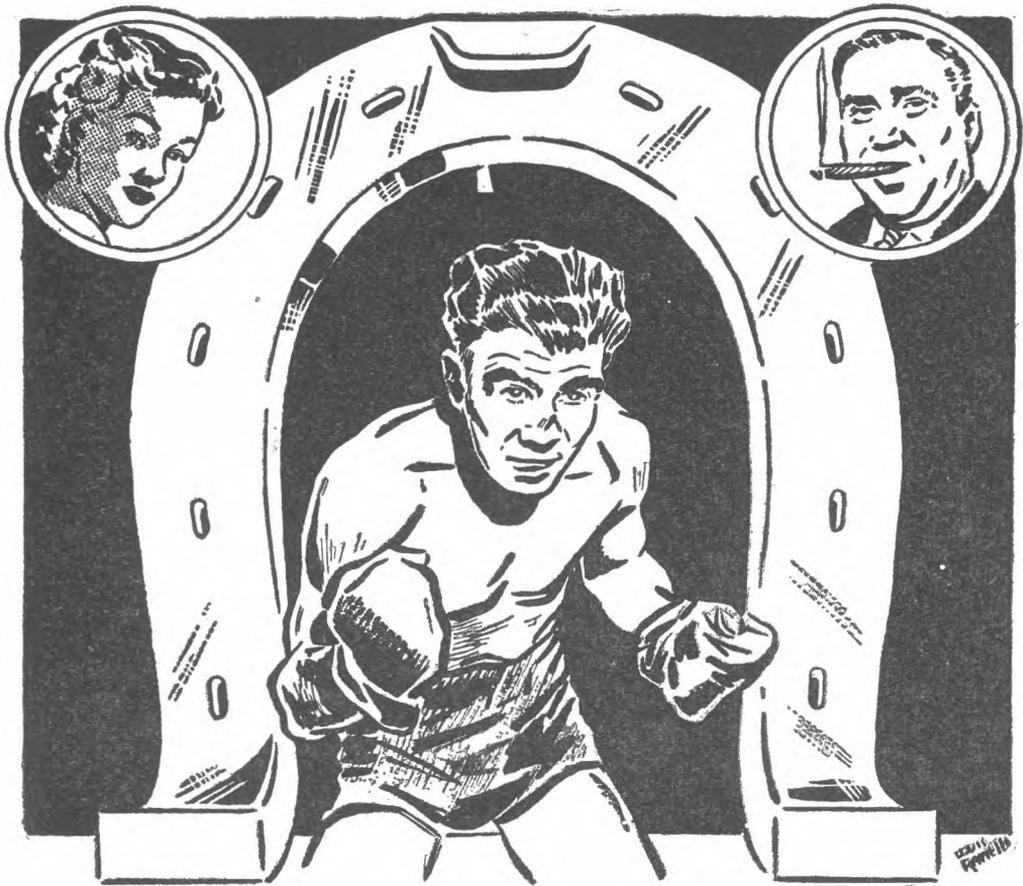
"Will I!" shouted the girl.

Senator Thurston lit a cigar. We were all up in Buster Glick's apartment. He lit it slowly, smiling, enjoying each puff.

"You know," he said. "This Marie Cardini is not a bad sort, just a bit weak. But she knows what Coke Harris is now. She made a clean sweep of the whole business. And Mr. Coke Harris, as of now, this instant, is no longer in the boxing business—nor the business of politics."

I said: "Well, anyway, we got a champ on our hands."

Gloria Thurston said: "Our hands—our hands is right. Only—you Doc—you count only in training the champ—my champ!"



The Bum Wears Yellow

By Ric Bentley

His best friend couldn't tell you. Nor his girl. Nor his manager. Nor could all the fighters that he'd laid on canvas with his devastating Blackjack Punch tell you why Lucky Jack was suddenly showing the yellow streak now . . . at the threshold of the title.

“**S**O YOU want to know about ‘Lucky’ Jack?” In repeating their question I brought back old memories. “Sure, what you want to know?”

“He’s not called ‘Lucky’ any more, Nealy,” Lou Harmon of the *Times*, reminded.

I let the toothpick shift to the other side of my mouth. “No, he isn’t. He’s giving a concert tonight at Carnegie, that right?”

This Lucky Jack was now William Jack, the noted young concert pianist. Once I had hopes of making him a great middle-weight champ, but I had only partially succeeded.

“What you want to know?” I asked

again. Me, Nealy McRae, now a broken-down manager and part-time referee, being interviewed about a famous kid like this William Jack. No, he hadn’t forgotten me; I was too proud and hard-headed to accept his help. And how did boxing tie in with music, and with concerts? Well, it did in this case.

“Give us the whole story,” Whitey Moreland of the *Journal*, says. “Don’t skip a thing. Make it hot!”

I shrugged. “Pull up a chair, boys. It will be a long one.”

“Remember, Nealy,” it was Lou Harmon again, “we want everything!”

I said slowly, “Yeah, everything!”

I met Lucky Jack—that is what he called himself then—in December of 1944. He went into the Navy the day after Pearl Harbor. He was seventeen at the time, and he served three years on active duty in the Pacific. He came back without a scratch, but he did contract tropical fever, which played a large part in his discharge. I saw him in a local gym, watched him box a couple of boys, took a liking to him.

The kid was a marvel. He was only an average boxer, but he could slug, he could hit. Man, did he dish it out to the local favorites! Flattened three of them in one day! He wasn't a big fellow, nor was he as solid as I liked them. He could take a punch pretty well for a couple of rounds, but if he didn't connect before that time he was as good as gone. He had to get them quick, and that's just what he did.

The first time he had ever climbed into a ring he got stretched out like a stiff on a stone slab in the city morgue. After that he always got them first. He hadn't lost a fight since.

But there was one hitch. The kid's folks wanted him to play the piano, wanted to see him on stage someday, playing Chopin or Brahms with a full-sized symphony orchestra behind him. And the kid could play. He had the stuff. But he wanted things quick-like. So do most of us, I reckon. He knew it would take a lot more study to realize his parents wishes, and the kid wouldn't wait.

At the time I was pretty well known in the nose-bashing business, and I took a fancy to the kid. If he wanted to fight he might as well do it under me. I talked it over with him, he was for it, and that was the beginning. Nealy McRae, manager; Lucky Jack, fighter.

His folks conceded gracefully; they wanted him to be happy, and if the ring was what he wanted they were not going to stand in the way. The kid promised he'd watch his hands, so if he changed his mind he could still go back to the piano. Once-broken, poorly-healed fingers do not a pianist make.

Thus we were settled. I went right to work with him, taught him every trick and every angle I knew. He was an apt pupil; he was a natural. He beat up his sparring partners once a day, put in hours of roadwork, punched the bag and studied

the bunch of films I had bought up for him. It wasn't long 'til he started pointing out things I never would of noticed myself. I knew I had something at last.

The kid had a deadly punch: a short, solid right chop to the jaw. He used it often, and with devastating effect. I've seen men built like granite drop under that blow.

But I taught him to use his left; not just to jab with, but to land with full force, to snap the opponent's head back, to line him up for that powerful chop.

The Navy had taught him speed and hustle, but it had not taken the cockiness out of him. He was good, and he knew it. He was going to the top in a hurry.

I LINED up a fight for him. Sailor Kelly, a gob he had licked twice in the service, agreed to meet him again in Newark. Lucky had won and successfully held the Navy middleweight championship during his three years of service, and Kelly was the last contender he had fought before receiving his discharge. The two victories had both been by technical knockouts.

"Don't think because you took this feller twice before that this will be a cinch," I warned.

He merely laughed. "Worried, Nealy? Don't be. I'll get him quick this time."

"Where did you get that swelled head?" I groaned.

"Poor Nealy!" he exclaimed. "Always have to worry, don't you? Now listen, old timer, and I'll tell you what will happen. I'll knock him stiff inside two rounds, maybe less. Now go lay some folding lettuce on me and get rich quick!"

"In your case I won't bet," I tossed back.

Kelly looked dangerous as he came into the ring, and I was damn worried. This kid of mine wouldn't go easy; he wouldn't be content with anything but a quick knockout. And fellers who fight like that hit the canvas the hardest.

"Go easy!" I said, as he held out his hands for a final inspection.

"Yeah, yeah," he mumbled. "Tape okay?"

I gave it up. What could you do with a guy like that?

"I got a date after the fight, Nealy," he said.

"You got a date?" I echoed.

He nodded. "I got a date. Cutest little . . ."

They were lacing the gloves on him now, and he shut up like a clam. That's Lucky. Never could open his mouth when strangers were around. We nodded to Kelly and his manager in the center, listened to the instructions.

"You'll be getting your trunks dirty in a minute, Kelly," my boy said.

"Yeah?" Kelly rejoined. "We'll see!"

The kid looked good in that round. He was fast, graceful, made Kelly look sluggish. He got in a couple of good lefts, but his right he never got to use. Kelly, I don't believe, landed a solid punch. His timing was lousy, but I knew he packed power in his gloves.

Lucky wasn't even sweating when he returned at the end of the round. "That the way you wanted it, Nealy?" he grinned.

I grinned back. "You bet."

He sobered. "This round it goes my way."

"Now kid," I began, but the buzzer cut short my time. I was scared to death. If my boy got cocky, and careless . . .

I worried in vain. He lit into Kelly from the bell, lashed him across the ring with stinging lefts to the head, and pinned him in the corner. Kelly never landed a blow. The kid hit him in the belly, felt him start to sag. He straightened him with the left I had developed, and I couldn't help but feel proud. Then it happened. Everyone in position to see, myself included, gasped as the deadly, right chop caught Kelly on the point of the jaw. He sprawled, face down, on the canvas, while the kid and I with music in our ears, listened to the count.

It was all over. The crowd went wild; they chanted the kid's name, they swarmed into the ring (despite all the city police could do) and lifted him down across the ropes, carried him the length of the aisle to his dressing-room.

It made the papers. They began writing up his chopping right; they called it "The Blackjack Punch." The kid took it in stride. "I knew they'd like it," he said. "And I told you I could get Kelly. It was simple!"

Simple. Yes, it certainly was. One fight in the books and he was ready for the champ. I had to make him see . . .

But he did train. He worked like a dog, never complaining, never making excuses or cutting short his hours. He was a manager's delight. But when he climbed into the ring he became a headache. The advice I would pump into him was always disregarded when combat began. He fought his own way, and nothing would ever change him.

WE met Bob Adams in Trenton, and the kid bounced him three times in the opening round before the ref decided Adams had had enough. Hank Churchill did a little better. He made it through three rounds before that terrific chop put him to sleep. In Pittsburgh, Rocky Doolan folded like a deflated balloon after one round and the kid had four noticeable wins under his belt.

We bought a small training camp on the edge of town for a song and set about repairing it. I gave the kid a couple of weeks to himself, but he kept right on training. When he said he would get to the top he meant it. I never saw anyone work so hard.

We would get there, I knew; but it would take time. The kid needed more experience.

"How long, Nealy?" he asked me. "When do we meet the champ?"

"Hey!" I chuckled. "Don't rush the poor guy. He's probably never heard of you."

That made him mad. "I'll make him hear of me!" With that he went back to work.

We hired three new sparring boys and a young colored lad for a second. We didn't need anyone else.

The kid began hitting harder. He flattened big Red Russell in two and Joey Kladis in three. In St. Louis we really made the headlines. The kid knocked big Gus Finn out of the ring after a minute's exchange. Finn announced his retirement the following day.

"Pretty soon," I told him. "Pretty soon, kid."

So he went at it again. Three more by k. o.'s and it was ten straight, the last eight by knockouts. We were getting more offers than we could handle now. And the green stuff piled up, too!

I promptly discovered the kid was super-

stitious. I wanted to buy another camp in a better location, but he refused to leave. "Why?" I asked him, "why, in heaven's name?"

"It's been lucky for me," he replied. "Why do you think they call me that? Because I am lucky, that's why; and I intend to stay that way."

"You didn't get where you are by luck, kid," I told him.

"No? I think I did. But why leave here anyway, Nealy? What's the matter with this place?"

"Just wanted a change, kid."

"Stay, will you, Nealy? Please stay."

I was surprised no end. "You didn't think I would leave you?"

His lashes flickered briefly; his eyes blinked. "No, of course not, Nealy."

But I knew better. "I think you were worried," I said.

"Me? Yeah, Nealy, guess I was. I'm hell, Nealy, but I need you. You've done a lot for me."

I hadn't known him to be so serious before, except when he was in training or in the ring. It was a pleasant discovery, indeed!

Bill Shaw of Detroit was the first big test. A couple of his rights had the kid a bit groggy for a time, but in the fourth he caught Shaw in the ropes and kept him there. In the fifth he had him on the run, and in the sixth he tagged him with that right. I got the things together and waited for him to leave the ring.

A funny thing happened. Shaw, getting to his feet after the count, was fighting mad. He tore across the ring like a mad bull, swung from the floor for the kid's jaw. Only Lucky wasn't there. The force of his swing carried Shaw into the ropes, where he hung between the second and third. Lucky calmly booted him in the rump and sent him into the second row of seats.

That crowd ate it up. Shaw tried to climb back in, but his trainer caught hold of him and led him away. So there was my boy, Lucky, standing in the center of the ring, with flashbulbs going off in every direction. He removed his mouthpiece, flashed them a broad smile.

I yelled to him. "Yeah, yeah, coming Nealy," he tossed back. He turned to the camera boys beside him. "Excuse me, fel-

lows," he cracked. "My manager wants to give me hell for my performance tonight!"

I turned a bright scarlet. Their eyes were turned upon me. "You can't find anything wrong with this kid, McRae," one of the camera boys remarked. "He's the next middleweight champ."

If only, I said silently, you are right. But if some boy wiser than Shaw could have seen those openings . . .

"Where you going tonight?" I asked the kid when we reached the dressing-room.

"Club Rio, Nealy. Some of the gals are planning a celebration for me. I told them I'd win, and I did. Yessir, it will be a grand affair. Want to come, Nealy?"

I growled, "Hell no. What do I want with fancy parties—and dames?"

"They're not all dames, Nealy. Some of them are pretty well decent."

"I've never met one yet that wasn't out for the dough she could get out of it."

He grinned. "What about your mother, Nealy?"

He had me there. "Let's stick to your generation," I flung back.

He spoke softly; tenderly. "You are all wrong, Nealy. And I feel right sorry, too."

It hit me pretty hard. I thought he was talking through his hat; but somehow I couldn't forget his words. Maybe what he said was true.

Then I hit on an idea. Suppose I went to the club, got a table where the kid couldn't see me, and waited for the results? So at ten sharp I was at the Club Rio. It was an eventful evening. The place was a bit noisy, but very pretty and very exclusive. I wondered how I had got past the door. When the cigarette girls paraded past I really began to enjoy it. The way the women dressed made you think of burlesque; the gowns were hardly sufficient coverage, but then perhaps they were not intended to be. It took me a while to become accustomed to it.

I spotted the kid as he came in, a dame—a girl—on each arm, flashing his smile and his greenbacks like he owned the place. But I was proud of him, even though he was a stubborn, conceited fool! And by Judas if he didn't address the waiter in Spanish! And he spoke it well. How many more things was I to find out about this boy of mine? Next I would learn he

had a wife and six kids over on some Pacific island!

"H-allo, Enrique!" the kid called, and I gulped. The club manager himself received a hearty slap on the back. "A table for three," the kid requested.

"No, no, *senor Jock*," the fellow shook his dark head. "We have a table all ready for you, and the two *senoritas* too."

"Of course," said Lucky. I ducked in my chair as they passed, turned to watch them seat themselves at their table. Those who were already seated greeted them enthusiastically, while the kid grinned from ear to ear. He was well pleased with the way things were going. I was not doing bad myself, for the cigarette girl had stopped four times.

I gritted my teeth as he took a glass of champagne. What kind of training rules was he following? And then a cigarette. Oh, well, I figured, let him celebrate. Eleven straight wins against tough competition is pretty good. No record, but it is still good.

By twelve I was full of cocktails and a bit dizzy from too many quarter cigars. I stuck to the five-centers from that time on. Lucky was going strong by now. Two bottles of champagne; two packs of smokes. He had danced, and danced, and danced. My own shoes were under the table, but my feet were not in them.

I watched him stride up to the bandstand. "May I use your piano?" he asked. The leader, sax in hand, was interrupted in the beginning of another number.

"W-why, certainly, Lucky." Everybody knew this kid of mine.

"What is he going to do?" my neighbor asked, and her husband shrugged between inhales. Did it occur to them he might intend to play the thing?

II

HIS FINGERS went to work, rippling up and down the 88's, just as they had gone to work when formed into a fist on some guy's face. He was no longer just a leather-pusher; he was an artist now. Sure, he needed lots of steady practice, but even now the talent was there. He was great.

"He is playing Beethoven!" It was my neighbor again.

8—Fight—Fall

"No, sweet, that is Bach."

"Now Clarence, what do you . . .?"

I snapped, "Anyhow it is good. Shut up an let me listen!"

From Beethoven—or Bach—he went to Shubert, and then to Chopin, who had long been his favorite. You wonder how I know what he played? I like the classics myself. Yeah, even an old, broken-down manager can enjoy some of the finer things of art.

The whole room was silent, every eye fixed on the kid. He had them completely charmed; I wondered what he would do if he had five or six years more experience. But the kid wanted to be champ. He wouldn't get five or six years of experience.

They watched with amused smiles while he removed his coat and loosened his ten-dollar tie. He rolled up his sleeves and his left hand got the downbeat on some bogie—I mean boogie-woogie. I choked on my fifth cigar. Never had I heard him play boogie. And how he played it! The room livened up; the crowd left their tables and moved to the front to see those fingers trample the ivories.

The kid felt good, mighty good. I moved to another table for a closer view, and there—in front of me—lay a genuine, five-cent cigar. I did not hesitate. My twenty-five cent cigar was soon in its place.

Now there was one thing the kid wouldn't do: boogie was boogie, the classic was classic. He would not mix them. He would not jive Beethoven or the rest of the Old Masters. He had respect for their work. He was a great fighter; he was a better musician.

Beat Me Daddy Eight to the Bar; Down the Road a Piece; Caribbean Clipper—the kid played them all. He played his own boogie, making it up as he went. The whole country was jive-happy; if the kid could set this stuff to music, get it down on paper, he would make a fortune. He could even organize a band, tour the country . . .

Here I was, making all kinds of plans for him, forgetting that the kid had only one desire—to become champ. It was his life, his own choosing. I had no right to interfere.

Then he suddenly stopped playing; he had played enough. That was the way with him. All of a sudden he would quit,

and it was useless to beg him to continue.

"No more piano, folks!" he addressed the crowd. "Thank you very much for your kind attention. I'll let the band take over again." He quickly found a partner and glided onto the dance-floor with all the agility of Fred Astaire.

By now people were returning to their tables. I remembered I had changed tables with the rest. "I beg your pardon," a voice addressed me. "You have our table."

"I am sorry," I apologized. I bowed and walked away.

"Sir!" The gentleman called after me. "You forgot your cigar!"

I shook my head. "No, I do not smoke two-bit brands. It must be yours."

The gentleman smiled; I smiled back. "Perhaps I did purchase one, and cannot remember doing so. Sorry."

"Quite all right," I beamed, and went back to my own table. His five-cent cigar felt good in my pocket. I decided to save it until the next day.

My watch showed five-'til-two. How long would this kid of mine remain here? The dames would probably keep him out 'til dawn; but I was too damn tired to care.

I paid my check—four cocktails and a sandwich—and got my hat. It was the middle of May; a warm, clear night that made a guy feel like walking. So I walked. And then I was home.

The kid was up and making breakfast by eight. I cursed him for awakening me, and he just laughed. "Breakfast, Nealy? How do you want your eggs?"

"Sound asleep," I growled, "just like I am—or was!"

"Why should you be tired, you old relic? You went to bed at ten, didn't you?"

"The dev—," and I caught myself quickly. "Sure, sure. But I'm getting old, and I need lots of sleep."

He came in out of the kitchen, handed me a glass of orange-juice. After what I had swallowed the night before I needed it!

"You do look tired," the kid said. "You look like a guy with a hangover—just a mild one, though."

"To tell the truth," I said between swallows, "I did a little celebrating myself."

Lucky grinned. "Pitching woo at your age, Nealy? Now it comes out. Nealy is

a drunkard; he was once sent away for a cure . . ."

"Get out of here!" I laughed, and my pillow caught him in the pit of the stomach. "You and your quips."

"When did you get in?" I asked, when the orange-juice and the pillow had been put in their proper places.

"Two-twenty, my friend."

I gaped. "Two-twenty? But I saw you about five-'til-two and . . ." He was staring at me in astonishment. I realized what I had let slip.

"Then—then you were at the Club Rio last night! You saw—you heard—me play the piano!"

I nodded. "Sore, kid? I just thought I'd drop in and see how you were getting along."

THE kid did not take it the way I hoped he would. He was angry, and that looked bad. If he was through . . .

"You were spying on me, Nealy!"

"No kid, no I wasn't."

"Don't play innocent. You were afraid I'd break those precious training rules of yours. To hell with those rules. I'll live as I please, and do what I please. I win, don't I?"

"Kid, please . . ." I began.

"I had fun, Nealy, lots of fun. You saw I played the piano like I've never played before. I'm living now, Nealy, living right, the way I've always wanted to live. I've got money; I'm a success. I'm a big boy now!"

I said quietly, "You're only nineteen."

"I fought for my country, Nealy," he said. "That makes me of age. Until I got that fever . . . anyway, I'm out now. I could fight over there; why can't I fight here as well? I'll be champ, Nealy; damned if I won't. But I'm going to have fun, too! Three years under fire is no bed of roses!"

I was beat, and I knew it. When a boy of seventeen goes off to war he loses some of the most important years of his life. That is the growing-up period. Lucky grew up out there with all the blood and stink and hell that war can bring.

Sliding out of bed I put my arm about his shoulders. "I'm sorry, kid. I meant no harm."

He broke down. "I'm sorry, too, Nealy. I'm a big fool, and I know it. You can't

toss friendship around the way you can money."

"How about breakfast?" I recalled. "Got the eggs ready?"

"Won't take long. You get dressed; I'll fry 'em for you."

We were up in the big time, the big money, now. "Farmer" Hitchcock, who fought out of Des Moines, was next on our list. Lucky settled down to training right away, and he was in top form when we met the Farmer and his manager, Jim Dodson, for the weigh-in ceremony.

The kid was still as cocky as ever, and the Farmer didn't like it. He'd beaten the cockiness out of more than one opponent, and he told the kid to his face he would be no exception.

"Nor do I want to be," Lucky retaliated. "I've great respect for farmers. During the time I was overseas I found they were the backbone of the nation. But I'll waste none of it on you."

We almost had the match right then and there. "If you two fight as well as you talk we'll have one of the greatest slug-fests of all time," the commissioner laughed.

"Begging your pardon, sir," Lucky said, "but this guy won't last long enough to make it interesting."

My boy was really gunning for this one. At the ringside he showed no sign of nervousness. He was calm, cool, determined. If only the Iowa lad didn't connect first I knew Lucky would make it short.

Not a word was exchanged as they met and touched gloves briefly in the center. I believe the referee would have been better to save his words, for all the attention they paid him. The Iowa boy was out to end it, too!

They tore into each other from the bell, and the fans loved it! The hot dog and peanut salesmen put aside their wares and sat down in the aisles to watch. They wouldn't miss this for the world!

It was vicious; it was give and take all the way. Lucky's right chopped the other down twice, but he came up without a count. His own haymaker set the kid back on his heels, but it lacked the necessary power to send him to the canvas.

In the second it increased. Though neither boy went down they punched harder, and their blows were telling. Lucky had a bad cut above his right eye; the

Farmer was bleeding from lip and nose. The crowd ate it up! The rougher, the bloodier, the better they liked it; the more they screamed and applauded.

"He doing any damage?" I asked between rounds.

The kid shook his head. "No, but I am!" he grunted. He certainly was. He swept the third completely, and the Iowa lad was hanging on the ropes at the bell.

Lucky hit him like a piledriver, his small but solid fists opening numerous cuts, re-opening the old. He belted him into the ropes, set his feet apart, and moved in like a wounded panther. Farmer began to fold. His own punches lacked power and drive; they had little behind them. I have yet to meet a middleweight who punches harder than Lucky Jack.

Then it was all over. That deadly right chop that had flattened nine in a row found another victim. Farmer lay flat on his back, eyes open, trying to summon enough energy, enough strength to pull him back to his feet. He failed as the count reached ten, and Lucky was announced the winner. Yes, now we were on the way up!

The newspapers carried a three-column spread, complete with photos, and a special write-up by the nation's top sports authority. He predicted Lucky would go far, but without more polish, without more instruction and improvement in defensive art, he would never become champ.

The kid wouldn't listen. "Defense hell!" he swore. "If you can hit you can make it. You can't win by defense, no more than you can win a war the same way."

"He doesn't mean defense alone," I argued. "Of course you've got to hit. But one of these days some guy will take advantage of your openings, and . . . bingo, goodbye title!"

"You believe that?" he asked, seriously.

"I do," I replied. "You leave yourself wide open, Lucky. I could drive a truck through your holes."

"I can take it!"

I spat, "Sure, but for how long? Suppose they put over a Sunday punch? Can you take it flat on your back with the ref counting ten?"

That sobered him. "Maybe—maybe you got something at that."

"You bet I got something."

"You can show me—tomorrow."

I reached for a five-cent cigar. "You got another date?"

"Yeah, Nealy. Blind date with a friend of mine."

"Go easy on the liquor."

HE laughed. "I'll watch my figure, Nealy," he promised. Four days before he had bought his first car, a sea-green convertible. He was as excited as a school-boy on his first date, and I didn't blame him.

It wasn't brand new, of course, for they weren't producing in '45. But it was the last model before converting to war production, and it was in top shape. He did a lot of puttering on it himself in his spare time.

When he came in at two-thirty I was still awake. I kept thinking of what that sportscaster had written about the kid.

"Hey! You awake, Nealy?"

"Uh-huh. Can't sleep.

"Too many cheap cigars, Nealy."

"You looking for a fight?" I chuckled.

In the darkness he slipped out of his coat. I could see his white dress shirt through the blackness. "Nealy, you ever meet someone you were crazy about?"

"Myself, you mean?"

He laughed curtly. "No, I'm serious." I said, "So am I."

"I'm talking about a girl."

I prayed it had not happened. He couldn't fall in love and settle down to raising future piano players. Not Lucky. But then maybe I was the one who was all wrong. Maybe that was what every guy needed.

"Never cared for dames, kid," I growled.

"Never been in love?" he asked.

"No."

"Nealy, I'm in love!"

I didn't want to say it. "Are you, kid?"

He had it bad, I could tell. His kind fell the hardest. "I met her tonight, Nealy."

I jumped. "Tonight? You date her once and already you are in love?"

"That's it, Nealy."

"Kid, it isn't real. You can't tell this soon."

"Yes, I can, Nealy," he insisted. "It hits you—kind of funny—right in the heart. You keep thinking about it, over and over."

Damn it, I thought. A woman can ruin a fistic career quicker than anything else.

But maybe he would get over it. I would wait and see.

"She is wonderful, Nealy," he said again.

"They always are," I grunted. "Come to bed, kid."

"Bed? I would only dream about her."

Everybody has bad dreams, I said to myself. Me? I dream of two-bit cigars.

"Who is she?" I asked. Might as well know the whole story.

"Kitty—Kit—Brandon."

"Nice name. Goodnight, kid."

"Goodnight, Nealy."

I saw him sitting by the window, staring out into the night.

He made a date for Friday evening, another for Saturday, and church on Sunday. "So you even got religious, eh, kid?" I laughed.

"It's about time, Nealy. Why don't you come, too? I'd like to have you meet her."

"Me? No, kid, I don't like third parties."

"It wouldn't be like that, Nealy," he said. "Honest, we'd like to have you. Come on, old timer. Do you good!"

I shook my head. "No, kid, I'm not going."

We met Kitty Brandon in front of the church. She was pretty, even more than the kid had led me to believe. She had a small, slender figure, nice legs and enough curves to look good in anything. But I wondered what she was like inside. I figured her for a nightclub singer, latching on to the kid for publicity. Sure enough, she was a singer, at a small club on the north side.

I felt miserable during the service. It was stuffy inside, and the silence got on my nerves. I kept looking at the cigar in my pocket. "It's hot!" I whispered. The kid hushed me quickly.

"Don't talk in here," he said sternly.

"Haven't you ever been in a church before?"

"It has been a long time!" I whispered back.

The air felt clean, and refreshing. "Did you enjoy the service, Mr. McRae?" Kitty asked me.

"It's Nealy, kitten," the kid said. So he called her kitten.

"Did you enjoy the service, Nealy?" she tried again. She had a cute smile.

Except for the heat and the lack of

fresh air, I found I had enjoyed it. I told her the truth.

"I hope you come often, Nealy," she said.

"He will!" Lucky told her. "I'll box his ears if he doesn't."

I unwrapped the gentleman's cigar. "Will you join us for lunch?" Kitty invited.

"No," I protested, "you two run along."

The kid took hold of my arm. "You come along. And stop arguing, will you?"

I rewrapped the cigar. Might as well save it until after the meal.

III

LATER, cigar in mouth, a cocktail at my right, music on my left; I was never more contented. The kid and his girl were dancing, and they were nice to see. She was making a regular gentleman out of him, as well as spoiling him completely. He had been spoiled enough when I first met him; now I wouldn't be able to handle him at all.

They danced close to the table. I could hear them talking. "Where have you been all my life?" the kid asked her.

"Right here, Lucky. Very often two people find they have been carrying on their existence under the nose of the other."

Very well put, I applauded. But I still think you want publicity, all you can get, or the kid's money. I've seen too many girls make a fool of a nice guy. I would not let it happen to Lucky.

They dropped me off at the theater and drove to a resort not far out of the city. It was past midnight before they returned. I heard them downstairs, apparently raiding the icebox. He did not drive her home until after I had fallen asleep.

We did little except sprawl in a cool spot, or—when the mood demanded—stretch out in the sunshine and accumulate an enviable tan. The kid liked to swim, and Kitty often came up to join him; but as for myself I bathed in the shade and smoked cigars.

Lucky was as solid as granite. He had never been in better condition, nor had I ever seen him as happy and as satisfied. He divided his time between the ring and Kitty. His music was forgotten.

At his request I paid another visit to



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our promoter, and through his efforts lined up another top-drawing bout with Slats McCoy, a tall, angular kid from the Bronx. The match would be held in Madison Square Garden, though we could not get the featured spot. We would be the last semi-final before the main attraction. McCoy, boasting a string of wins as long as the Queen Mary, was an excellent boxer. He was a fair hitter, but it was his skill and knowledge of the art that made him good. A win over McCoy would earn Lucky a crack at the No. 5 challenger.

We took several months to train, and McCoy's camp seemed equally as patient. Kitty, who worked largely in the evenings, was an almost daily visitor. The kid would drive her into town for dinner after his workout and shower and sometimes spend the evening at her club. Her very presence seemed to do him wonders; he fought better and harder whenever she appeared.

I taught his much defensive work, and drilled him thoroughly against McCoy's style, which was something quite new to him. Heretofore he had faced only his own style, that of standing toe-to-toe and slug-ging it out. McCoy would not stand toe-to-toe and slug; he would be a moving target, and hence a much more difficult one.

"What round shall I knock him out?" the kid grinned at Kitty. He was as cocky as I had ever seen him.

"Just you be careful, and win," Kitty told him. "Never mind trying to knock him out, like the others. You just be careful and do what Nealy tells you."

Bravo, Kitty, I said silently. Talk some sense into that thick head of his.

"But honey!" The kid was surprised. "I don't want just a decision. He can box rings around me. I'm going to flatten him or else."

"You mustn't lose now, Lucky; you mustn't!"

All this dame thought about was the loss of publicity she would suffer should the kid lose this fight. One minute I was for her; the next I knew her for what she was. I wanted to warn him against her, but I knew Lucky would not listen. A guy in love cannot listen.

We had a terrific gate, and it was not because of the feature attraction, which paired two top-contending heavies. The

kid was a favorite everywhere. A good, decisive win over Slats McCoy would make him a top attraction in any arena.

Kitty gave him a kiss for luck just before the opening bell. The kid waltzed out to meet McCoy, stars in his eyes, springs in his feet. And he was not prepared for the suddenness of the lanky kid's attack. Three solid blows had him in the ropes, and McCoy worked him over good before my boy had a chance to move out.

I could tell he was dazed, though I did not believe him hurt. McCoy did not hit hard, but he hit often. And he could take it. Lucky fell into his trap again and when the round was over his face looked like it had been run through a meat-grinder. We patched him up as well as we could and sent him out fighting mad.

But McCoy's evasive tactics paid off, and the kid landed only four or five good blows, while he took two dozen or more in return. The bobbing, weaving style puzzled him, despite the drilling I had given him for weeks. I realized how unlike the imitation the real product could be. McCoy's style, too, had changed since his previous bouts.

"He's got all three rounds, kid," I muttered through clenched teeth, "but you can get 'em back."

"Not unless I tag him, Nealy."

"Don't open, kid! He might get in that lucky punch!"

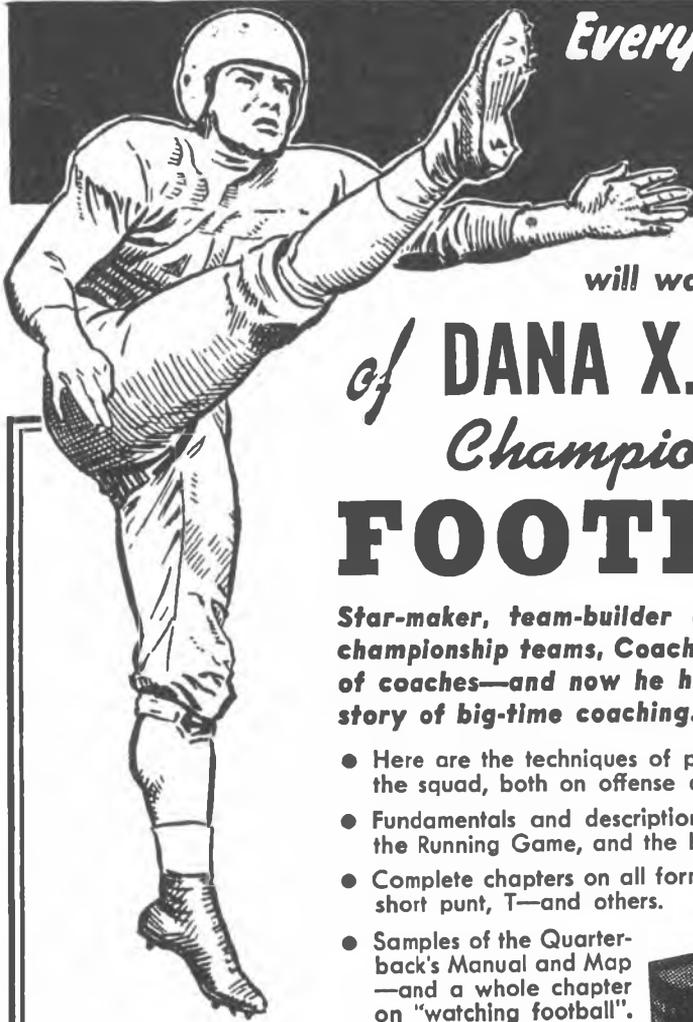
He laughed. "What lucky punch? He couldn't punch his way out of a paper bag, Nealy. He hits often, but he doesn't hit hard."

"But he's cutting your face to hell!" I swore.

"I'll be a flop if this goes the limit, Nealy." He spat savagely. "I'm going to knock his head off! I've had enough."

HE would sooner have listened to the man in the moon. But he carried out his threat. He caught Slats with a beautiful right-cross, and that slowed the beanpole down to Lucky's gait. A left to the mouth brought a trickle of blood. Another smashing left sent him into the ropes. The crowd sensed the finish. As McCoy bounced back the kid sent over his right.

He was back up at five; Lucky caught him twice more with the same punch. I



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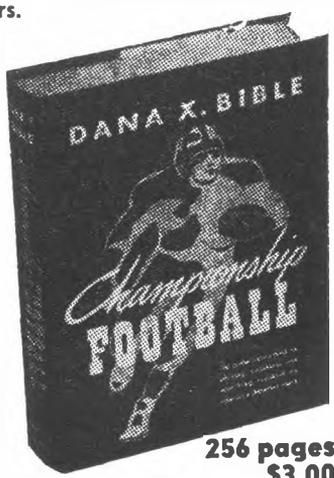
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wondered how a skinny kid like McCoy could take such a beating. He tried to escape, but Lucky boxed him in and went to work on his belly. Three more times he went down. Lucky grunted heavily and let him have it once more.

At seven Slats was on his knees; at nine he was pulling himself up by the ropes. He couldn't make it. His legs buckled and he pitched headlong to the canvas. Lucky waited until after the announcement, then helped Slats to his corner. McCoy was a gentleman, and he took the kid's hand with a smile.

Like I said, the papers ate it up, began to talk of him as a certain bet to take the champ. Lucky's ego took on added height.

Lou Burns was the twelfth straight by a knockout, and it came in the second. Stan MacKittrick failed to last six rounds and the kid jumped to third on the list. We fought another with MacKittrick, dropped him once again in the fifth; and another with a guy from Chile. He kissed the floor in less than two minutes and didn't even try to get back up.

The kid was getting pretty serious about Kitty Brandon. He bought her a ring; they got engaged. The marriage, however, would not come until Lucky was champ. I did not ask the reason for this, nor was I disappointed. If they waited, I thought, he would discover what kind of a dame she really was.

HIS folks had taken to her on sight, but the way I figured it I would have the last laugh. I realize now how wrong it was to hold such an opinion of her. She was friendly, courteous, decent enough to me, and I assumed she knew nothing of my real feeling toward her.

Lucky was riding high. "I'll be champ before you know it, Nealy," he said to me, highball in hand. "You look like you don't believe me."

I eyed the drink. "You look like a champ!" I drawled. "Whiskey always builds a fine body. So more power to you, kid."

He grinned. "Same old Nealy! Can't stop worrying about me, can you?"

"You are my bread and butter," I said. I told myself, Why be a wet blanket all the time? Why not give him a break and show some confidence! You know he will

be champ; he has the stuff, he has the ambition.

"I'll always worry about you, kid," I added. "But don't mind me. Of course you'll make it. You've got it, Lucky; you've got it!"

The kid's chest expanded. "You bet I have. I could lick any man in the world!"

Ouch! I grimaced. How corny! "John L. Sullivan once said that too, kid. Look what Corbett done to him!"

"He was out of training."

"Still he lost. Don't overrate yourself, Lucky. Just have a normal amount of confidence, and train hard. You'll make the grade."

He laughed with great amusement, a trace of a smile touching the corners of his mouth. "A very pretty speech, Mr. McRae. I shall give your advice every consideration."

"See that you use it!" I said, "and you'll be all right."

Three days before the match with Raymond "Rhino" Rankin in Madison Square Garden the war ended! New York—and, of course, the entire nation—went wild!

"Thanks to the Lord it is over," Lucky said quietly. "I'm glad for the poor devils over there."

"So is everyone else," I commented.

"I know, Nealy, but I can feel it more because I went through it. By golly, Nealy, I'm really going to take Rankin apart now. He's an old Army man, and he's been shootin' off his mouth about the small part the Navy played in the war."

I grinned. "The Army boys know different," I said. "He's just a loudmouth!"

The kid winked. "I'm going to close it for a long time to come!"

He fought like a tiger from the opening bell, and had Rankin flat on his back before the round was over. The big guy recovered, however, and it was not until late in the fifth that Lucky put him out for the count.

"One more big step, kid," I said, "and then the champ!" Steve Apollo, the champ, had fought two weeks previous and had knocked out Jon Carter, the leading contender, in the tenth round. So I figured the kid was next for a crack at the title. But no, they ruled my boy had to meet Carter first. This Lucky did not like; he cursed and complained, and even paid a

visit to the commissioner. It was no use. It was Carter or nothing.

This Apollo was a splendid and popular champion. He was a modest, shy fellow who ran a gym for underprivileged children in his spare time. He was about the nicest guy that ever put his hand inside a mitt. He stopped in at the camp about a week after the kid's win over Rankin and spent the afternoon talking about the war. He, too, had seen action in the Pacific; thus the two had much in common to discuss.

Kitty Brandon came out for dinner, and at our insistence Apollo remained. We had Lucky play for us, and the champ had a dance or two with Kitty. It didn't seem right that in a matter of months these two lads would be climbing into a ring to do battle. Steve was getting up in years, though I believe he was still in his prime, and he planned on retiring after a few more fights.

I didn't want the kid to get stale from too much training so I sent him on a two-week vacation to the Bahamas. Kitty wasn't able to get that much time off so she hopped a plane back after spending four or five days with the kid. But Lucky was different when he returned! I noticed it the day he arrived. He almost seemed to say, "No, I won't fight Carter! I'm not going in the ring with him!"

THERE seemed to be something lacking now. His high ego was gone; before leaving he had sent a wire to Carter reading: *I shall knock your head off, old timer!* Carter was old as fighters go, having reached his thirty-eighth birthday shortly before his loss to the champ, but he was ring-wise; he was a crafty veteran who let few opportunities pass him by. No, it was not the ego that I missed. It was what I called "spark," or perhaps I should say heart, that was lacking. What he had seen, what he had done during those two weeks in the Bahamas I did not know. But he had nothing when he returned.

Worried, I called Kitty, and told her about the kid. I wondered, soon after, if I had done the right thing. They quarreled not long after that, but through it all I found something in this Kitty Brandon

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I had overlooked before. I realized she had always loved him, and that that love was genuine. I had been wrong about her; all wrong. I could not help but feel like a heel for the way I had felt about her.

I was a witness to their quarrel; they were in the room next to mine and their voices were well above the normal pitch. "Either you fight as Nealy tells you or we are finished, Lucky!" she demanded. You'll have to make your choice now. I don't know what has come over you, but I do know that I can't marry you the way you are. Why can't you tell me what it is?"

The kid didn't know what to say. He just stood there and stared at her. I did not think she would really leave him, but if she made Lucky think so it might help. "Honey," he said at last, "you don't understand. I can't tell you; I want you to help, certainly, but I—well, I just have to work this one out by myself. I'm scared, that's all, I'm scared."

"Scared? Of what?"

"Skip it!" he said. He reached nervously for a cigarette. "You know, I've been thinking about what my folks said. Maybe they are right. Maybe I haven't got what it takes to be a fighter. Maybe I should have stuck with the piano."

"If you feel that way," Kitty said, "why don't you quit the ring and go back to your music? I think that is where you belong, too."

No, kid, I thought. No, you can't do it. You can't give it all up now. You'll soon be at the top; a chance at the title. Don't quit now. You'll get over this—this mood that is dominating you. Don't listen, Lucky. You can't quit now.

Maybe Kitty was right, I do not know. But after he had climbed so far I couldn't stand by and let him chuck it all overboard.

"No, honey," the kid said. "I won't quit. I'm going through with it—somehow."

She put her arms around him. "I didn't really mean what I said about leaving, Lucky. I love you too much to walk out on you just because of—because of this. Oh, I've made such a mess of things. I'm just no good!"

He held her close, his lips brushing her cheek, her ear, her hair. "Baby, that's a

lie. You are too good for a guy like me. I'm yellow. But I'll try to do what you want me to do. I'll try Nealy's way."

He's tired of fighting, I figured. He's stale. The vacation only made things worse. He wants to do something else now beside break noses or loosen a tooth or two.

"Why not quit now, Lucky?" Kitty pleaded. "Don't go into a ring feeling as you do. You haven't a chance this way. I never wanted you to be a fighter, Lucky, not since the first time I met you. You aren't the kind; you do it only for the easy money you can get out of it. That is wrong, darling; all wrong!"

"But I've got to have a crack at that title," the kid insisted. "I want to lick this thing that possesses me; I want to rid myself of it once and for all. Only it is so strong I don't know how I can do it."

She kissed him on the tip of his nose. "Then you must work this out, you must decide for yourself. I hope you do the right thing."

He came to the door with her. "I need time to work it out," he said. "I can reach you at home?"

"Yes, at home." She lifted her head for his kiss. "I love you, sweetheart. Don't ever forget it!"

Then she was gone. The kid turned with a sigh and went up to his room.

I knew he wasn't ready for the Carter fight, but I could do nothing under the circumstances. His timing was off, his footwork sluggish and ridiculous. "Don't worry, Nealy," he said to me. "I'll fight him. I can lick him. I always win. That's why they call me Lucky!"

"Everybody's luck runs out sometime," I reminded him.

"Not mine, Nealy. It will never run out."

For the first time I noticed him shaking. "You cold, kid?" I asked. He was trembling like a leaf.

"Cold? No, Nealy; I'm not cold."

"Is it the fever?" I asked again.

The Carter fight was only three days away. I was worried enough about the kid's form, but now this shaking business . . .

"It's me, Nealy! No, it's not the fever, and I'm not cold. It's me!"

"You?" I chanted. "What in blazes you talking about?"

IV

HE POURED himself a glass of water. I watched him drink. I believed it to be a touch of the fever he had contacted while in service, though I did not know whether one could undergo an attack after almost two years of perfect health. He had been pronounced cured upon receiving his discharge. And yet a recurrence . . .

"Give me a cigarette?" he said.

"Not when you've got a fight only three days away."

"Give me a cigarette!" He was demanding now, not asking. What was I to do? I gave him one. I figured he was either going crazy or he was punch-drunk. The kid hadn't ever broken training before. But I wasn't going to start anything over one cigarette.

"Didn't mean to shout at you, Nealy?" he apologized. "I'm just not myself, that's all."

"And you haven't been for three months. You've seen little of Kitty; you're way off form for a fight you got to win; and then you say you're not yourself. You bet you're not! You never will be if you go on like this!"

He shrugged. "I can take care of myself!"

"But can you take care of Kitty?"

His eyebrows raised; he crushed the half-smoked cigarette and looked hard at me. "What about Kitty?"

"Can you take care of her?" I asked again. "The gal loves you very much."

"Is that so hard to understand?" he came back.

I said, "You love her, yes; but what kind of a husband would you make?"

"A damn good one," he retorted. "There is nothing wrong with me as a husband."

I knew something was on his mind. I had to find out what it was. "You couldn't make her happy, nor would you be happy, the way you feel now, kid." He was listening. "I've heard of fighters going stale, but I've never known one to have such a complete change of form as you. It won't do, kid. Don't get your brains knocked out if you don't know why you are doing it! Now this guy Carter; he is as tough as they come!"

"Yeah," the kid said, "yeah, he's tough."

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You think I can't take him, Nealy? He's old, he's slow; he's on the way out."

"Wrong. Carter may be old, he may be slow, but as yet he isn't on the way out. He's top ranking contender. Just because he lost to Steve doesn't make him a has-been."

It was futile, talking to the kid that way. But I had to try. "You've come a long way, kid. You don't want to quit now. You'll be the next champ."

And then it came. "Nealy, I'm yellow! I'd rather face the champ any day than to face Carter. Don't ask me why. But for the first time in my life I'm afraid to enter a ring!"

I could sense something behind it; something deep behind it. The kid could not or would not tell me anything. The only others who might be able to help would be his parents. I made up my mind to see them. I asked Kitty to come along.

"Was Lucky telling me the truth when he said it was something he had to work out alone?" Kitty asked, as I drove the kid's car back toward the city.

"Yes," I said, "he was. He didn't lie to you; Lucky would never do that. But I don't really think he can come through alone. He needs that added push, and we must give it to him. He certainly seems to be afraid of something."

Kitty said, "And it all happened during those weeks he spent in the Bahamas."

I did not agree with her. "No, he has carried that fear within him ever since he returned from service. To be sure those weeks there increased it, gave him time to think about it. Up here he was too busy. But his sudden affliction has something to do with his forthcoming match with Carter. I aim to find out just what that is. If his folks don't know then I guess we are licked."

We found what we wanted to know twenty minutes later. Of course his parents had suspected nothing, and it was a frank surprise to them when I explained Lucky's sudden fear of the ring.

The kid's brother, Russ, had been a fighter too, some five years back. He had fought under a different name, and that was why I did not connect the two. Neither the family nor close friends or relatives had ever mentioned it. And Lucky had never breathed a word of it, though he

had told me just about everything else concerning his family. And now I knew.

Russ, gunning for the crown—he was also a middleweight—had been killed during a match with one of the leading contenders. But Lucky never forgot it. A thing like that often remains with a person when everything else is forgotten. Russ had been Lucky's idol; it was the typical brother-worship pattern.

The kid had promised himself he would even the score, should he ever meet this fellow in the ring; he would win the crown, and make Russ' dream come true.

"Make me a promise, kid," his brother had asked, "that if I don't make it you will take over. Win the title, kid! It's the only thing I ever asked of you in my whole life."

Mama Jack was no little concerned. "What can we do to help him?" she asked.

"We'll find a way," Kitty and I said together.

"Always we have wanted him to play the piano," she told us. "Fighting is not for a boy like Lucky. He has the talent, the temperament to become a great concert artist. Why does he want to fight?"

"Lucky would be on the stage right now, mama," I said, "except for your older son. They were very close, and when they made one another a promise they would do everything in their power to fulfill it. Lucky's got to carry out that promise now; until he does he will never go back to his music."

I KNEW the answer already. Kitty and I drove to the local library, and despite the pressure of her pleas I refused to talk until I had the evidence before me. We waited while the librarian dug through the records; waited impatiently.

"Please tell me why you want the papers of five years ago? Kitty persisted. "I know you want to read about his brother's death, but what can we gain from it? The real cure lies in immediate action. We must see Lucky!"

Still we waited. At last we had the papers before us. I flipped the pages hurriedly, discarding paper after paper until I found the one for which I had been searching.

"Kit!" I cried. "Here it is! **YOUTHFUL FIGHTER KILLED IN MATCH WITH JON CARTER! DEATH DE-**

CLARED ACCIDENTAL! This is it! I knew who his brother had fought the moment Mama Jack finished. Ever since we started together Lucky has been waiting for this chance. Now that he has it he cannot go through with it. You see, Kit, Carter was at his peak then; he lost a couple of bouts and retired. He made a comeback recently and he's at the top once again. And now the kid must fight him in order to get a chance at the crown."

"He's not afraid!" Kitty defended stoutly. "You know he isn't, Nealy."

"Not in his heart. But in his mind he is afraid!"

I had heard of similar cases. During the war there came considerable tales which men in uniform willingly repeated. It was understandable; everyone must face and conquer fear of some kind during a lifetime. I could recall some of my own; it helped me to think, for I could then put myself in the kid's place. For five years he thought of nothing but to get a crack at Carter; now he felt he could not go through with it.

"How can we help him?" Kitty asked, desperately. "We have such a short time."

"Three days?" I did not feel the confidence I tried to display. "One hour would be sufficient. We'll find a way!"

I saw the tears mount in her eyes. "We must, Nealy," she said. "He will never want me if we fail him now."

"You have it bad," I murmured. "So has the kid. You know, I had you pegged wrong from the start."

She showed her surprise. To be frank so did I. I did not think I had played so convincing a part!

"Why—why, what do mean?"

"I figured you were a dame out for publicity and dough, like most of the others I have seen. I'm sorry I ever made that mistake!"

"Then—now—you are convinced, Nealy? You really believe I love him?"

I had been a complete fool. It was I who had been wrong all along. "Honey," I said to her, "I have never been more sure of anything in all my life!"

She started to cry again, and I took her out of there before I had her bawling on my shoulder. We drove back to the camp, where we learned Lucky had gone

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for a walk. There was nothing to do but wait for his return.

I set about preparing a meal, and after that she felt better. Food had always comforted Nealy McRae, not to forget a good five-cent cigar. But the cigar lacked the usual enjoyment, and I soon confined it to the ashtray.

From the reports I had received Jon Carter was in fine condition, and was being made a slight favorite because of the kid's poor showings during his exhibition matches. However, they were expected to enter the ring at even money. The kid has always been a good attraction and he probably always will be. He had lost few fans despite his dismal showings. The sports writers remained behind him, and had flocked into the camp to watch his progress during training.

Lucky returned hours later, and Kitty was sound asleep in her chair. "What you two doing?" he demanded. "Telling all, true confessions, or something like that?"

"Cut it!" I whispered sharply. "She's been waiting here all evening for you. Where you been?"

"Took a walk, Nealy. Tried to clear things up."

"Any luck?" I asked hopefully.

He shook his head. I had expected a negative reply. "Better call it off, Nealy. I can't go in there!"

"What about Kitty?"

"I guess—well, we'd better call everything off. What else can I do?"

I wanted to take hold of him and shake some reasoning into him, but I knew how futile that would be. The sole result would be a sore jaw for Nealy McRea!

Kitty spent the night in the spare room. You have no idea how cute she looked in a pair of my pajamas! I could easily have been in love with her myself.

But things had reached a climax. The kid's bed was empty when I awoke. At first I thought he was downstairs having breakfast, desiring to avoid contact with Kitty.

But the house was quiet, and I had the feeling . . .

Without benefit of robe or slippers I hurried downstairs to confirm the fear I could not rid myself of. There was a freshly written letter on the table, and with trembling fingers I opened it.

Nealy,

I can't go on this way any longer. Funny how a guy can take things in the war and then turn coward when he gets back in civvies!

Please don't try to find me. I'll be back when I've found myself again, if that is possible. Take care of Kitty and the folks, and don't forget yourself!

Lucky.

FOR a long time I sat and stared out the open window, down the long, winding road he had taken. I, Nealy McRae, his best friend, could do nothing. There was nought to do but call off the fight and wait for the papers to take the kid apart.

Better let her know, my mind kept repeating. Tell her now; it will be easier if you do. It would probably be the finish between them, but she was entitled to know.

I knocked softly on her door. "You decent?" I asked. She was awake.

"In your pajamas, Nealy? Don't be funny!"

I could not laugh. She was sitting upright in bed, the long dark hair spilling across her shoulders, the sunlight cutting capers across her concealed legs.

"Why so glum, Nealy?" She caught sight of the folded paper in my hand. I believe she knew instantly what it contained.

"He's gone!" I said, with no feeling in my voice. H-he left a note."

She read it swiftly. "No, Nealy, no! He can't leave like this; he can't give up without trying!"

Slowly I said, "I'm afraid he has."

She flung herself across the bed, her body racked with sobs. I could have killed the kid for what he was doing to her.

I realized what had happened. I, Nealy McRae, was in love with her!

She did not cry long. She had spirit, this Kitty Brandon. She was a fighter. "He'll come back for the match, Nealy; I know he will!"

"Now Kit . . ." I started to say, but she cut me short.

"He'll come back, Nealy. I know Lucky. He is no quitter; he is no coward. He will be back, and he will fight Carter!"

"Carter will beat him to a pulp!" I said. "The kid's not in good form. And now he's not even here to train."

She refused to admit defeat. "No one need know he is gone, Nealy. We can close the camp, tell them we are working in secret. It will help promote the match, too!"

"What you want more fans for?" I asked with a growl. "If he doesn't show Carter will win by forfeit and Lucky will be finished in the ring. There won't be a soul who will defend him but us."

"But we can't call it off now, either," she persisted. "What excuse can we give?"

"The best in the world, honey! Our fighter has disappeared. It will be better for him this way, believe me!"

She put her soft head on my shoulder, and I wanted to take her in my arms and tell her I was in love with her. But she was the kid's girl; she would always be his girl, if only the kid came back to her. All I could do would be to take care of her until he returned.

"Nealy," she said, "give me a chance; give Lucky a chance. Do it my way, please! If he doesn't go through with this fight he will never have confidence in himself again. We've got to give him a chance to come through!"

"Chances, chances!" I groaned. "Everybody wants to give chances." But I gave in. Either way it would still be up to the kid. "Okay," I agreed, "we'll try it your way. Secret sessions—press barred—all that stuff. You run the show; I'll follow along."

The help had great respect for Lucky, and we knew our secret would be safe with them. But we gave them some folding money to counteract any offers they might receive from visitors.

We carried it to the utmost. Behind closed doors we had two of the sparring boys exchange leather, and the press lads ate it up! We had one of them hit the canvas at regular intervals, and I myself kept shouting: Keep it up, kid! That punch is terrific! Why, old Carter will kiss the canvas in ten seconds flat!"

The papers wrote it: LUCKY JACK RUNNING OUT OF SPARMATES! QUICK FINISH SEEN IN MATCH WITH CARTER! How we chuckled at that one! But the sports writers could not be blamed; they had no way of knowing it was only deception. The irony of it



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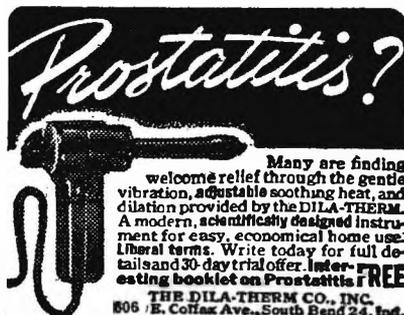
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all was the way they wrote the kid up. The columns seemed to be better than they had been when we gave them the real thing.

We sweated out those three days, but by fight time our long wait was almost over. I admit I had little hope of the kid showing, but Kitty, up until the final moments before our due appearance, remained firm. Then she began to waver.

Could—could I be wrong, Nealy?" she asked slowly. Do you suppose—I don't know him—as well as I thought?"

"HELLO!" someone said. We turned together. Lucky grinned at us from the doorway.

"Well, I'll be a . . ." I started, and grinned like a baboon as Kitty went into his arms. "Miss me?"

I chuckled. "Hell, we didn't care if you never came back."

"Hush, Nealy!" she silenced. "I missed you—like—" and then she began to cry.

The kid picked her and just stood there, holding her in his arms. "Don't cry, kitten," he soothed. "I missed you, too, but that is all over now. I'm back, and I'm going to fight!"

I patted his shoulder. "I was doubtful," I admitted, "but Kitty never once lost faith in you. She knew you would return. She planned all that secret stuff, too!"

He kissed her, long and hard, and I thought how grand they looked together. "Better wait until we are married before you carry the bride around!" Kitty laughed, and the kid set her down once more.

One of the attendants stuck his head inside the door, telling us we were next on the card. We were the final event for the evening. "Hey!" the kid exclaimed. "I've got to dress."

Kitty grinned. "You mean undress."

I waved her out. "You get to your seat, Kit. I'll get the kid ready."

"One more kiss," Lucky said, and he got it.

He began to peel off his clothing. He told me where he had gone, what he had done. "For almost the whole three days I wandered around like a bum, Nealy. I've been drinking and smoking like a fool. I

didn't even shave until this morning. You should have seen the beard!"

"But what made you come back?" I wanted to know. I was impatient; I was no less worried. He looked bad; he looked slow.

"Two days ago I decided to get a plane reservation for Panama. But I couldn't get on the plane. Don't ask me why, but I just couldn't. I had it out with myself over some hot coffee—the first I had had in the whole time I was away. Last night I stopped at Russ' grave, and that was the clincher. I could hear him calling me a coward. I knew then I wasn't afraid anymore!"

I gave him the trunks. "You look bad, kid!"

"I'm okay, Nealy. I'll make it now. And Nealy—no matter what happens after this one Kitty and I are going to be married!"

I grinned broadly. There was a lump in my throat, however, I could not dislodge. I remembered that morning when I brought her the kid's letter. "Swell, kid," I said. "And how about the title?"

I started putting on the tape. "The title, Nealy? Well, I'll have a crack at it, and try to win for Russ. If I do I'll give it up the next day."

"You quitting the ring?" I echoed. I would be sorry to see him hang up the gloves, for with him went the greatest right I had ever seen. "How will you support Kitty?"

He was a new Jack now. There was no conceit, no boastfulness; instead I faced a boy who had suddenly and completely grown into manhood.

"Nealy, I'm going back to the piano, back to my music—for good!"

I swallowed hard. "Swell, kid," I said again.

"What about you, Nealy?"

"Me? I'll get me a new boy. Or maybe I'll turn ref. Yessir, I think I'd like that!" The tape was on, binding the fists that would take him to the top. "Ready?" I asked.

"Ready!" he said.

There were tears in my eyes as we started down the aisle.