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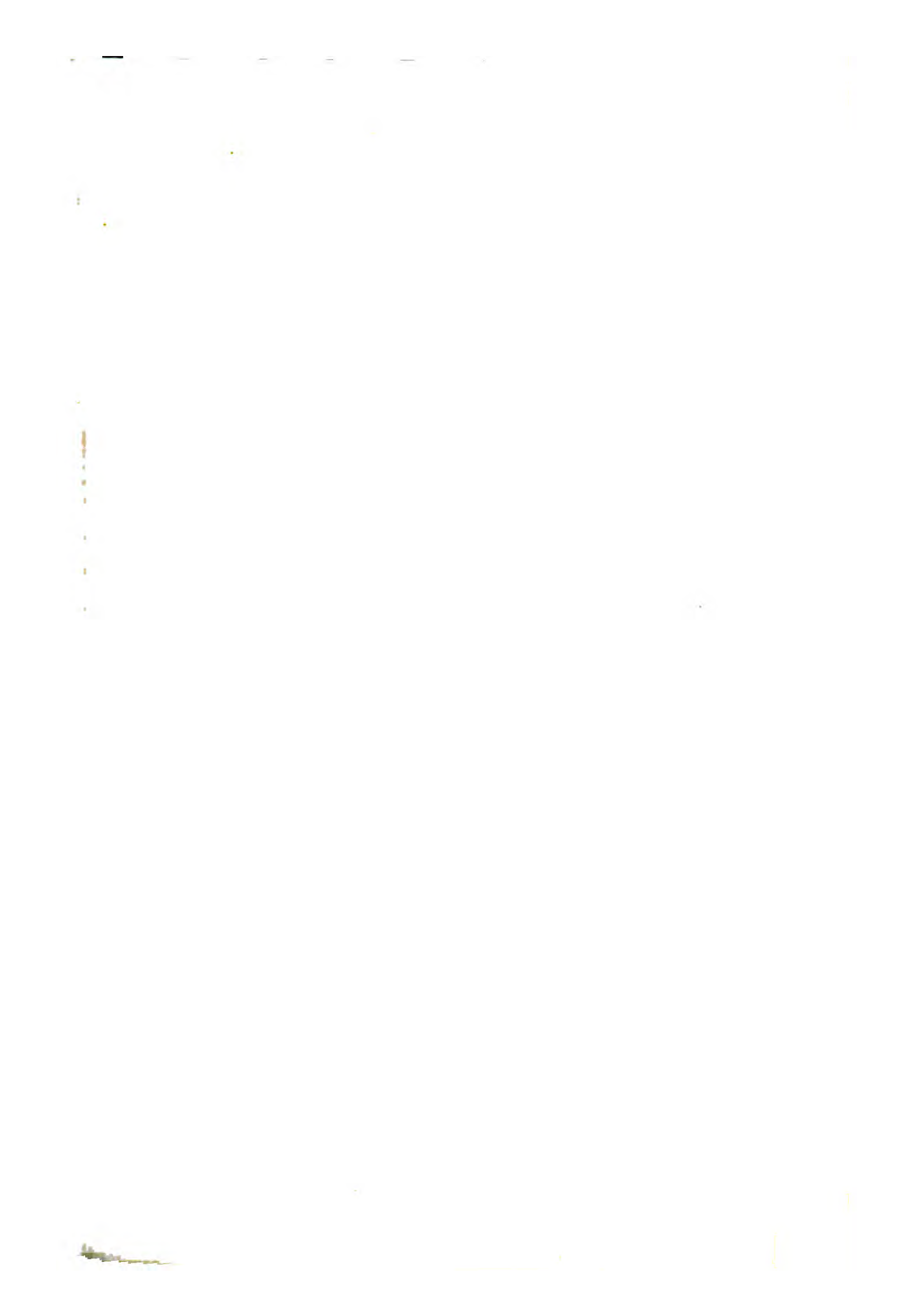


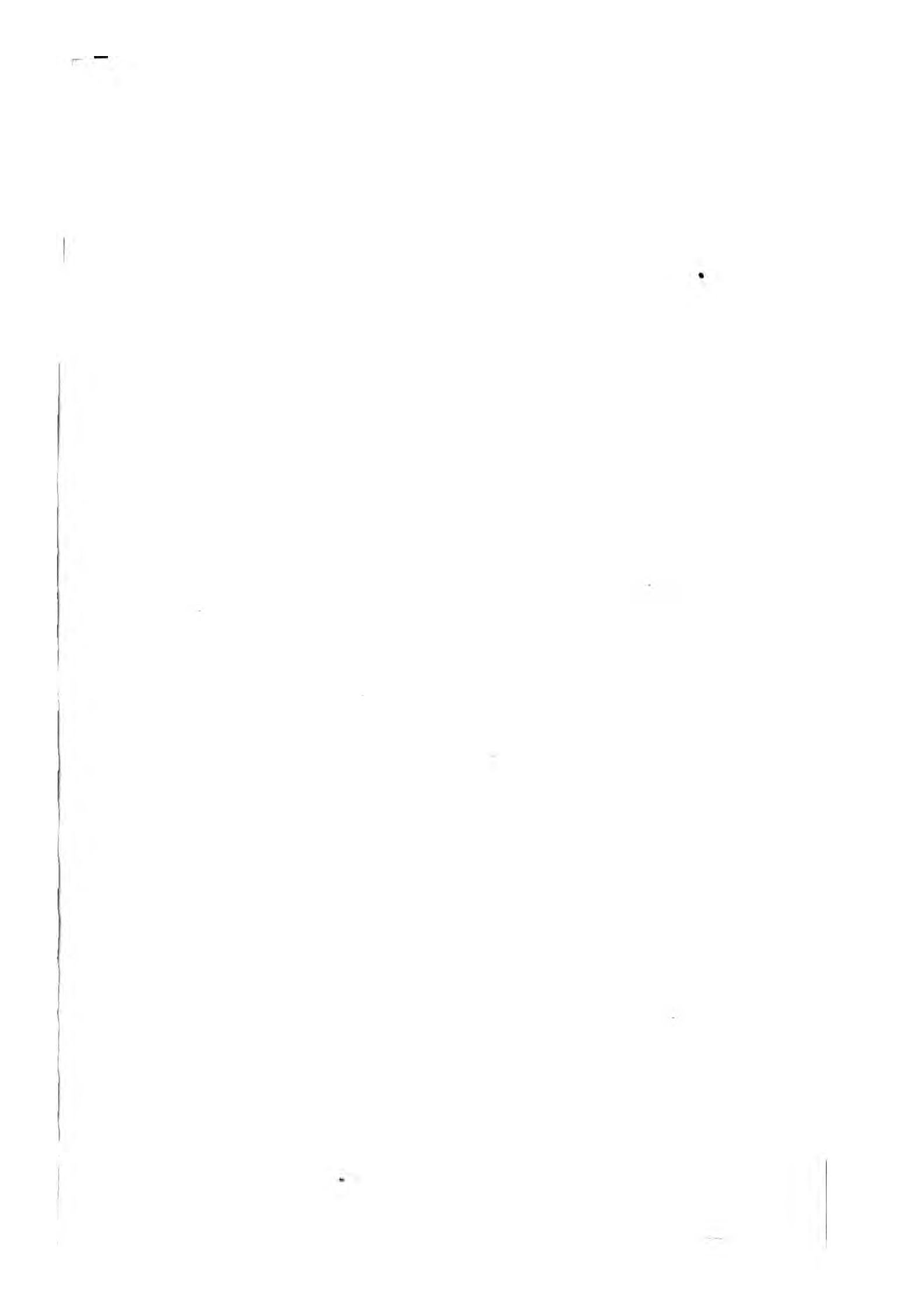
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PROGRESS

H. C. WITWER

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BOOKS BY H. C. WITWER

FROM BASEBALL TO BOCHES
A SMILE A MINUTE
ALEX THE GREAT
KID SCANLON
THERE'S NO BASE LIKE HOME
THE RUBAIYAT OF A FRESHMAN
THE LEATHER PUSHERS
FIGHTING BACK
FIGHTING BLOOD
LOVE AND LEARN
ROUGHLY SPEAKING
BILL GRIMM'S PROGRESS

Bill Grimm's Progress

By

H. C. Witwer

Author of "The Leather Pushers," etc.



G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York & London
The Knickerbocker Press

1926



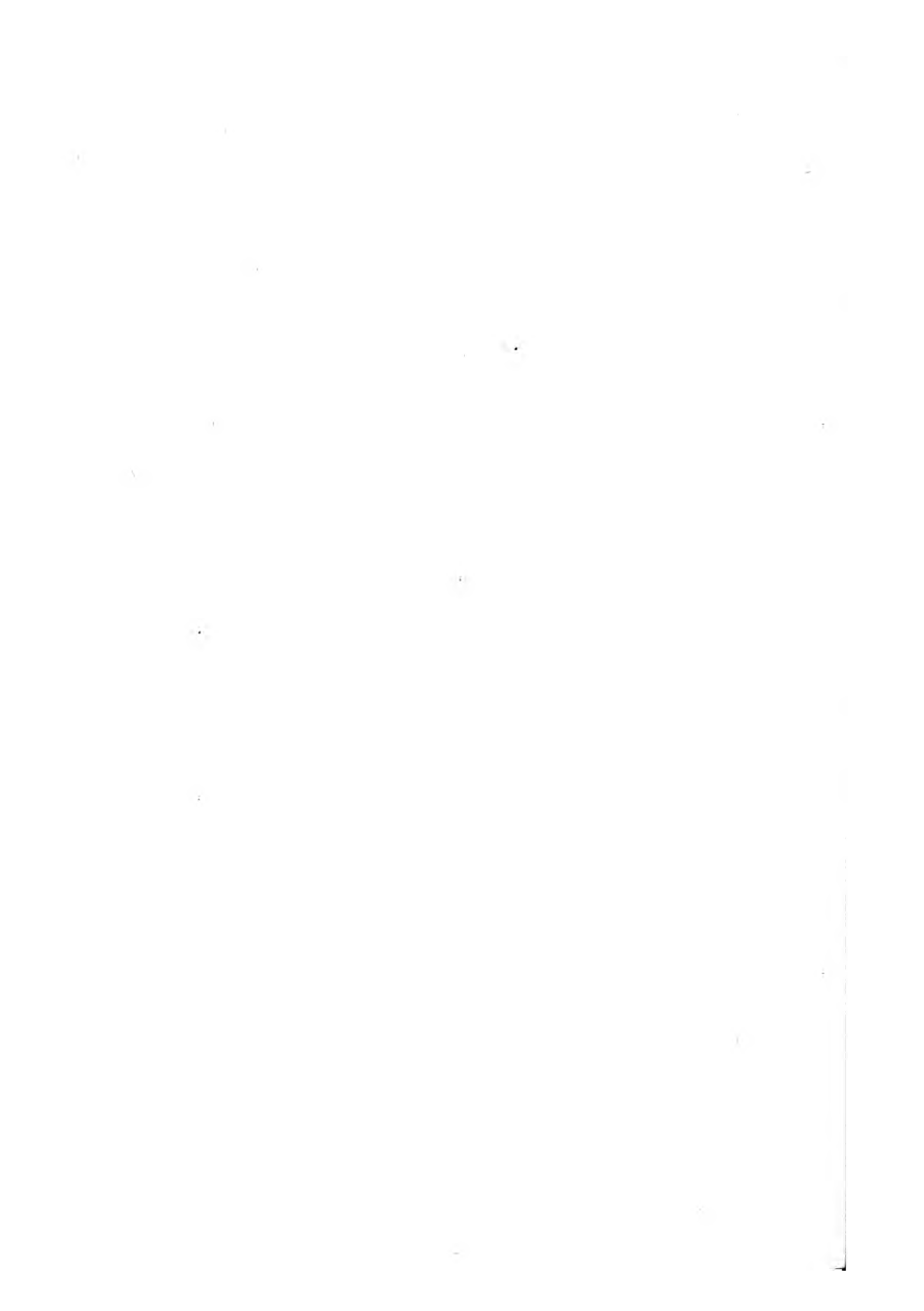
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To
GRANT OVERTON





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BILL GRIMM'S PROGRESS

BILL GRIMM'S PROGRESS

CHAPTER I

THE LADY OF LYONS, N. Y.

SHE'LL never look more beautiful than she did that wild night when she stood beside me in Fairfax's deadfall and told me to make good! I'll never be as brainless again as I was that same evening when I let her go with a paltry handshake. A fool and his honey is soon parted! Imagine a chilly good-by to the best looker since Venus the Milo, when I might of cinched matters then and there. I could of kissed her and she wouldn't of shrieked, but it took me many a day to find *that* part of it out.

Well, when she told me to leave Fairfax Falls flat on its collar bone and put myself over, she started something! Who was she? Wait—I'm going to haul off and broadcast the low-down on

the whole business. This may not be as pungent as *Romeo & Juliet*, but at least it's shorter.

Speaking of truffles, the first thing everybody usually asks me is how did I ever manage to climb out of the ash can and get to the top of the heap. I read the other day where a great man was asked that same question. "To what do you attribute your success?" was the way it was put to him. They thought he was going to say it was the influence of his mother, the love of the little woman he was wed to, his early religious training, working twenty-four hours a day, or something like that. Well, he crossed 'em!

"To what do I attribute my success?" he says, "Why—to my *ability*, of course!"

There's a guy after my own heart—he had the courage not to be modest!

Although I've yet to experience the sensations of being called anything else but Bill, not counting oaths, my rightful name is William R. Grimm, Esq. I graduated with high honors from the University of Experience and I'm entitled to place T. D. after my name if the mood should hit me. T. D. is a ten-letter vertical word meaning "Taxi Driver," and don't curl your lip—we can't all start life in Buckingham Palace. I guess you figure me hard-boiled.

Well, if you'd been in hot water as much as *I* have, you'd be hard-boiled too!

That initial R in my name stands for the word Reginald and was a big concession on the part of my man-mountain father to my sainted and romantical mother, who, I understood, fondly wished to baptize me Percy. Dad was a roaring-voiced building contractor of the old two-fisted school—a handsome giant, from his pictures. Mother was his exact opposite—frail, dainty, refined. Their entirely different compositions has staged many a clash in *me!*

From my father I got my brawn and from my mother my ambition. Both parents was lost at sea when I was a kid, and the pennies which should of come to me was quickly dissipated by a equally dissipated uncle. It's certainly a crime that the only relations we can pick out for ourselves is our wives, ain't it?

Well, being thrown on my own at a age when I should of been a pupil in somebody's high school, my intentions has always been much better than my grammar. If they wasn't, I could be hung! I guess I've about covered the situation with regards to myself, except I might add that I never pick a fight and I never duck one. My motto is, "If hit on one cheek, turn the other—and if hit on the *other*,

knock 'em cold!" Otherwise I'm polite to one and all, know my groceries, can wear a dress suit without somebody asking me to show 'em to their table, read a lot to give myself a synthetic education and watch my speech like Puss watches a mouse. It ain't half as hard to come up from the gutter as it is to keep from bringing the gutter up with you. That last one's a *real* feat!

At the winsome age of twenty, which is where I'm going to begin giving you this load of my adventures, I was foiling the poorhouse by operating the only taxi in Fairfax Falls, N. Y. Husky, healthy, and not exactly resembling a gorilla, I didn't have a worry or a dime in the world. As I was still young enough to have dreams in the daytime, I firmly intended to check out of the taxi racket and win fame and fortune at *something*, but I hadn't located my trick as yet. Nevertheless, I'd made up my mind that some day a glass-panelled door was going to have on it in gold letters, W. REGINALD GRIMM and underneath, PRESIDENT. Whether that would be followed by "Of the United States" or "Of the United Garbage Company," I didn't know or care!

I wasn't very fluent with money while I was bounding around at the wheel of a taxi, but I was

certainly seeing a lot of life. What I missed in jack I made up in laughs! I also learned a lot of things which didn't do me no harm in later years—few people has as good a chance to view human nature as a taxi driver has. Experience is a hard school—no Yale or Harvard—but for the pupils which will pay attention to Teacher it's a great one!

My mock taxi, built by myself personally from junked parts of a flock of different cars, was something to think about. It cost me less than \$150, and at that price it was a steal. There was room enough for Congress to meet in the thing and it had three speeds: hither, thither, and yon. It would go anywheres—by freight. Around Fairfax Falls they called it the Leaping Tuna, but my name for it was the Gambler Six, as it was nearly always broke. There was a garage in this slab run by Skip Mullen who ground a mean valve, but I done all my own repair work after one interview with that baby. I asked him what I could do to stop my motor from smoking, and he says to keep my tobacco where the motor can't get at it! Skip writes vaudeville acts for a living now. . . .

Left Hook O'Brien and Butch Ford was my two best pals in Fairfax Falls. In spite of the fact that we've known each other for a dozen years now, by

a strange coincidence they're still my friends. O'Brien was a classy lightweight box fighter and Butch was his trainer and afterwards my manager—no drawing-room wows, but two of the squarest shooters which ever put on a collar! Left Hook O'Brien was born Izzy Rabinowitz, but took that Irish name for business purposes. He was nobody's fool. Once when I kidded him about being a Jewish Sinn Feiner, he grinned and answered me this:

"I like to have the crowd *with* me when I go in there! Well, you listen to 'em the next time you see a box fight. You'll hear 'Kill the Wop!' 'Knock the Jew stiff!' 'Smack 'at Swede silly!' 'Flatten the big Limey!' *But*—did you ever hear a fight crowd yell, 'Kill the *Irishman!*'?"

A pay-off, what?

O'Brien's one and only ambition was to cop the lightweight title, and Butch Ford's was to wake up every morning of his life with five bucks in his kick.

The first big turning point in my life arrived when Butch got me to drive him and Left Hook O'Brien to Rochester, where O'Brien was to box Knockout Burns before going on to New York City for some more important quarrels. I'd seen O'Brien go a half dozen times before and knew he was good, and

so did the lightweight champion, which didn't wish no part of my boy friend. On paper, O'Brien figured to stop Knockout Burns in a couple of frames, and it looked like a great chance for me to win a few nickles for myself. Likewise, I'd see the brawl from a ring-side seat which Butch staked me to. As if that wasn't enough, business comes along and combines itself with the pleasure I looked forward to having. Just before I pulled out of town I got a call to stop at Lyons the day after the fight, pick up a school-teacher named Miss Baxter and haul her back to Fairfax Falls, where she was carded to do her stuff at our new schoolhouse.

Like everybody else, Left Hook O'Brien rated Knockout Burns a pushover, and he trained for the battle by getting his nails manicured. At that, he give Burns a fearful pasting—made a chopping block of him—but he couldn't put him away. As game as a punching bag and as tough as a life sentence, Burns was in there to stay the limit. That's what he managed to do, though in every round O'Brien done everything to this gil but run away with his wife! Burns being a local idol, the fair-minded referee called it a draw. If that scrimmage was a draw, so was the war! However, I bet that my buddy would slap Burns for a loop, and that

rotten decision cost me my lifetime savings—thirty-four iron men. I had to borrow money for gas to get home on. Not so good!

Came the dawn, as they say on the screen, and right after a two-bit breakfast I shoved off for Lyons to get this school-teacher I was due to bring back to Fairfax Falls. On the way out of Rochester a female voice suddenly calls my name when I'm stopped by a traffic signal, and I immediately pull over to the curb, as the voice happens to belong to Pansy Pilkington. Don't laugh—Pansy's made many a wiser boy than me stop, look and listen! It was less than a year later that this palatable young lady was to stand New York on its head from the front row of the Follies. I know you never heard of no Pansy Pilkington in the Follies. Neither did nobody else. However, I ain't going to tip you the name she used there, as it's a hobby of mine to be a gentleman and Pansy was supposed to of hit Broadway direct from Vassar.

But at this time she was just a lowly biscuit shooter at the Commercial House in Fairfax Falls and probably thought Flo Ziegfeld was a ball player. The super-flapper of the burg and as soothing to the eye as green goggles, Pansy had that school-girl complexion without the bother of going to

school. She was a disturbance of the first water, there's no question about that; still, she never made *me* feverish. I guess I was Pansy-proof. For one thing, I figured it would take too much Jack to step out with this Jill!

Her arms was full of bundles, and she dumped some on the front seat of my taxi beside me with a sigh of relief.

"Hello, Pansy," I says. "You look keen. How come you're in Rochester?"

"Well, Bill, I got sick of being a Mail-Order Mary!" she smiles. "You know—'send us only two dollars and get this beautiful Paris creation!' and 'Simply sign the coupon and the postman will toss this almost-fur in your door!' I've left that stuff to the Dumb Doras. I've been on a shopping carouse!"

"You wouldn't fool me, would you?" I grins back. "What did you use for money?"

"I love that!" says Pansy indignantly. "Suppose I told you I drew a month's salary in advance?"

"Be your age, Pansy," I says. "If you told *me* that, I'd get hysterical! That guy you work for ain't putting *nothing* out. He's too stingy to harbor a suspicion! Why—"

"Oh, that reminds me," butts in Pansy, opening

her handbag excitedly, "today's the boss's birthday. Say—listen, Bill. Run over to that gents' furnishing store and pick out a nice tie for him—one you'd wear yourself. Here, this is all I have left!"

With that she hands me half a dollar.

"I can get him a collar for this, but not no tie," I says.

"But I have no more money," says Pansy, trying out some eye work on me. "Maybe *you*—er—"

"There ain't a chance of putting the bee on *me* either," I told her. "I'm as flat as a ballroom floor!"

And I explained to her what that Left Hook O'Brien-Knockout Burns shambles done to me. Pansy looks vexed.

"Well, run over, anyways, and see what you can get for a man for fifty cents," she says. "I'll watch your taxi."

I prowled into this swell haberdashery, and they immediately suspected I wasn't by no means Vincent Astor, so they treated me accordingly.

"I want to get a tasty tie, and I got half a buck to squander," I tell a haughty clerk. "What would *you* suggest?"

The clerk gives me the up and down and yawns in my face.

"I'd suggest another shop," he says and walks away.

A few doors above this drum there was a five-and-ten-cent store. I blowed in there and bought Pansy's boss *five* ties!

"I wish I could think of a little speech to make when I give him these," says Pansy.

"Just say, 'Here's some ties for your birthday—try and wear 'em!'" I says. "C'mon, hop in and I'll take you back home with me!"

I'd begun to think of the long voyage to Fairfax Falls with nothing for company but that school-teacher I had to get at Lyons—probably a comic valentine.

"I'd love to go back with you, Bill," says Pansy, "but—well, I have my return ticket and—"

"Here's a chance to play a mean trick on the railroad by not using it," I interrupts. "I got to pick up another lady at Lyons—she's going to teach at our new school—so you needn't be afraid to go with me."

"Afraid of *you*?" says Pansy, giving me a killing look. "Why, I'd never be afraid of *you*, Bill. I think you're a dear!"

"I wouldn't be surprised," I says. "My father was a Elk!"

As a matter of fact, it was *me* which was afraid of Pansy.

"As for this school-teacher," continues Pansy, climbing into the seat beside me and dumping her bundles into the back of the cab, "let her *walk* to Fairfax Falls or buy herself a pair of roller skates or something!"

But though a long ride with just Pansy looked plenty appetizing, I needed the sugar there was in it for me if I took this school-teacher back, so I rolled into Lyons, pulled up at the address I'd been given—and got the shock of my young life!

Somehow I'd got the idea that this Miss Baxter would be a hatchet-faced old maid as thin as a dime and just as thrilling. I looked for horn-rimmed glasses, hair plastered back flat, with a voice and costume about like a man's. That's the way Miss Tice, our other school-teacher, checked up—a girl which would be safe anywheres!

Instead of that, Miss Baxter was simply a panic! Around my own age, garbed in what Fairfax Falls would be wearing about five years later, the latest bob, the most recent everything else, a unbeatable argument for short skirts—well, a breath taker! She just outclassed Pansy, which was anything but a eyesore herself.

Pansy looked three or four times as surprised as I was, and she presented the Lady of Lyons with a peeved stare. Pansy could of been in Finland as far as Miss Baxter was concerned.

"I've been waiting an hour for you," this remarkable and highly annoyed school-teacher says to me.

"Listen!" I says, somewhat dazed. "Don't get mad over that hour's wait—I been waiting twenty years for *you!*"

Pansy's scornful snort didn't stop us looking at each other for maybe half a minute, during which Miss Baxter executed a blush which ruined me. Then with a quick frown she discouraged any further efforts on my part, but as I hopped out and swung open the door of the cab for her, her eyes was smiling if her lips wasn't. With a murderous glance at me, Pansy got off the front seat and stepped in the back too. She was what you might call fuming! I introduced her to Miss Baxter and explained how I happened to go out on a call carrying a girl with me. Inwardly I was wishing Pansy was in Portugal, not that I disliked her, but . . . However, Miss Baxter seemed satisfied with my explanation and made room for Pansy beside her.

Then begun a ride to Fairfax Falls, which to me was a riot, no kidding! Here I am with two beautiful girls and a twenty-five-mile drive staring me in the face and the fact that they're *both* there makes it out of the question for me to click with one or the other. It was a typical case of how happy I could be with either, was the other dear charmer away!

In the back of the cab the girls is breaking their necks to be polite to each other, but conversation died a natural death after a few minutes and they didn't even attempt to fake it. However, I was goaled by Miss Baxter—Barbara Baxter, as I managed to eavesdrop—and I took a noble try at promoting myself. I managed to exchange some careless words with her which soon steamed Pansy and caused that young lady to high-hat me. This seemed to give Barbara much secret amusement, and I guess that's the only reason she talked to me at all. She must of thought I was a fearful Patsy, then.

I got so interested in Barbara that I made a wrong turn on a detour and lost the state road. So I stopped outside a garage.

“What's the best way for us to get to Fairfax

Falls from here?" I asked the near-mechanic which come out in answer to the horn.

This clown walks all around my home-made taxi, looking at it like it was the first one he ever seen in his born days.

"You wish to go to Fairfax Falls in *that* boiler?" he inquires, like he can't believe his ears.

"Absolutely," I says. "How will I get there?"

"Well, if it was *me*, I'd pray for a miracle!" he answers, curling his lip. With that he walks into the garage and both them girls laughed their heads off!

But I found the road, and no further noteworthy events happened till we're within a few miles of Fairfax Falls. Then it was different. The old boat is rattling off a noble twenty-five miles a hour when the sudden, hair-raising wail of a siren makes the girls jump. Through the rear-view mirror I peg a big, costly speed wagon, cut along racing lines, roaring over the road behind me. I recognized the car and I likewise knew that the proprietor of same had no right to use that siren, as he was neither a police car, a fire-engine or a ambulance. I started to tell the nervous girls that, when this bozo, doing fifty miles a hour if he was moving at all, crowds me on a turn and we go crashing into a ditch with

Pansy yelling murder. I still remember there wasn't a single squawk come from Barbara Baxter—she was a thoroughbred, that's positive!

However, we landed right side up, and there was nobody hurt but my mudguards and temper. While I'm taking stock of the grief, our opponent drives slowly back around the turn, stops beside us, and gets out of his car. He was no stranger to me, being no less than Jack Fairfax, the sheik of Fairfax Falls and the first villain I ever met with a name like a hero.

Roughly about the same age, me and Fairfax has been first-class enemies of years standing, our private war starting long before when I knocked this tomato stiff for deliberately running his car over my dog. That's the tip-off on the kind of a guy he was—one of these babies with a chin you love to touch!

Jack Fairfax was something of a mystery in our town, where, in spite of the fact that it was named after his family, he was as popular as typhoid fever. His people had lived in Europe for years, and Fairfax himself aced around mostly in Rochester and New York City, though nearly all Fairfax Falls was owned by his parents. He simply drove in every now and then to burn the natives up by Ritzing

'em, while showing some of his rich, sarcastical, cake-eating friends the village named after him.

Amongst the Fairfax properties was a crumbling old mansion on the out-skirts of the town which some time before had been spread all over the Sunday magazine sections of the newspapers as a haunted house. It was still looked on that way by most of Fairfax Falls, and the citizens give it a wide berth in passing by. You couldn't get a kid within a mile of it! Strange noises, clanking chains, unearthly lights and weird groans was just a few of the "spirit signs" which half the town swore to and the other half laughed off. Personally, I was what you might call neutral, but through the fact that Jack Fairfax constantly visited the place and bragged about doing it, I figured the haunted-house thing was apple sauce.

Well, when Fairfax come back that day after running me into the ditch I was naturally fit to be tied, but on account of Barbara Baxter being there I didn't smack him down. Regarding the subject of girls going wild over cave men—well, some do and some don't! I was taking no reckless chances. Dressed like a fashion plate, with a cigarette sticking out of his mouth from a long, gold holder, this proper Humpty Dumpty stood there sneering at

me, and, of course, alongside of him I looked like a tramp.

"I'm going to complain to the authorities about that remarkable conveyance of yours, Grimm," he says, with a nasty grin. "It's a menace to navigation!"

Pansy laughed, but Barbara didn't. I seen her coldly sizing him up.

"You should be heartily ashamed of yourself!" bursts out Barbara warmly. "We might have been killed!"

It was then Fairfax lamped her for the first time. One amazed look at her floored him—you could see that in his very readable face. Off comes his swagger cap. It hadn't come off for Pansy.

"Don't think because you're still on your feet that I'll forget this, Fairfax!" I says. "If we was alone, I'd lay you like linoleum, you big false alarm!"

But he pays me not the faintest attention. He's all eyes for Barbara Baxter.

"I—why—I—I gave you the horn and I tried to avoid crowding you, but I—was going too fast!" he stammers, talking directly to her. "I'm terribly sorry! Won't you let me take you the rest of the way into town?"

At that I dropped the jack I was getting ready to raise the front wheels with and stared from him to Barbara. I noticed Pansy staring at *me*, and her face was good and angry. Fairfax had everything I didn't have—clothes, class, money, a swell car, a great line of chatter. Regardless of the miles there was between 'em in every other way, Fairfax and Barbara belonged in the same drawing-rooms, that was a cinch. I was just a taxi driver—where did *I* rate any favors from her?

Barbara hesitated and looked thoughtfully at me, while Fairfax's hungry eyes never left her face. He was hanging on her answer like it was a matter of life or death. I felt pretty low. To me it *was*—a matter of life or death to my hopes!

"How long will it take you to make repairs?" Barbara asks me.

"Five minutes!" I says before the words was hardly out of her pretty mouth.

"You're crazy!" snorts Fairfax, and he pulls open the door of my taxi. "If you'll step out, Miss—"

"I shall wait—you needn't bother!" interrupts Barbara, with icicles on every word, and my heart tries to climb out through my ribs.

"Get away from that cab and make it snappy!" I bawls at Fairfax, taking a step toward him.

He moved slowly away and I could swear there was a touch of contempt in Barbara's glance at him. He seen it too, but the ignored and enraged Pansy give him a out—enabled him to take the air without choosing me.

"You can ride *me* into town, Mr. Fairfax," says Pansy, and hopping out of my taxi she flounces into the front seat of Fairfax's bus.

Fairfax hadn't invited her and this boy scout wasn't particularly overjoyed at the idea of rolling into Fairfax Falls with the Commercial House waitress by his side, beautiful or not. However, he had no choice and he shot away with a grinding of gears and probably a grinding of teeth too. The last *I* got was a poisonous glare from Pansy.

"I'm sorry I ain't got some magazines or something in the car to amuse you," I says calmly to Barbara, when they'd gone in a cloud of dust, "because it's going to take me a good hour and lots of equally good luck to get this mechanical toy where it'll roll!"

A flash of alarm in her lovely face is quickly chased by anger.

"What do you mean?" she demands. "Why did you tell me you could repair it in five minutes?"

"I wouldn't fool you—it was because I wanted

you to stay!" I says truthfully, opening up the hood and gazing at the motor. "You're having a romantic adventure—don't scream!"

Wam—what a furious stare I got for a minute! Then I grinned cheerfully at her and darned if she didn't grin back.

"Why didn't you go into town with Fairfax—that other fellow?" I asked her, while I'm puttering around.

She opens a little beauty bag she's carrying and powders the end of the most bewitching nose since Helen from Troy.

"I do not like his type," she says. "You seemed to know him well—who is he?"

Well, that was just the beginning of four hundred and eighty-six questions asked me by this toothsome young lady while I'm trying to get Mr. Motor to mote. She wanted to know all about Fairfax Falls, the natives, the Fairfax family history, etc., etc., and even etc. The haunted house particularly aroused her attention and she made me promise to show her the place at my earliest convenience. Then she dreamily begins brushing the sleeve of her dress with her lily-white hand.

"And—Pansy?" she asks me, without looking up. "Your sweetheart?"

"By no means," I grins. "I ain't got no sweet-hearts—I'm just a boy which girls forget!"

That extracted a laugh from Barbara, a delightful sound as she handled it.

"You're a most unusual—er—taxi driver!" she says. "Tell me something about yourself."

At last we'd struck a subject on which I was well posted, and I certainly done it justice!

Well, Barbara Baxter didn't pitch right into her job as school-teacher, but Jack Fairfax stayed in town and pitched right into trying to put over a fast one. He fairly swamped Barbara with flowers, candy, books, auto-ride invitations or what have you? Then, to my great astonishment and rage, this scissorbill begin to get results. Twice she went out riding with him, which got me red-headed and tickled Pansy Pilkington silly.

After giving matters plenty of due consideration, I decided to interview Barbara on the subject of Jack Fairfax. I seen her trip into Yackley's drug store one morning and stopping my comedy taxi outside I strolled in after her. We sat down at the fountain and I plied her with a chocolate soda.

"Where have you been keeping yourself?" she asks me, watching my face in the mirror behind the counter. "Long time no see!"

"That don't seem to of ruined your health," I says gloomily. "If I was you, I wouldn't give this Fairfax too much leeway. Fun's fun, but that bird's forever looking for the best of it and—"

"Just a moment!" she cuts me off, colder by fifty-four degrees than the ice cream in her glass. "I think you forget that you and I are but chance acquaintances, Bill. You're not my father, my brother, my guardian or my fiancé. I'm quite able to take care of myself—in *any* company!"

Surprised and hurt, I leaped up off the stool.

"Good-by and excuse me!" I says.

Darn it, I could feel my face flaming as red as all the tomatoes in the world. She had gave me the razzberry, cold turkey! I started for the door, positive that there ain't no Santy Claus, but she called me back—in a far different tone of voice.

"Is your taxi engaged?" she smiled—and I'm in love all over again.

"No," I says. "And *I* ain't engaged either. I ain't even *going* with nobody!"

"Then take me out and show me that haunted house you told me about," she commands. "And take that sullen look off your face. You know, you're really handsome when you smile, Bill."

"When *you* smile, the rest of 'em is just girls," I says and told the truth.

Well, I drove her out to Fairfax's alleged haunted house and once we got there I had a hard time getting her to leave. Although she'd asked me a raft of questions about this trap before, that didn't stop her from asking me all about it again. I never seen nobody so curious! Did anybody else besides Fairfax ever visit the haunted house? When and how often is the ghostly noises heard? Had the place ever been offered for sale? Did Fairfax himself tell people it was haunted? That's just a few of the things Barbara wanted to know and I give her as many details as I had in stock.

Fairfax heard about this trip we took—probably from Pansy Pilkington which saw us coming back—and he gnashed his teeth. The very next day he walks up to my stand outside the hotel and says his car's in the repair shop and he wants to engage my taxi for the afternoon. He acted so friendly I should of been suspicious, but instead I was thrown off my guard. So I met him at two o'clock as arranged, and he orders me to drive him to the Commercial House. Still I don't tumble. But when he comes outside with Barbara Baxter on his arm I like to fell off my seat!

"Just drive us around for a couple of hours," says Fairfax, grinning from ear to ear. "I'll tell you when to come back!"

Barbara looked amazed when she seen me—staring first at Fairfax and then back at me. I thought she was in on this attempt to humiliate me and I give her a frigid glare. Up goes her head with a toss.

"You don't mind driving us?" she asks me.

"Why should I?" I shot at her. "This is my business, ain't it?"

But within a hour I was three feet past infuriation at the cracks Fairfax was making about me from the back of the cab. I suddenly whirled my taxi off the road, shot through a gap in a fence and drove 'em madly across a newly plowed field, stepping on the gas and nearly bumping my passengers and my seagoing taxi apart! When later I come to a halt outside the Commercial House, I'm satisfied I'd of dropped dead if a look from Fairfax could of killed me.

"How much do I owe you, you infernal idiot?" he pants, crazy mad.

"Twenty-five bucks, you inveterate sap!" I says, and taking off my coat I begin to roll up my sleeves.

Barbara tried hard to keep a straight face and

glare at me, but she must of thought of something funny because all at once she bust out laughing, winked at me behind Fairfax's back and skipped into the hotel. Fairfax gazed after her, glowered at me for a minute, muttered a baffled oath and practically hurled the twenty-five fish at me. In a way, that was a disappointment. I was hoping he'd want to battle—if he had, he'd of sure got service!

About a week after Barbara Baxter descended on Fairfax Falls, a couple of more strangers got off 84, the dilapidated spur-line train, and stepped into my cab. Right off the bat I got a kick when they asked to be hauled to the haunted house. They're a pair of mysterious-looking eggs, and one of 'em must of spoke out of turn somewheres, because he had a broken nose. While I'm trying to figure 'em out, the other guy says they're newspaper reporters from New York City and they're going to write up something new and startling about the haunted house, but they don't wish nobody in Fairfax Falls to know of 'em being there. The fellow with the bum smeller then shows me a twenty-dollar note, tears it across and gives me half of it, telling me I'll get the other half if I drive to the haunted house as fast as my bus can go and by some route which won't take 'em through the town. That's

what I done and I left 'em outside, looking at the house.

When I get back to my stand, I go to brush out the cab and I find one of them jazzbos has forgot to take a portfolio with him. So once again I drive to the haunted house, but there's no sign of nobody around, and though I thump and thump on the front door I can't get no answer. Going around to the rear of this old ruin, I get a attack of dumfoundment. Cuddled up against a window is no less than Barbara Baxter, plainly getting a earful of what's going on inside the house!

"Well, for weeping in public!" I gasps. "What are *you* doing here?"

You should of saw her jump!

"I—why—I—well—er—spiritualism is a hobby of mine, Bill," she says, recovering her wits and coming over to me. "I've been studying the haunted house—listening for the—er—ghosts and that sort of thing, you know!"

She winds up with a little laugh which sounded to me like it was forced. I must say she seemed anything but at ease.

"Well, there ain't no ghosts in there now!" I says. "There's a couple of guys—"

"Yes—who *are* they?" she butts in excitedly.

"I promised I wouldn't tell," I says, after a minute. I was thinking of something else. "Say, listen—when are you going to begin teaching school here?" I ask her.

That innocent question didn't seem to add nothing to her peace of mind. She give me a long, odd look.

"Very soon, now," she says. "I'll wait in your taxi and you can drive me back to town. I—I *walked* out here, you know. And—Bill, don't say a word to those men in there, or to *any* one, about my being here!"

While Barbara sat in the cab around in front I pounded on the back door of the house till the fellow with the caved-in beak answered, asking who I was through the door before he opened it. I gave him the portfolio and he's highly delighted, calling to his pal to see what they nearly lost. This little act of honesty on my part wins me ten bucks more and a order to call for 'em at eight the following night. It wasn't till I'd left Barbara at the hotel that the thought struck me, "How did them two guys get in that house when it's always locked?"

Driving to the haunted house a little before 8 P. M. the following day, as per my engagement, who should call to me from the sidewalk but Barbara

Baxter. No sooner does she find out where I'm bound for than she insists on going with me. Well, I was in a fine predicament. She wanted to go, she was sure she'd see the "ghosts" at night, and if you ever witnessed this girl you'd get a idea of how hard it was to refuse her *anything!* So I took her with me on the front seat, just to see what would happen. I seen what would happen, I'll howl to the wide, wide world!

I parked a little distance from the haunted house at Barbara's request and left her there while I walked up, knocked, and was let inside. The first thing I noticed is that the hall is full of wooden boxes, piled high on top of each other. One of the reporters says to back my taxi around to the rear, as they wish to load the boxes in it. I asks him where are they going, and he says to Rochester.

"Nothing stirring!" I says firmly. "I wouldn't wheel that old bus of mine to Rochester at night on a bet. Besides, it would fall apart with all them boxes in it. What's in 'em?"

"Never mind what's in 'em!" says the guy with the broken nose shortly, "but there's seventy-five bucks in this for *you* if you tend to your knittin'!"

But I had a sudden, queer feeling that something was wrong. I thought of Barbara sitting outside

alone in my taxi, and I commenced to back out the hall, when a door's flung open and Jack Fairfax stumbles headlong into the house! He ain't got no hat on, and his face is as white as a sheet. Personally I'm commencing to get a bit dizzy.

"What the—" begins one of the reporters.

"The state troopers are on their way here—we're sunk!" bawls Fairfax and then he catches sight of me. "What did you let *that* fellow in here for?" he howls. "He's the one who tipped them off!"

Fairfax stood in the background, panting and swearing at me, but the two reporters rushed me together. We are wrestling all over the place when the doors crash in and the house is swarming with state troopers. I never seen so many guns before in my life, and the next thing we're all pinched, including your boy friend, Bill Grimm.

With the butt of his gun one of the troopers caved in the lid of a box in the hall, and it turns out to be full of bottles. The bottles is full of booze. Good night! Things had indeed come to a pretty pass, and I seen the hoosegow staring me right in the face, when Barbara Baxter saunters in the now open door. Fairfax, held by a couple of husky troopers the same as I was, give a gasp and looked

thoughtful when he seen her, but I was too dazed to gasp—the whole thing smacked of a nightmare to *me!*

The troopers seemed to know Barbara and give her respectful attention, while she give me a pleasant and unanswered smile. Then she tells 'em to take their hands off me, as I'm as innocent as a very young baby. Not only that, she goes on, but I've helped her get the evidence that Jack Fairfax and the other two scofflaws is the master minds of a state-wide gang of common, ordinary bootleggers. They was no more newspaper reporters than I'm a Siamese duke!

While the troopers is loading their cursing prey and the boxes of hooch into the cars outside, Barbara leads the way into the deserted front room of the house and tells me things. There was spirits in that haunted house all right, but they was "*spiritus frumenti*"! It seems State Prohibition Enforcement Headquarters had been tipped that whisky was being brought to Fairfax Falls from Canada, taken to the alleged haunted house, and "cut" before being sold throughout the state. Barbara Baxter, a special revenue agent, was sent to our town as a school-teacher to get Fairfax and his pals with the goods.

"Hasn't it all been thrilling, Bill?" she asks me, with her hand on my arm.

But I'm half sore—half disappointed.

"You've made me look like a squealer!" I says, "I ain't infatuated with Jack Fairfax by no means, but that ain't the way I'd of boxed him. I fight in the open, myself!"

"But you've done a splendid thing!" says Barbara, though she did blush. "They were vicious lawbreakers, Bill, and—"

"Why did you give *me* a run-around about being a school-teacher?" I shut her off. "I told you the *truth* about myself!"

"Bill—I—I had to feel my way carefully," she says. "I had to know I could trust you!"

"Well, do you trust me now?" I asked her.

"Indeed I do!" she whispers. Again her hand touches my arm, and them Alice blue eyes looks deep into mine. Standing as close to her as that in the pitch-dark room, I got more kick than there was in all of Fairfax's booze. I had to put on the brakes—hard!

"Being a copper is no job for a girl!" I busts out. I *had* to say something!

"Oh, isn't it?" says Barbara. "Well, I made good, didn't I? Bill—bootleg whisky ruined my

home! It killed my father and cost my brother a high executive position. I wish I could put every one of those murderers in jail for life! I—why are you so—so quiet?”

“I’m thinking that the only reason you were nice to me at all was to get the dope on them guys!” I told her.

“Then you’re thinking wrong!” she says softly. “I—I like you, Bill!”

That’s where we should of went into a clinch, but she was alone in that dark room with me, and she trusted me. I didn’t know how she’d take it, and I refused to gamble! I figured it would keep, so I just said “Thanks!” and shook her hand.

“Bill,” says Barbara, “are you going to be a taxi chauffeur all your life?”

“What’s the difference?” I says. “It’s a honest trade, and there’s good money in it! I—”

“Nonsense!” she butts in. “Why don’t you get out of Fairfax Falls, dispose of that absurd automobile, and start doing something big? Get into something worth while and lay the foundation for your future before it’s too late. Why, there must be *dozens* of things you can do that offer more possibilities than driving a taxicab in a small town!”

I said nothing at all—I was busy thinking. Then

I realized I still had hold of her hand, and I let it go. We went out to my taxi, and I drove her back to town, the trip being made mostly in silence, though she sit beside me on the front seat. When we got to the Commercial House she says she was going to New York City to stay with her aunt for a while, and when I merely give her a gloomy "Good-by!" she seemed peeved, for some reason. Then she give me her aunt's address and phone number, again telling me to leave Fairfax Falls, which was cramping my style, for bigger fields and bigger opportunities. I took it for granted she was walking right out of my life when she walked up the stairs of that hotel. I'll never take *nothing* for granted again!

Well, I followed Barbara Baxter's advice, and I did get out of Fairfax Falls for a bigger playgrounds. I went to New York City, and I drove a taxi there!

CHAPTER II

SO THIS IS NEW YORK?

AMONG the thousands of things I *didn't* have was a university education, as maybe you've kind of suspected. Yet, strange as it may seem to the campus sheiks, many of the world's greatest successes wasn't college-bred.

In fact, plenty people to-day are satisfied that "college-bred" is bread which requires a fearful amount of dough, is seldom self-raising, and usually proves to be nothing more or less than a four-year loaf!

However, though I was scant on learning, there was a few particles of ambition in my composition—just enough to defeat my best efforts to be a flop.

The very first thing I done after leaping off the rattler at Grand Central was to phone Barbara Baxter. When the voice with the smile had tired of giving me the regular push around—"Busy,"

“Wrong number” and “They don’t answer”—she snapped into it and I found out from Barbara’s aunt that her charming niece had been called to headquarters at Washington. So, being as homeless as a poker chip, I started on a hunt for a room, keeping firmly in mind that my roll of seventy-three iron men might have to last me till Prohibition became popular.

Butch Ford was running a gym on Twenty-third Street at the time, and I went there for some dope as to where I could park and feed the old body. I happened to hit Butch’s trap during the rush hour, and the place was jammed with pugs and mock pugs—sparring, shadow boxing, pulling the weights, bag punching, running around the track, being rubbed by their handlers, pickling their fists in the brine bucket, and throwing the medicine ball. It was the greatest collection of red-blooded Nordics, broken noses and tin ears I ever viewed in my life—a flock of human accidents getting ready to happen somewheres!

Left Hook O’Brien was then training for his quarrel with Rough House Hicks—a fight which the fans will never forget on account of a thrill having nothing what the so ever to do with the bout, but plenty to do with *me!*

Well, my two buddies give me a warm greeting, shaking my hand and patting me on the back with no little delight.

“Hello, Big Boy!” says Butch. “How did *you* come to back in here?”

“How’s the taxi business in the Falls these days?” O’Brien wants to know.

“Boys,” I says solemnly, “I’m all washed up on Fairfax Falls. I’ve gave up the worldly pleasures and frivolous delights of that park and have come to New York to seek my fortune!”

“That’s a victory!” grins O’Brien. “Why don’t you ask the Standard Oil Company could they use a younger man than Rockefeller at the head of it?”

“I bet Wall Street would quake in its boots if it was Jerry to *you* bein’ here!” remarks Butch. “When d’ye figure on pullin’ off your first panic?”

“The question to *me* is whether you clowns will laugh after I smack you down!” I growls, with a frown.

Butch regards me seriously.

“And, brother, you could do that thing too!” he says softly. “Listen—have you landed anything here yet?”

“I just got off the choo-choo,” I says, “but I got

to get on somebody's pay roll somewhat quicker than right away! You couldn't use a social secretary, could you?"

"No," says Butch, "but I could use a heavyweight! Look here, Bill, you're simply fritterin' your life away on the front seat of a taxicab. All *that'll* ever get you is a ticket for speedin'! As you stand, you're just as much ring champeenship material goin' to waste. You're as big as a box car, as healthy as a week in the mountains and you should be able to drop anybody you sock! Why not trade your chauffeur's badge for a set of gloves?"

"Be yourself, Butch!" I laughs. "I'm no fighter!"

"You'll do till one comes along!" says the earnest Butch. "I'm willin' to train you and manage you on a fifty-fifty split, and the worst you can get is a punch in the pan. What d'ye say?"

"And *I'll* wise you up on how to put that strength of yours into rights and lefts," chimes in O'Brien, enthusiastically. "You should be able to cope with most of the mugs in the heavy division right now! And, Bill, think of the gravy in this game! I clicked off over seventy thousand smackers last year——"

"Not countin' tips," Butch butts in on him. "You

wouldn't think Left Hook O'Brien was a millionaire, would you?"

"No," I says truthfully, "I would not!"

"Well, he ain't!" says Butch. "But he's just bought him another apartment house, and he's got important money in government bonds. Where'd he get that sugar? For a minute's manual labor in a twenty-four-foot ring. Think *that* over!"

I *did* think that over! Here's Left Hook O'Brien purchasing apartment houses like I buy collars, and he was so unbright in school that he couldn't get out of the fourth grade till one day it caught fire. He thinks anchovies is a disease and Kanakas come from Kansas, yet he's putrid with government bonds. O sole mio!

Well, though the bait was tempting, I wasn't quite hooked by their proposition. I thoughtfully gazed at O'Brien's busted smeller and swollen ears, which he later had retreated by a beauty doctor on the grounds that they didn't look dressy. Looking at the ruins of his features, I decided that prize fighting was a bit too wearing on the profile. Personally I don't yearn to get in no brawls, even though they say I'm a killer once I get under way. But at that time it took a whole lot more than money to get me red-headed enough to fight, and as to coldly and delib-

erately cutting a guy to pieces or punching him insensible as a regular trade—honest, I couldn't cuddle up to that idea at all!

Then again there was the matter of Barbara Baxter to be taken into consideration. I didn't think she'd get demented with joy if she heard I'd turned into a professional bruiser. Of course it would make me look like a two-fisted he man, but that alone will get you nowheres with a raft of girls—you'd be surprised!

So I thanked Butch and O'Brien for their kind offer, but stalled 'em off for the time being. I don't mind telling you that I wasn't positive myself that my refusal was final, particularly after Butch let fall the information that Left Hook was to get \$7,500 for his coming debate with Rough House Hicks. Seven thousand five hundred dollars for ten rounds—thirty minutes' work if the fight went the limit. I'd have to drive a taxi twelve hours a day about *four years* for that!

Well, to make a long story agreeable, I took a room with Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien in their tasty suite at a uncostly hotel. Both them boys could of afforded the Ritz, but they saved their pennies—a feat which took *me* years to accomplish and then I had to have help! A few days after that I

managed to pounce on a job driving a taxi, through the starter being a friend of Butch's and a wild admirer of Left Hook O'Brien. At last I was a full-blooded New Yorker and had started on the road to fame and fortune. Cold cat—what a trip *that* turned out to be!

A exciting series of run-ins with hot-headed coppers, on account of the traffic rules being Chinese to me, took my original bank roll and most of my wages in fines and hush money. But I was soon wheeling a venomous taxi. Acin' around Broadway one pay day, which likewise happened to be my afternoon off, who do I bump into but Pansy Pilkington!

"Well, for weeping in public!" she cries. "Is it really you?"

"Absolutely!" I grins. "Me, myself, in person—not a moving picture!"

"Gee, but it's great to meet a friend from your home town!" hums Pansy. "My, I'm tickled to see you, Bill!"

"That's two of us feels that way!" I says. "How come you ain't on the job back at the Falls?"

"I got that cheated," laughs Pansy. "I've brushed off my last table and hoisted my final tray for the yokels. Me and the Commercial House is divorced, Bill!"

"I didn't see nothing in the papers about it," I kids her. "Listen—I was just going to knock over a feed. Come on in the automat and I'll wheatcake you!"

"Oh, Daddy, you're so good to me!" Pansy kids back, with a come-hither look in her navy blue eyes.

"Don't make no plans, Pansy," I says. "This party begins and ends with them wheatcakes, and I don't mean maybe!"

Pansy shrugs her pretty shoulders.

"So it's come to this, has it?" she says. "Well, all right, I'm game—tomorrow's *another* day!"

Ten minutes later we're sitting at a table, engaged in the pastimes of eating and lying. Pansy says she's now a buyer for Tracy's department store and expects to be sent to Paris the next morning to pick out their fall line of hairpins. Undaunted by that, I says I been hired as a salesman by a big downtown house and I leave for Nevada next week with a line of lighthouses.

With the dessert we both told the truth.

What Pansy Pilkington really come to New York for was to get a job as a chorus girl, and while I had to admit that Pansy had more than enough qualifications for that exacting portfolio, I looked on the matter with some alarm. Being older than Pansy—

in years—I took on a fatherly manner and presented her with a lecture on the pitfalls and temptations which surround beautiful chorus girls. I seen too many movies not to know what I was talking about.

But Pansy just laughed me off kind of scornfully, saying I ought to know that she knew her oil and that there was exactly no chance of anybody putting over a swift one on *her*. In fact, my fears for her safety seemed to steam her up, and she dropped a few sarcastical remarks about me and Barbara Baxter and what she called the “raw deal” we give Jack Fairfax.

“I told you fifty times I never cracked that Fairfax was a bootlegger!” I says, getting a temperature myself. “I didn’t know nothing about it till he was pinched. You seem to have quite a weakness for that tomato!”

“Blah!” sniffs Pansy. “I wouldn’t wipe my shoes on his best shirt. But I hate to see *anybody* double-crossed, and that’s what that Baxter girl did to him. As far as you’re concerned, Bill, I think she just made a Barnaby out of you. I don’t think you could be a sneak if you wanted to, as I told Jack Fairfax!”

“You *told* him?” I asks, astonished. “He’s in the hoosegow, ain’t he?”

Pansy throws back her head and laughs.

"Oh, for Gossakes, you're just a baby!" she says. "Don't you suppose a fellow with Fairfax's money *knows* anybody? He's out on bail and, Bill, look out for him. He's sworn he'll bear down on you and that female Nick Carter for having him arrested, if it's the last thing he does!"

I thanked Pansy for her warning, but I wasn't crazed with terror by no means.

Pansy had to see a theatrical manager, so I left her and dashed in a phone booth to give Barbara Baxter a ring, as her aunt had said she might be back from Washington on that date. Well, she was—and what a kick I got out of hearing her thrilling voice over that wire! Kick number two come when she invited me to dinner that night at her apartment. Warm puppy, I was sure getting the breaks!

I'll tell whoever's listening I was busy for the rest of that day. Being as loose as cinders in money matters, I blew my whole week's wages on a brand-new outfit of clothes, give the barber a heavy play, and when I rung the bell of Barbara's nifty drum I felt snappy and looked nobby! Barbara herself opened the door for me, and if she wasn't really glad to see me again, then besides her many other arts she's a wonderful actress. She hadn't put on the

dog for me, but in a beautiful blue dress which fit like the skin on a grape she was positively what you'd call a thought for to-day. Pansy Pilkington was pretty, but Barbara Baxter was breathtaking!

At first I'm all tongue-tied—a guy in love's a hot sketch, ain't he? But Barbara soon put me at my ease. The next thing on the program was a introduction to her aunt, a very sweet lady which didn't seem to find me nauseating, though I bet my grammar must of puzzled her. During the knocking over of a tonsil-tickling meal, Barbara's aunt was a great audience for me. She giggled at nearly every crack I made and says my "colloquialisms" was charming. That twelve-cylinder word stunned me for a minute, but I rallied my brain and faked it, remarking politely that *her* "colloquialisms" was tasty too! That wrung a laugh from both of 'em, and, dinner being over, Mrs. Aunt said she had some letters to write and would we excuse her? She was excused with the greatest of speed.

Then Barbara and me adjourned to the living-room, to talk about this and that.

"You're looking splendid, Bill," she says, as we sit under a shaded light on a couch.

"And you look to *me* like the Leviathan would

look to a ship-wreck victim on a raft in the Atlantic," I says. "I wish—eh—that is——"

"Yes?" prompts Barbara softly, when my voice suddenly realized it was getting a bit cuckoo and trailed off.

"Oh . . . nothing," I sighs, looking gloomily out the window at New York. "Only, it's sure tough that you're so beautiful and—and I'm so poor!"

There was something strained about her laugh, but the quick glance she give me wasn't a *mad* one, whatever else it was. I'd of parted with my left arm to of read it right!

Then, plainly to get the subject and likewise the predicate less personal, Barbara began to tell me about the last case she worked on. I ain't got even half a idea of what it was, because I wasn't listening. I was just sitting there dreamily watching her sparkling eyes, her lovely face and her pulse-quickening smile and thinking that if I had her curves and they let me pitch, Babe Ruth would be lucky to even foul one off me!

She soon noticed my lack of attention and stopped her story, a bit peeved.

"You're not listening to me," she says somewhat coldly. "I hope I'm not boring you!"

I come out of my trance with a start. "I'm highly

interested," I says. "But—well, I thought maybe we might talk a little bit about *ourselves*, not having congregated for such a long time. By the way, I've took your advice and become a refugee from Fairfax Falls!"

"Why, that's excellent, Bill," she says warmly. "I'm sure it will be a turning point in your life. In this wonderful city opportunity not only knocks, it breaks down one's door. And, Bill, you'll find New York is not cold and callous, as the failures denounce it, but warm and generous to those who have something to—to 'deliver,' as you'd say."

"I don't think the wares *I* got to display will cause no sensation," I says with a regretful grin.

"You have youth, ambition and health," she says. "What more do you ask?"

"I'd swap 'em all for luck!" I told her—and she frowned.

"Luck is the god of the loser!" she declared reprovingly, then, "What are you doing? Something interesting, I'm sure."

"I'm driving a taxi," I says, point-blank. "That's plenty interesting and likewise calls for no little skill. Ask the man who owns one!"

It had been midsummer in that room—now along comes winter!

"Bill," she says reproachfully, "I'm exceedingly disappointed. I thought you'd leave all that in Fairfax Falls. I certainly looked for bigger things from you here than being a taxicab chauffeur. Why, you're in the same rut you were in before—you've simply changed your *residence*, not your position in life. Don't you see you'll never get anywhere this way? What opportunities will ever come to you as a taxi driver?"

Aha, little did she know—or me either, for that matter—of the shower of opportunities which was due to hit me at the wheel of a lowly taxi! As things was to happen, I had the laugh on her for those remarks in jig time.

"Barbara," I says quietly, "I met *you* while I was driving a taxi. If nothing else ever happens to me for the rest of my life, I got no squawk comin'!"

She rose hastily from the couch and walked over to the window, answering nothing at all.

"Furthermore," I went on, also getting up, "people which inhabits houses of fur shouldn't throw moths! I ain't so keen myself over you being a detective. That's a man's racket and not a woman's."

"Your criticism is gratuitous!" she snaps.

"Pardon you!" I come back. "Pitching big words at me don't change my opinion."

In another minute what had all the earmarks of a grand evening was ruined. No kidding, we parted with all the loving affection of two preliminary boys breaking from a clinch. She didn't rush to the door after I'd gone and howl to the empty air for me to come back, like they do in the movies, either—I waited to see. I never even got to say fare-thee-well to her aunt, and Barbara's last remark was that I could come back when I'd done something big—not before.

Well, I done something big!

Less than a week later my taxi is hailed when I'm cruising along upper Broadway and, grinding to a stop, I like to fell off my seat when I got a flash of my intended fare. It was no one less than my ancient enemy, Jack Fairfax!

To say that this gil was likewise astounded at this chance meeting, which if you read in a book you wouldn't believe, would be putting it truthfully. He just stood on the curb and glared at me, and I give him back his glare with pawnbroker's interest! However, we both soon recovered from our surprise and exchanged some red-hot English, overlooking no weak points of each other known to both of us. Fairfax's comments on my present job and the way I was dragged up was ample in themselves

to explode me, but when he commences to pan Barbara Baxter, I went what is known as amuck!

Hoping he wasn't too proud to fight, I leaped from my seat to the pavement with the praiseworthy intentions of pasting him, when two birds come along and step into my cab.

"I'll be with you in a second," I says to 'em. "I want to give this guy his change!"

But when I turned around to wallop Jack Fairfax he was gone—for the time being!

One of my passengers orders me to drive to the Stevedores & Scientists' National Bank—eight blocks away. When I hauled 'em there this same fellow says:

"Keep your motor running—we'll be right out, and we'll be in a hurry!"

"Have to make a train at Grand Central!" adds the other.

So I kept the gas on, throttled down, and in a few minutes I see 'em coming down the steps of the bank. They was sure in a hurry, as advertised, and likewise in a lot of grief! Tearing masks from their faces, they rushed for my taxi, followed by a baker's dozen of hatless, shouting, excited men, some of which was shooting at my two fares. Before I knew what it was all about, my passengers jumped into my cab

and while one of 'em returns the shots of the quickly gathering crowd, the other one jams a icy muzzle against the back of my equally icy neck.

"Step on it, or I'll cook ya!" he hisses hoarsely.

Well, while I ain't exactly a villain, I'm no hero either! Them two gunmen was something more than earnest, and I had no choice. So I jammed down the gas, and we went away from there, followed by a hailstorm of bullets, female shrieks and the shrill whistles of coppers coming up on the run. The panic was on! My two playmates kept leaning out the doors and firing away at our pursuers, while bullets commence splintering the windshield and piercing the sides of the cab. Not so good! Lots of them little one-way tickets to the graveyard missed *me* by the breadth of a hair and dumb luck!

Honest, we went through everything but college, and pretty soon motorcycle cops took up the chase, with foot gendarmes standing on the running boards of commandeered cars and blazing away merrily. Bullets flowed like water, and there was only two more shots fired at the Marne!

But we had a running start, and the traffic maze helped us too. While I weaved my taxi in and out at breakneck speed, the cops seemed to get in each other's way, and at Van Cortlandt Park I'd shook off

everybody. In spite of all the shots exchanged, neither me, my tires, gas tank or the inmates of my taxi was hit. They made me drive 'em way beyond Hastings, where a touring car joined us with two other guys on the front seat. I stopped by request, and one of my fares hands me a hundred-dollar bill and tells me gruffly to beat it. I was only too glad to get rid of 'em, and I breathed a heavy sigh of relief as they jumped in the touring car and vanished up the road at top speed.

"So this is New York!" I says to myself.

Well, when I finally got back to the garage with my bullet-riddled taxi, which looked like it come direct from a battlefield, I found quite a reception waiting for me. The committee was composed of cops, reporters and photographers, and they seemed hugely glad to see me. They didn't wait for me to climb down off the seat; they was so impatient they pulled me off it!

Then they begin a cross-examination of me which must of lasted a couple hours and reduced my weight about fifteen pounds. I told 'em forty times all I knew about my two free-shooting passengers—and I knew nothing: how they come to engage me, what they looked like, that I'd never saw 'em before in my life, would be greatly pleased if I never seen 'em

again, and that I drove 'em away from the bank because of the loaded gun pressed against my neck. On that last point I got a lucky break because a couple or three citizens which had saw the start of that wild race stepped forward and says I'm telling the naked truth. Finally, after I'd posed for the newspaper photographers, I was allowed to go, but told to hold myself ready for more questions at police headquarters.

That night the papers is full of the daring hold-up of the Stevedores & Scientists' National Bank, together with the part *I* was forced to play in the get-away of the robbers. A tingle run merrily up and down my spine when I read that them two brigands had grabbed \$40,000 and wounded one of the tellers. My photo and one of my wrecked taxi also decorated the front pages, and I got quite a thrill out of reading all the details, feeling I had suddenly become a person of great prominence in the bustling port of New York! I knew Barbara Baxter would read all that and I felt like calling her up and saying, "So nothing ever happens to a taxi driver, hey?"

But I didn't. Instead, I sit up half the night talking over the robbery with Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien, which looked on me as a hero of the first water, though Butch warned me the cops would

probably make my life miserable from then on. Butch hit a homer on his guess, for when I reported for work the next morning I got two fearful setbacks—I was both fired and pinched!

A couple of burly plain-clothes men took me down to headquarters on what they called a "short affidavit," where I was searched, booked on "suspicion of grand larceny," finger-printed, and all my measurements taken. I was almost a year afterwards getting the police to destroy all that stuff!

Well, when the John Laws got done toying with me, they led me into a office where there was a lieutenant, a copper stenographer and some hard-boiled, assorted gumshoes. I was invited to sit down, and then the looey nods to one of the dicks, who opens a door, and in steps—Jack Fairfax!

At my start of surprise and the wild glare I give him, which the cops was quick to notice and read the wrong way, Fairfax shot me a swift, evil grin.

"Did you ever see this man before?" the lieutenant asks him, pointing to me.

"Yes, sir," says Fairfax, and then goes on like he's reading it out of a book. "I hailed this man's taxicab on Broadway a few moments before the robbery of the bank. It was stopped at the curb, and I didn't see there were two men inside until I

came up to it. They were in earnest conversation with the chauffeur, and didn't notice me at first. I distinctly heard the three of them discussing a proposed hold-up and instructing this fellow as to *his* part in the affair."

With that as a starter, he reeled off the most sensational downright lie I ever heard since I read "Gulliver's Travels"! No fooling, I was too dumfounded to dash across that room and knock him dead, or even butt in on his story. The stenographer is taking all this down, and by the time Fairfax got through he had sworn in black and white that I helped frame that hold-up! When I did find my tongue, I was too mad and excited to talk clearly and they locked me up in a cell.

I guess that's where I'd been yet if Barbara Baxter hadn't read in the papers about me being jailed. She come flying down to headquarters with a lawyer, and when she showed the bulls her credentials as a federal detective they let her see me fast enough. Barbara didn't even ask me was I guilty—she simply said she *knew* I had nothing to do with that robbery and it was a outrage to lock me up! Then we had a session with the lieutenant. The lawyer pointed out that I had no police record, and they'd already held me more than twenty-four hours without enough

evidence to hold me at all, except as a witness. He demanded my release, saying he'd be responsible for me, and Barbara chimes in with how I helped her in her government duties at Fairfax Falls, explaining just why Jack Fairfax was sore at me. When she wound up by saying that Fairfax is even then out on bail awaiting a trial that will probably send him to Atlanta, Mr. Lieutenant weakened! I finally got released in the custody of Barbara's lawyer, a smart old guy named Yerkes.

Believe me, I was plenty grateful to Barbara, and I had to admit that her being a detective at *that* time—woman's job or not—was a great thing for *me!*

However, my trouble was just the opposite to being over. The rap had gone around, and I soon found out that getting mixed up in the bank robbery had not only cost me the job I had, but had barred me everywhere else! The few dollars I had left galloped away for room and board, then my watch, new suit and a overcoat found out what it means to lay in a pawnshop. Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien staked me a few times willingly, but I couldn't go on living off them boys, forever, and neither was I ready to accept their propositions to enter the ring. I would of called it a day and crept back to Fairfax Falls again, only that would of

looked like I was yellow and the Big Town had licked me. Honest, I didn't know *what* to do!

I was sitting in Butch Ford's gym one afternoon, watching Left Hook O'Brien go through his final workout for his rumpus with Rough House Hicks, when the phone rings. Butch answers it and says it's for me. That lawyer, Mr. Yerkes, had been trying to line me up for a private chauffeur's job, and I was hoping it was him, so I rushed eagerly to the phone. A female voice dashed my hopes—it was Pansy Pilkington speaking.

"Hello, Bill!" she says pertly. "What's a six-letter word meaning holdup?"

"Garter!" I snarled into the phone, mad enough to battle a lion and give the lion the first two bites!

"That's a wise crack!" she giggles.

"So is the Grand Canyon!" I returned. "What do you want?"

"Don't be so peevish!" she says. "I suppose, now that you have a bank roll, your old friends are apple sauce—is that it?"

"What do you mean I got a bank roll?" I asked her, surprised.

"Oh, don't kid *me*, Bill!" says Pansy. "I read the papers regularly. You sure put over a speedy one,

I'll tell the world! I always knew you had lots of nerve, but robbing a New York bank——”

“Do you mean to say you think *I* had anything to do with that,” I almost screamed into the phone.

“Bill, don't put it on for *me*—I knew you *when!*” she says calmly. “I only hope you got your share, that's all. By the way, if you feel like throwing a party for old time's sake—well, I'm not doing a thing to-night!”

In rage and disgust, I slammed up the receiver. She thought I was a burglar. Can you beat that?

Well, fate or luck, whatever you want to call it, works in mighty strange ways! Barbara Baxter had never saw a prize fight in her life, and I got her to go with me to see Left Hook O'Brien meet Rough House Hicks at the Garden. Our seats was so close to the ropes that if they'd been any closer Left Hook would of been disqualified for having his friends in the ring with him!

Rough House Hicks was a good boy, but he was no match for the hard-punching, iron-jawed O'Brien, which almost knocked him off in the very first round. It wasn't a fight; it was a slaughter, with O'Brien the busy butcher! Unfortunately, Hicks was what is known in fistiana as a “bleeder,” and he soon was a gory sight, which didn't please Barbara a particle.

In the second frame, when O'Brien begin battering his unlucky tête-à-tête from pillar to post, Barbara said the brutality of the thing made her ill, and she demanded that I take her home at once.

Well, I didn't quite agree with Barbara's views of the matter, and I was enjoying seeing my buddy do his stuff, but I decided to obey orders rather than get in wrong with her again. We're rising from our seats, when in looking across the ring I suddenly recognized a familiar face in the crowd right opposite. The fellow's features puzzled me for a minute. I knew I'd saw him somewheres, but—*where?* Then I grabbed Barbara's arm, squeezed it till she let fall a little cry and wheeled on me in surprise, but I was gooseflesh all over and even forgot to apologize for my roughness. *The guy across the ring from me was one of the bank robbers!*

I quickly panted out that information to Barbara, and at once she was as excited as me. She says to tell a near-by copper, which had been keeping his eye on *me* ever since we come in, but I growled:

"That bull will gum things up—hold everything, Barbara. I'm going to nail this baby myself!"

Left Hook O'Brien and Rough House Hicks was in a furious mix-up, and the howling crowd was following their every move. I tried to work my way

around the ring to reach my man at the other side, and in doing that I shut off the view of the ringsiders. Loud yells of "Hey, sit down, Dumb-bell!" hands grabbing fiercely at me and a chorus of angry boos slowed me up. This shouting attracted the attention of the bank robber, and he seen me headed for him. He knew *me* all right, for he started to get up and duck. But I seen a lifetime chance to square myself with Barbara Baxter, the world and the Stevedores & Scientists' National Bank, and the sight of that parsnip slipping out of my hands like that made me desperate! I couldn't move a inch past the angry ringsiders, and I looked wildly about for a short cut to the other side of the ring. In a flash I seen one!

To the thunderstruck amazement of the crowd, I jumped through the ropes right into the ring where O'Brien and Hicks was slamming away at each other. Immediately the house was in a uproar, and the referee gazed at me like he was stunned! The two scrappers was far too busy with each other to notice me, and still ferociously battling they milled across my determined path. Was a mere prize fight to keep me from my prey? Blah! I impatiently grabbed the boys by their shoulders and flung 'em aside, to collide against the ropes on opposite sides of the

ring. The referee come to life and grabbed me, but with one shove I sent him sprawling to the canvas. Then I dived through the ropes over his prostrate body to land on top of the wildly cursing bank bandit, who, caught by the jam around him, was wedged there tight!

At almost the same instant Left Hook O'Brien recovered from the shock of my charge across the ring and knocked the still astonished Rough House Hicks as cold as the middle of a nut sundae!

Barbara thought my capture of the robber was the pig's velocipede, and I got five thousand dollars reward from the Stevedores & Scientists' National Bank!

CHAPTER III

A COMEDY OF TERRORS

WELL, unable to decide what to do with myself and my five thousand bucks, I squandered a couple or three weeks in idleness, mostly hanging around Butch's gym watching Left Hook O'Brien and a flock of other leather pushers train.

During these days I took Barbara Baxter to dinner and a show a couple of times and when she asked me what I was doing now I just stalled. I got a keen form-fitting tux and a horde of stiff shirts, and when I strut my stuff you just know I wear 'em! One night we went to a swell cabaret to dance after the theatre and during a waltz she pinned me down.

"How are you and your five thousand dollars getting along, Bill?" she leads off, looking up at me seriously.

"Not so good!" I says truthfully. "I ain't used to wealth, and that jack annoys and befuddles me!"

"The money *annoys* you?" she wants to know, raising her eyebrows.

"Absolutely!" I says. "That five thousand ain't enough to make me independent, and it's just *too* much to make a bum job fascinate me. The gil which invented money was a clever young man, but he should of stayed in the laboratory another day and invented a cure for its worries! No fooling, Barbara, I wish I never won that reward. If I was broke again, I'd *have* to go back driving a taxi and my *mind* would be at ease, anyways!"

At that she laughs outright.

"I love that!" she says. "Bill, your naïveté is delightfully refreshing in this atmosphere of super-sophistication!"

"My which is refreshing in what?" I asked her, baffled.

"Your artlessness in a place where that is at a premium," she says. "I don't approve of you wasting your time in the company of that prize fighter O'Brien. You must try to overcome your irresponsibility and get down in earnest to the business of being a success. You know, Bill, you won't always be the healthy, good-looking young giant you are at present!"

I knew she was giving me the best of advice and

I *did* feel like a Dumb David . . . fooling away my time when I might be getting somewheres. Is it possible, I thought, mechanically pivoting Barbara around—is it possible that I'm doomed to be a Loser?

"I'll take the matter up with the Boston office," I grins, trying to laugh it off. "What do you wish me to be a success at?"

She seems to be peeved because I'm smiling.

"Oh, how can you be content to be just a taxi driver?" she exclaims.

"It's healthy," I says, still kidding, though I'm thoughtful at that. "It keeps me out in the open air!"

She stops right in the middle of the waltz.

"I don't think that's a bit funny!" she says. "A cabman! Well, I'll wager if *I* was unfortunate enough to find myself in that—er—profession, I wouldn't be just one of a thousand chauffeurs, I'd be champion taxi driver of the world. Ambition knows no level—even some of the clover grew *four* leaves to stand out from the mob!" she wound up, laughing.

"That's a good thought," I says as the music ceased firing and we walked to our table. "Barbara, that's just what I'll be—world's champion taxi

driver. I'll look up the jazzbo which holds the title now and challenge him to a race up Fifth Avenue in reverse gear during the shopping hour!"

She shook her pretty head sorrowfully, but smiled and laid off me—for the time being.

Well, determined to have some adventures with my five thousand iron men, I took Barbara Baxter and, unknown to her, my entire bank roll to the races at Belmont Park the following afternoon. Butch had furnished me with two tips so hot he says they burnt the big Butter and Egg man's tongue which whispered 'em to him. The first one was a beagle entitled Evening Star, and as it was afternoon and not evening this one failed to twinkle. It come in seventh. The other feed box special was labeled Hot Dog and it ran like a cold one. It finished fifth, which was better than the first one could do. I almost forgot to mention that there was only five horses in that second race.

I'd lost a thousand bucks—important money—with break-your-neck speed, so I laid off them collies till the last scamper. Thinking I'd dropped about twenty dollars, Barbara kept consoling me, and when the final event come up she breaks out with the gambling fever herself. There was a horse in this race called Miss Barbara, and, following a

hunch, Barbara gives me a ten-dollar note to lay on its nose. I left the grand stand and bounded around with the sharpshooters on the lawn, and I found the oral books was holding Miss Barbara at 50 to 1. You could of got 60 to 1 if you pleaded. I run into "Six-to-Five" Casey, a handbook which used to operate around the garage where I parked my taxi, and I buttonholed him.

"How d'ye like Miss Barbara in this scurry?" I asks him.

"The same way I like pneumonia!" sneers Casey. "That spaniel ain't win a race since Columbus says 'So this is America?' Git aboard the favorite, young-feller-me-lad, he's a shoo-in!"

Well, I got aboard the favorite. Without crack-
ing to Barbara, I bet her ten and five hundred
smackers of my personal finances on Casey's tip.
There was a dozen bangtails in this six-furlong
dash, and they clowned around at the post till the
starter was fit to be tied, and every fingernail in
the grandstand was bit to the quick. Finally, the
webbing shot up and the soul-thrilling, hoarse, thun-
derous boom, "They're off!" split the summer air.

The prancing favorite was left at the post with
my dough and Barbara's, while at 50 to 1, Miss
Barbara romped home in front!

So that was all settled—and so was I!

There was no use of me informing Barbara I hadn't bet her ten like she told me. The least it would look would be funny. So already fifteen hundred on the nut for the day, I gamely said nothing, but paid my delighted lady friend the five hundred fish she would of won had I laid her money as directed.

Personally, gentle reader, I think horse racing is all damp, and the next time I crave to see the equines in motion I'll watch a merry-go-round!

Undaunted by the fact that two thousand of my original five had gone by the board, I hauled off and bought Barbara a diamond ring for her birthday. Zip goes another eight hundred! This was considerable gewgaw, and I thought it would knock her dead. I nearly fainted when she turned it down cold!

"Bill," she says, eying the ring carefully and then handing it back the same way, "you were a foolish boy to buy so expensive a gift for me—or just now for anyone. A box of candy or flowers or a book would have been a pleasant surprise."

"You ain't mad, have you?" I says indignantly. "I got this ring in Tiffany's! What's the matter with it?"

"Not a thing—it's beautiful," she smiles. "But

I never accept jewelry from—from gentlemen acquaintances, Bill.”

“You wouldn't take jewelry from a guy which wasn't a gentleman, would you?” I ask her, a trifle sarcastical. I thought she was high-hatting me, and I was hurt. But she snubbed my question and come back with one of her own—a habit of hers.

“Have you found a position yet, Bill?” she inquires.

I nodded in the anti-affirmative, looking gloomily out the window at the beginning of one of them all-day rains.

“How much of your five thousand have you left?”

“About twenty-two yards,” I says.

“Yards?” she repeated, puzzled.

“Twenty-two hundred dollars,” I explains patiently. “A yard's a hundred berries.”

“In what language?” laughs Barbara.

“In slanguage,” I grins back. “Ask me some hard ones!”

“Bill, I wish you wouldn't be so—so slangy,” she says. “Honestly, that beastly taxicab environment has so roughened your speech that half the time I feel the need of an interpreter when conversing with you!”

I stood up in front of her, a bit steamed.

"I guess I don't fit in with your plans, Barbara," I says quietly. "I won't come around any more. Good luck!" And I started for the door.

"Oh, sit down, you—you infant!" she says impatiently. "I like you, and you know I do, but I must confess I *am* vexed with you. I thought that five thousand dollars would give you a splendid start, but you're throwing it away as if you were a millionaire. . . . And you're not even working! Just *when* are you going to stop idling away your life and begin making good?"

That started another of our usual pungent arguments that sent me away a half hour later, sore at myself, at Barbara and at the world in general. The steady downpour of rain didn't help matters any, and when I got back to the hotel where I was splitting a suite with Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien, I was as blue as the color itself. Believe me, there's many a lurch twixt the girl and the church!

Propped up against the mirror on my bureau, probably by Butch or Left Hook which generally got the mail, was a pink envelope addressed to me. The writing was puzzlingly familiar, but the perfume, which the letter seemed to of been drenched

with, was not. I ripped it open, feeling very romantic, and, of course, I turned to the signature first. It's a hobby of mine to always read telegrams that way too—adds something to the kick! But this one thrilled me about as much as watching a walking match would thrill a letter carrier. It was signed "*Always yours, Pansy.*"

I hadn't saw Pansy since she credited me with being in on that bank robbery and I'd hung up the phone on her in rage and disgust. This letter from her was a humble apology and a most affectionate plea for a interview.

Well, it was as hard for me to hold a grudge as it was for me to hold a job. Likewise, I was plenty low as to the results of my argument with Barbara, so I up and called on Pansy.

Dressed to thrill and succeeding at it, Pansy opened the door of a nobby drum on upper Broadway which she shared with a girl who would be in no danger anywheres. Why is it that the female chums of these panics is generally nightmares? This maiden, answering readily to the name of Miss Jukes, took the air with a wise "two-is-company-three-is-a-crowd" grin which greatly annoyed me.

"Have a drink, Big Boy?" smiles Pansy, taking my hat.

"Yeah—*water!*" I says, sitting down and glancing around the rooms. "You look like Prosperity's sister. How d'ye like the chorus?"

"Fried!" she giggles, flopping down beside me, and I'm instantly drunk with cologne. "I'm not in the chorus, Bill; I'm in the movies—look!"

With that she jumps up and takes a photograph from the mantel. It was a picture of herself in a costume which didn't contain enough cloth to put a cuff on a ant's trousers! I handed it back.

"Why, Bill—you're actually *blushing!*" she laughs, regarding me curiously. "It's really not a very good picture of me—just an ordinary studio still."

"Yeah?" I says. "It looks more like one of them double exposures to *me*, from the way you're dressed!"

"Hotsy-totsy!" she says, half angry. "Don't get rosy with *me*, Bill Grimm, or Mamma spank!"

"So you're a movie star, hey?" I grins amiably. "That'll wow 'em back in Fairfax Falls. Wait till the Jaspers you used to wait on pick up the papers and see 'Pansy Pilkington, Heaven's Gift to the Silver Screen!'"

"Not yet, but soon!" says Pansy. "I wouldn't fool you, Bill. I'm only an extra now—a super

in a superproduction being assembled over on Long Island. Honest to Valentino, it's got everything in it but the kitchen stove and I think it's called 'The Plaything of Nero.' The scream to *me* is that in the big Roman banquet scene I trip gayly in with a platter of grapes—My Gawd, even in the movies, I'm still a waitress!"

We split that laugh and then talked for a while about dear old Fairfax Falls and some of its comical natives. Once Pansy got serious and pulled me over to look out the window down on seething Broadway—

"This is the town we both have to take, Bill!" whispers Pansy grimly, pinching my arm.

"Well . . . let's take it!" I answered, gripping her hand. And I liked her more at that minute, for some reason, than I ever did before or since!

Pansy'd had a lot of tough breaks—a useless family, the combination of beauty and poverty. She was a brave kid, and I don't care by *what* means she got to the top, she deserved her success!

She made some tea and chattered on, while mostly I merely listened, wondering where she'd get and where *I'd* get before New York got through with us. I thought about Barbara Baxter too. . . .

When Pansy's voice trailed off, I looked up with

a start and found she was gazing at me with serious eyes.

"A Canadian dime for your thoughts!" I remarked, helping myself to a cake.

"Bill," she says, "why don't you come over to Long Island with me and try your luck at the studio? I bet you'd photograph like a million, you handsome divil! Some of us extras get seven-fifty a day and all of us gets lots of laughs. That's got driving a taxi cheated, hasn't it? Mr. Puttee, the big director, is showing me a lot of—er—personal attention, and I'm satisfied I can use a few smiles to get you a job!"

"You better not try to give that movie director no run-around, Pansy, or you'll positively win yourself a lot of grief!" I warned her. "These city slickers is different from the traveling salesmen you used to make jump through hoops at Fairfax Falls!"

"For Gossakes, what got *you* so educated?" demands Pansy. "Remember, we *both* came out of the country!"

"I know," I says. "And what we want to do *now* is take the country out of *us*!"

Then I told her that I'd declare myself in on the movies at the proper time, as I had to shove off for

Lyons in a few days for the trial of Jack Fairfax.

Pansy steered the conversation around to Barbara Baxter, which she disliked exceedingly for the reason that with me it was versa vice. Under the influence of Pansy's cleverly faked interest, I got confidential and showed her the diamond ring Barbara had refused. Pansy's thrilling eyes became blue saucers and she drew a deep breath as she gazed at the ring, remarking that if Barbara turned it down then Barbara was not only a perfect lady, but she was likewise slightly demented!

As I expected, Pansy tried the ring on, but—as I didn't expect—it wouldn't come off! We both tugged at it and screwed it around and around till her finger was sore, trying soap and two kinds of water, but nothing stirring. So Pansy promised to go to a jeweler and have the ring filed off, if home remedies failed to remove it that night.

Tired of hanging around Broadway doing nothing, I arranged to meet Barbara at Lyons for the Fairfax trial, while I went on ahead to the Falls.

When I blew into the town Narrow Pelk offered me back my taxicab for a hundred dollars. Acting on a sudden hunch, I haggled with him and finally bought my former meal ticket for sixty-five dollars, cash. I figured it a good buy, for I could

fix it up myself, take it to New York and operate it there as a independent taxi. I just wasn't born to punch no time clock and work for somebody else! Also I thought Barbara Baxter might regard a taxi *owner* as something more palatable than a taxi *driver*.

Just before I left Fairfax Falls for Lyons, I run smack into Jack Fairfax! I was about to pass this egg without a second glance, when he stopped me with a kind of timid wave of his hand and a sheepish, friendly smile. Well, I was as much amazed at his plain wish to bury the hatchet as I was shocked at his appearance! Usually a fashion plate, his clothes was now seedy, he had a crying need of a haircut and shave, and his face was drawn and haggard. No fooling, he was a walking photograph of a total loss, and he looked like he fell out of a well, or something!

I returned his greeting a bit doubtfully. There was no doubt about me being sorry for him. My sympathy, never hard for nobody to arouse, went out to this fellow which had once been way up and was now low enough to put on a high hat and walk under a worm! Then again, I couldn't help feeling partly responsible for the jam Fairfax was in.

Well, with a Federal hoosegow staring him in his shifty eyes, Fairfax pleaded with me to go light on him in my testimony and to try and get Barbara to do the same. I promised to do all I could.

It was no cinch to get Barbara to ease up on him! However, I finally managed to soften her a bit, and then we both had to proposition the district attorney, which was all set to send Fairfax over for a long stretch. Barbara had more luck with the prosecutor than I did—she smiled at him!

The gist of it was that the judge suspended a jail sentence, but slapped a five-thousand-dollar fine on Fairfax. A hasty check-up showed he had about three grand left to his name, or two thousand less than the law demanded of him.

The judge told Fairfax if he didn't pay the fine he'd park him in Atlanta Penitentiary for at least a year, sharply cutting off his panic-stricken plea for mercy. Well, I know I was crazy to do what I done, as the fellow remarked after diving off Pike's Peak, but I figured jail was no way to reform Jack Fairfax. So to the surprise of the court and Barbara Baxter and the speechless astonishment of Fairfax, I stepped up and loaned him the two thousand he needed to make up the fine. That got rid of the last of the five thousand gulden reward paid

me by the Stevedores & Scientists' National Bank for capturing the Humpty Dumpty which held it up. Easy come, easy go!

So Fairfax's troubles was over, but mine had just begun. Barbara wasn't overjoyed at the idea of me operating my own taxi in New York, and she was even less delighted with the way I'd gone through that five thousand dollars. She seemed to think there was no hope for me, and she done most of that thinking aloud! I wanted her to come over to Fairfax Falls after the trial and wait till I fixed up my cab so's I could haul her back to Gotham, but she pleaded a headache, or something, and left Lyons by train. When I tried to make a date with her for later in the week, she says I better wait and phone her when I get back as she might be busy. There was just a trifle Ritz in her manner, but I pretended not to notice it and give her a pleasant good-by. I'm hard to discourage, as the book agent says!

After spending a couple of days getting my sea-going taxi in shape, I made up my mind to take Pansy Pilkington's tip and snatch a job in the movies. I come to that conclusion while overhauling the motor—you can do a lot of heavy thinking while puttering around with wrenches and hammers

and grease guns—try it some time. Though, at that, my brain generally does its best gymnastics when I'm eating.

Well, I drove my dilapidated taxi over to the studio on Long Island where Pansy was elevating the noiseless theatricals, incidentally intending to get back from that charming young lady the diamond ring I'd bought for Barbara Baxter.

The stern watchman at the studio gates got his first inkling of me when I shot past him at the maniacal speed of twenty-five miles a hour, the best I could coax from my synthetic motor. I guess after one look at the crazily shimmying back of my burlesque taxi he figured we both belonged in one of the company's custard-pie dramas and let it go at that. I couldn't find Pansy, but I did excavate her director friend, Mr. Puttee. From then on I had lots of luck and all of it bad!

Mr. Puttee gazed at my taxi as if hypnotized, and then he begin to slap his hands together and laugh his head off. He called over his assistant, Joe Closeup, and some more laughter was distributed. The yes-men heard the famous director's guffaws and hastened to perform their duties, rushing up and nodding agreement with everything he said. I think that was the studio where they

once shot a guy down in cold blood for saying "No!"

"I can see a thousand feet of legitimate hokum in that grotesque conveyance!" chortles Mr. Puttee to a chorus of yeses. "Boy—come here! How much do I have to put on the line for that mechanical bon mot of yours?"

"It's priceless!" I says. "But *I* ain't! I go with the taxi, and you can have us both for seven-fifty the day and cakes!"

I remembered that was the wages Pansy had mentioned.

"Sold!" hollers Mr. Puttee. "Report to Joe Closeup at eight to-morrow morning, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul!"

Thus, gentle reader, I became a full-fledged actor overnight.

Well, to say I was delighted would be dismissing Niagara Falls with the remark that it was plenty water! I was tickled silly with the ease at which I crashed the movies, and, all swelled up like a mump, I rushed to a telephone to let Barbara Baxter know that among her boy friends is a coming film sensation. What got into me then, I don't know. It might of been her lovely, velvety voice which always went to my head and ruined my judg-

ment. It might of been the studio atmosphere, or it might of been and probably was a combination of both! I started to say I'd been hired as a extra, but hesitated at the sudden thought that a extra was nothing to brag about. Then my brains must of left for location, for I found myself saying I'd been engaged as a "stunt man" to do daredevil exploits in Mr. Puttee's latest insult to the intelligence!

Ooo-la-la, how I paid for that!

Of course Barbara was surprised and thrilled. She invited me up for dinner that night to tell her all about it, and I spent most of the day wishing I'd told her the truth! I knew I'd have to supply some details as to what stunts I was going to do for Mr. Puttee, and I also knew that the more I let my imagination loose the worse the showdown would be for me. I cussed myself out for ever going near that studio at all, and that made me think of Pansy Pilkington, which had put the fatal idea into my roomy head. Clunk—and the telephone company is enriched with another nickel!

"Pansy," I says. "Don't scream—I got a job with Mr. Puttee!"

"Four cheers!" says Pansy delightedly. "I have to rush to my hairdresser's so I'll see you on the lot to-morrow. I knew I'd bring you luck!"

"While you're *bringing*, Pansy, bring that ring with you, will you?" I asked her, and hung up to get ready for my dinner date.

Within five minutes after I entered the apartment where Barbara lived with her aunt, I thought she was pretty frigid to a gentleman she'd ask to dine. The line which usually made her laugh flopped dismally *that* night, and my attempts to keep the conversation going was first-class failures. Most of Barbara's comments was yes and no and anything but nourishing. Finally, she says:

"I met a friend of yours downtown this afternoon."

"Well, you look none the worse for the experience," I says. "Who was it?"

"Pansy Pilkington," she answers coldly, with a odd, thin smile.

"Oh—yes!" I says, a bit uneasy at her steady gaze. "Pansy's been in New York for quite a while. She's in the movies too. I meant to tell you—"

"That you'd given Pansy the ring you first gave—er—you told me you'd bought for my birthday?" butts in Barbara coldly. "Well, it's all right—*she* told me *that!*"

"But, listen, Barbara!" I began frantically. "That ring—"

"I saw it on her finger, Bill!" she interrupts. "Pansy also informed me that through her—er— influence with the director you were engaged, not to do any spectacular feats, but merely to drive your comedy taxi for a few feet of film in one picture!"

"Well, for crying out loud!" I yelled, jumping up. "What have I done to that girl to make her hate me?"

"On the contrary, Pansy is exceedingly fond of you—I'm positive of that," says Barbara. "She's a very pretty girl. I congratulate you!"

Had Pansy been there at that minute, I'd of— well, I'd sure of gave her a dirty look!

I paced up and down the room with my head in a whirl. In a flash I decided I'd make good my original story. I'd said I was a "stunt man"—well, I'd *be* one!

I didn't even try to explain to Barbara how Pansy come by the ring, because I wouldn't of believed it myself!

What I *did* tell Barbara was that if she'd trip over to the studio the next day I'd show her whether I was a "stunt man" or just a extra. She said she'd

come and I win a victory which was to nearly cost me my life!

This Mr. Puttee wasn't a bad guy at all. I introduced Barbara to him the next morning, telling him she was a government detective and just dying to see him direct a picture. He bowed all over the big stage to her—says it looks like she was *made* for pictures. The attention the hard-boiled director was spraying Barbara with caused quite a little buzz of comment amongst the actors waiting to perform at his pleasure and had Pansy Pilkington manicuring her nails with her teeth! Mr. Puttee didn't make *me* jealous—not only did I *know* Barbara Baxter, but I was big enough to knock him over if needs must by flicking a muscle at him. Besides, I was busy racking my brain for a answer to *this* burning question—just *what* was I going to do to prove to Barbara that I was really daredevil stunt man and not no lowly seven-fifty-a-day extra?

Well, after shooting a few scenes in the studio, we all dashed down to one of the score of sleepy little villages which dots the shore of Long Island Sound. Mr. Puttee's assistant, Joe Closeup, had pasted a funny mustache on me and made me up to look as tough as a life sentence. I felt like a real trouper which had been in the movies for years,

but I'd of felt even better if Mr. Puttee hadn't insisted that Barbara ride in *his* car going to the town we was to work at. Pansy's feelings was split between anger at Mr. Puttee watching Barbara like a hawk and enjoyment at me watching *him* the same way!

The scene we was to take was to be shot on the end of a dock and went like thus :

Launcelot Fishbaum, the leading man, has hired my comical taxi to catch a boat. We're late, and when we reach the pier, I run the taxi right through the gates, scattering extras right and left. Then my motor is supposed to stop dead, and I can't get it going again. Launcelot Fishbaum jumps out of the cab in a rage, and without paying me rushes to the end of the dock and hires a motor boat to catch the liner he's missed. I get my engine going again and run the cab right to the water's edge on the wharf and stand there hollering for my fare and shaking my fist after him till I'm told to stop. The carpenters had put up a wooden safety barrier, so's I wouldn't go off into the water when I run my cab to the edge.

Well, we rehearsed that a half dozen times, and I done fine, according to all accounts. Mr. Puttee had fixed a seat for Barbara near the cameras and

away from the yokels, which had turned out en masse to see a movie being made before their eyes. The director promptly photographed 'em as a background without 'em knowing it, which enabled him to send half the extras home and save a pretty penny.

Then Mr. Puttee gets us all set and hollers: "Alay up—cameras—action!"

I give him service.

With Launcelot Fishbaum inside, I run my taxi right through the closed gates of the wharf, missing the extras by dumb luck. As instructed, I pretended the motor went dead on me and Launcelot got out and run to get his boat. Immediately I hop back to the wheel of my cab and start after him. I done better than that: I caught up with him! Launcelot cursed and run wildly, and I drove the same way. Mr. Puttee howled madly through his megaphone for me to slow up, and there was some female shrieks when I bumped Launcelot with the front of my cab. The handsome milk-faced leading man leaped nimbly and terrifiedly out of my way, forgetting all about what he was supposed to do, but distinctly remembering to save his life. "Now," I says to myself grimly, "I'll show Barbara Baxter whether I'm a high-class stunt man or not!"

With the safety barrier looming up over my mudguards I stepped on the gas, crashed through it and buried myself and my cab to the hilt in Long Island Sound! The last thing I heard was Mr. Puttee's delighted voice scream to the camera men to keep on cranking. If you've saw that picture, gentle reader, you know *now* it wasn't faked!

I come back to life in a hospital, as weak as a drunkard's alibi, and the first mortal I see is Mr. Puttee bending over me.

"How's my taxi?" I whispered faintly, always thinking of others first.

"I'm sorry to say it's dead, my boy!" he says, patting my dizzy head. "The unfortunate equipage is lying in fifteen feet of very wet water, and it's useless to grapple for the body. However, I'll see to it that the company rewards you handsomely for the loss of that juggernaut and for giving me five hundred feet of comedy that will knock 'em off their seats! What was wrong—did you lose control of the cab?"

"No," I says, with a feeble grin. "I lost control of myself!"

He was still staring at me and muttering something about me being double cuckoo, when Barbara and Pansy elbowed him away from my bedside.

Pansy tearfully give me back my ring, explaining to Barbara just how she come to get it in the first place. Barbara's smile showed me that helped quite a lot. Then Pansy done a fadeout with Mr. Puttee, who was waiting for her.

"Bill," says Barbara softly, as she sits down beside my bed, "why did you risk your life like that?"

"I told you I was hired to do stunts," I says, feeling like the Patsy I was, "and I didn't want you to think I was a four-flusher. If you don't take this ring now, I'm going back there and commence diving for my cab!"

She hesitated, but finally slipped the diamond on her finger, but she tried to avoid making it mean anything by remarking nervously that she'd keep it so I wouldn't lose it or try it on any more girls' fingers, like I done with Pansy.

The medico comes along then, and I find I'm only suffering from a wrenched shoulder and being the next thing to drowned, so I ought to be able to leave this trap the next day.

"What will you do then?" Barbara asked me, when he passed on.

"I'm going to hunt up Jack Fairfax and get back the two grand I loaned him," I says. "He's

probably staked by his father by now, and with two thousand dollars I can quit this clowning and make a fresh start!"

"Bill," says Barbara, "don't bank too heavily on Fairfax. You should have let him go to jail, as I wanted you to do! My superiors have informed me that Fairfax has gone to them with a tale that both you and myself were involved in the bootlegging ring at Fairfax Falls. He declares we simply made him the goat and that was why we both asked clemency for him, and you paid his fine!"

Just a nice boy, that Fairfax, what?

CHAPTER IV

THE WANDERING JEHU

AMONGST the slew of professions besides taxi driving which failed to enthuse Barbara was the gentle art of pugilism. That's one of the reasons why I kept stalling Butch Ford, which urgently wished me to forego the frivolous pleasures of life and become a box fighter. I thanked Butch for the chance he'd offered me of getting my nose broke and went up to see Barbara Baxter.

Barbara's proposition goaled me, no fooling. She wanted me to take a job in the revenue service! She was sure she could land me a dry agent's portfolio on the strength of the assistance I'd bestowed on her in busting up that bootlegging ring in Fairfax Falls. Of course she'd had no trouble convincing the officials that Fairfax had simply told 'em a bedtime story about us being in it, too.

Well, lads and lassies, I gently but firmly turned down Barbara's offer to make me a John Law, just

like I'd vetoed Butch's plan to make me a leather pusher. Neither of them arts appealed to my sense of humor, if you get me. I hadn't the faintest of faint intentions of driving a taxi all my life, but I felt I could cheat being either a professional pincher or a professional puncher!

"Just what is your objection to entering the service of the government?" Barbara asks me, a trifle chilly after my point-blank refusal. "You would at least be engaged in something honorable and useful; a profession that calls for courage, resourcefulness and initiative. I should think it would appeal to you much more than being a—a cabman!"

"Barbara," I says, "the way you pronounce cabman makes it a fighting word! However, the last thing I want to do is argue with you. I don't doubt that being a dick—excuse me—a detective, is a high-class occupation. I admire 'em. I like to read about 'em. I think Nick Carter and Sherlock Holmes was a pair of panics. But the point is *this*—I'm never going to make my coffee and cakes on the weaknesses of my fellow clowns in this comic strip we call Life!"

"I'm afraid I don't understand!" snaps Barbara, fifty below zero.

"Don't be afraid while I'm here," I grins. "I

mean I don't crave a job which depends on my neighbor's mistakes!"

"Your philosophy is a bit weird." She smiled, but not pleasantly. "Then you must think physicians, judges, lawyers, ministers and Heaven only knows how many other callings are similarly dishonorable! You are not only childish, Bill; you are tactless. You seem to forget my own profession!"

"I'm sorry," I says, freezing up myself—I was very sensitive in them days. "I didn't mean to bat out of turn. You asked me a question and I answered it!"

Barbara rose and looked out the window at New York.

"I have an engagement at eight," she remarks to a building across the street.

That burnt me up.

"See if *I* care!" I says, putting my hat on the place I bought it for. "But thanks for reminding me, *I* got a heavy date at eight o'clock too, and I can just about make it. See you all of a sudden!"

When I got outside I stared fixedly at my watch. It was half past four. Three and a half hours to keep a engagement which existed only in my imagination. The next guy which tells me he's crazy about some girl—well, I'll know what he means!

I'd apparently lost Barbara, but I still had the five hundred which the movie company plied me with, so I acted accordingly. I went shopping for horseless carriages and bought myself a second-hand taxi, cruising up and down the Great White Way in search of business—and Mons. Jacques Fairfax. I had a yen for the two grand I'd loaned that baby!

A couple or three days of silence from Barbara Baxter was all I could stand, so I phoned her. Everything went along perfect and I was talking myself into a moonlight auto ride with her, when I happened to admit I was operating a taxicab once again. She immediately hung up on me and the moonlight motoring thing became chili sauce!

Restless and blue, I brooded about Fairfax till I decided to give myself a workout as a sleuth. I hunted for him in New York like a custom's inspector searches a movie star's trunks, but it was like hunting a drop of ink in a coal mine!

Baffled but determined, I drove to Fairfax Falls, picked up his trail there and followed it to Rochester, where it led back to Manhattan again and then petered out. My private villain had disappeared like a yokel's bank roll in a Times Square crap tourney, and I was satisfied that as a detective I was a fairly good chauffeur. It was these travels of mine in

search of Fairfax which caused Barbara to call me, half angrily, "The Wandering Jehu."

She was taking exactly the wrong way to make me check out of the taxi-driver vocation!

Convinced that Jack Fairfax had immigrated abroad, I was ready to charge my two thousand-buck loss on him up to publicity, when Lady Luck begin to flirt with me. Pansy Pilkington phoned and invited me over to her flat to help her ruin some tea. It was the first time I'd heard from her since she jobbed me into that movie, and I was by no means ready to let bygones be bygones. So I stalled and let her have a couple of uncommittal answers, till she remarks she can tell me some interesting statistics about my friend Jack Fairfax.

Twenty minutes afterwards I moored my taxi outside a Park Avenue palace, having changed my working uniform to a nifty blue suit. I took off in a elevator and made a safe landing on the twenty-first and top floor, finding Pansy's apartment after a vigorous ten-minute walk through the corridors. Nature's gift to the movie industry opened the door in person, a banquet to the vision as usual. The delicious Pansy had a lot of faults, but they wasn't connected with her face or figure, that's positive!

Still, to me, Pansy was just a nice kid from my

home town. Don't laugh—I can take my girls or let 'em alone. I liked Pansy, but I was insane over Barbara!

Pansy grabbed both my hands and leaned close, but I contented myself with exchanging smiles. Then I walked in and sat down by the radio, which I immediately shut off, as I couldn't seem to get hopped up over Mother Mooney's Thrifty Tip-offs for Young Brides.

"Let's get down to cases. I got to make some dimes to-day," I begin briskly. "Do you know where Jack Fairfax is, Pansy?"

"Aren't you glad to see me, Bill?" is her ridiculous answer.

"Practically hysterical!" I says patiently. "Catch me a glass of water, I'm going to have a convulsion of joy! This is a swell hide-out, a great neighborhood. You look wonderful, so do I, so's your Uncle Jake! *Now*—where's Fairfax?"

Pansy grinned and sat down beside me.

"Same old Bill!" she sighs. "But handsomer every time I see you. That's a very attractive suit. . . . Jack Fairfax is in New York. He seems to be positively filthy with money, and, speaking of evolution, I think he made a monkey out of you!"

With that she commences to fool with the end of my tie—a thing I hate!

“Never mind the wise cracks and leave my haberdashery alone!” I growled, gritting my teeth. “Where can I find him?”

“Bill,” says Pansy, kind of turning her face away, “Jack Fairfax is going to open a swell night club in the cabaret belt and—er—he—he wants to engage *me* as the hostess!”

“Well, I’ll be a cup of coffee!” I exclaimed, jumping up with rage and astonishment as companions. “So it’s come to this, has it? I thought *he* was as broke as the Eighteenth Amendment, and I thought *you* was movie mad!”

“Pardon you!” says Pansy, with some indignation. “I was *never* demented regarding the jumping snapshots! I told you long ago that I came to New York to get into the Follies, and I only played around in pictures for my expenses waiting for Ziegfeld to make me a proposition. I just lost my job at that Long Island film distillery because I said ‘No!’ to Mr. Puttee, the director!”

“What d’ye mean you said no?” I inquired. “What did he ask you?”

“That comes under the head of my own affair!”

she tells me, flushing. "Anyways, he took me out of his production and substituted a title. I'm just as glad! I was getting a trifle dizzy being a maid in one film, a court lady in the next, a bathing beauty in another, then a stenographer, nurse, nun, native dancing girl or what have you—all for seven-fifty a day. Not so good. Why, there's trained *dogs* over there that click off five hundred and more a week!"

"And you never hear no scandal about 'em either," I remarked, gazing around her classy apartments. "Listen—where do you rate this duplicate of Buckingham Palace when pay day's a thing of the past? This drum must set you back plenty!"

"I knew you'd say that." She smiled oddly. "But, Bill, this suite isn't as priceless as it looks. It's the smallest one in the building and away up in the rear near the roof. I must have a good address or I won't land a job—at least, not the kind of a job *I'm* after! Meanwhile, I—I—well, I may take Fairfax up on his offer."

"And you was the one which thought he was poison, hey?" I sneered.

Pansy laid her hand on my arm, but my temperature kept normal.

"I *don't* like him, and you know it!" she says

earnestly. "He's just so much static to *me*. But—I have to eat, don't I? And I *do* want to keep level, Bill, even if nobody will ever believe I did."

"Different here, Pansy," I says, facing her. "*I'll* believe it!"

"Of course, *you* would, you darling!" she says, and this time my arm gets a squeeze. "But they're not all Bill Grimms. Would you—would you really mind if I took that job as hostess in Jack Fairfax's cabaret?"

"Pansy," I says, "don't let's get so serious. If you take my advice, you'll suit yourself. You're over seven and should be nobody's fool. *Never the less*, I wouldn't get too chummy with Jack Fairfax——"

The telephone bell cut me off.

"It's Fairfax!" Pansy whispers, with one lily-white hand over the mouth-piece. "He's downstairs!"

"Good!" I says, licking my lips. "Tell him to come right up. I'll act like I don't know you."

"But, Bill, for Gossakes, I——" begins Pansy hesitatingly.

"Hey, listen!" I shot out savagely. "That egg's in me for two grand, and I'm by no means Vanderbilt. Get him up and don't crack that I'm here or I'm off you for life!"

With that I ducked into the next room and shut the door.

"Come up, Jack, I want to talk to you," says Pansy into the phone, and she had to repeat the invitation twice before her voice got loud and steady enough to make him understand her.

While Fairfax was enroute in the elevator, I give my nervous girl friend a rough outline of the questions I wanted her to ask him, so's I could get the answers in the other room. Then I stepped on a chair and peeped over the transom.

Fairfax swaggered through the door, tossed his hat on the sofa like he owned the joint, making a step towards Pansy with outstretched arms and a leering grin. Pansy ducked him, though, sitting down with a table between 'em. Jack seemed to of knocked over either seven or eighteen cocktails, and the sight of that big Humpty Dumpty sitting there dressed like a fashion plate when he owed me two thousand fish had me ready to chew railroad ties!

Pansy knew her oil and lost no time getting matters down to brass tacks.

"Don't you think you should pay Bill back, now that you're so prosperous?" she asks Fairfax. "I understand he's up against it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortles this burglar, tapping a



cigarette on a gold case. "Pay him back? Be your age, Pansy, you're out of your mind, old thing! I'm not putting anything out for Grimm. Wasn't it through him and that infernal Baxter woman that I got arrested? Do you know that on account of that hippodrome at the Falls my father has cast me off?"

"You wouldn't fool me, would you?" says Pansy, with a nervous glance at the door shielding me.

"Fact!" says her vis-à-vis, pulling out a roll of bills which would of strangled a hippo. "The pater gave me ten thousand dollars and cut me out of his will!"

While Pansy stared fascinated at the money he got up and eased himself around the table till he stood behind her chair. Bending down swiftly and suddenly, he kissed her, the big stiff!

With a startled cry Pansy sprang up and slapped his face, but, laughing his head off, Fairfax threw both arms around her. At this interesting point I shoved open the door.

"That's out!" I called to his back, which was towards me. "Let Pansy alone or papa spank!"

Say—you should of pegged Jack's dumfounded pan when he dropped his arms and swung around on me. Pansy stepped away from him and with great presence of mind begin powdering her nose.

"You ungrateful little cat!" yells Fairfax at her.

"So you framed me, eh! You and this—this rustic sweetheart of yours!" He walks over to me and snarls in my face, "The lady-killing chauffeur, eh? Does Barbara Baxter know you are also Pansy's lover?"

Pansy jumped between us, and her eyes were two four-alarm fires.

"You evil-minded fool!" she pants. "I——"

Fairfax pushed her roughly aside.

"Well, what do *you* expect to get out of this, Grimm?" he sneers.

"The sugar you owe me—and some skinned knuckles!" I says softly, and promptly smacked him down.

Unfortunately he wasn't badly hurt, but being far from the gamest guy in the world he couldn't see his way clear to get up and fight. If he had, it was my praiseworthy intention to give him the cuffing of his life, and I don't mean perhaps! As it was, I made him hand over his bank roll, which to my great disappointment only amounted to twelve hundred bucks. When he'd flaunted it before Pansy it looked more like twelve million! Still, tens and twenties make a lot of display.

"This leaves eight hundred still due me, Fairfax," I reminded him.

“Try and get it!” he grunts at me wickedly.

“What’s the matter with his watch and ring, Bill?” asks Pansy coolly.

“That’s a good thought—thanks, Pansy,” I says, choking off a laugh, and then I bent over the still reclining gentleman. “When you slip me that eight yards balance, Fairfax, I’ll give you back your jewelry. Hand it over and make it snappy or I’ll beat you into a treat for a surgeon!”

I must of looked murderous, for he removed his gewgaws and flung ’em at me without a word. Then he got up, jammed on his hat and tossed me and Pansy a vicious glance to split between us.

“Call me a taxi!” he commands Pansy.

“Right here!” I spoke up, all business. “My nobby vehicle’s outside. Where to, sir?”

Pansy bust out laughing, and Fairfax’s answer was to slam the door after him so hard that two pictures and a mirror fell off the wall. I helped the still giggling young lady to pick ’em up and then shoved off myself.

A very successful conference, with much business transacted!

Well, I kept phoning beautiful Barbara Baxter till she finally threw up her hands and made a date with me. For the rest of that day I wheeled my taxicab

about in a happy trance and astonished my enraged fares by smiling benignly in their faces when they bawled me out for hauling 'em to wrong addresses. All I could think of was that me and this hashish eater's dream was going for a ride that night and the rest of the world could go by as far as I was concerned! I exchanged my taxi for a hired two-seater sport model which was the last syllable in dog, and we drove to a swell trap at Long Beach with the objects of dinner and dancing. That went over big, and so did I till I told Barbara about my session with Jack Fairfax. She thought it was great that I got as much out of him as I did, but she coldly declared that my visit to Pansy in her flat was all wrong!

"You and Pansy appear to be inseparable," she says, tapping the table idly with the menu. "Don't you think you would have had a more enjoyable evening with *her*? Or do you—er—alternate with us? First Pansy, then——"

"Don't be silly, Barbara!" I interrupted, reaching over and grabbing her hand before she could snatch it away. "Pansy's more like a boy friend to me. She's a good scout and I like her plenty, but—but I *love* you, Barbara!"

That last slipped out almost without me knowing I

was saying it, and I held my breath, positive I'd pulled a fox pass. But Barbara's eyes softened, and she produced a blush which positively ruined me.

"Bill, you're incorrigible!" she smiles. "What do *you* know about love?"

"What *don't* I know about love?" I grinned back. "I'm a taxicab driver, ain't I?"

To my great relief, she laughed heartily, and the rest of that night was simply grand, no fooling!

Talking of apricots, when I rolled my taxi up to my stand the following evening I was amazed to find no less than Jack Fairfax waiting for me. With him was a great big thick-necked broad-shouldered bozo, which, besides a cap and sweater, bore other earmarks of a pug, viz., one of his ears seemed much more like a sponge. He give me a dirty look, so thinking him and Fairfax was going to choose me, I hopped down off the seat, buttoned up my coat, and took a step towards 'em, just in case. The bruiser looked willing enough, but Jack grinned and held out a handful of bills.

"We don't want any bloodshed, Grimm," he says in apparent good humor. "I made an ass of myself the other day, and I want to apologize. Here's the eight hundred balance I owe you—may I have my watch and ring?"

Well, the idea of Fairfax cuddling up to me completely baffled me. I actually felt cheap for taking his jewelry away from him and knocking him down at Pansy's. Instantly it came to me that he'd brought this burly scrapper along with him for protection only.

"Here's your stuff," I says, sheepishly handing it over. "And I'm sure sorry I lost my head and hit you, Fairfax! I——"

But with one snatch he grabbed his junk out of my hand and slipped behind his friend.

"*Let him have it!*" he hisses in the other guy's good ear.

Sock!

Before I could realize his sudden change of front and get my hands up, a iron fist connected with my chin, and I kissed the pavement. I wasn't knocked cold, but I was the next thing to it! While I was shaking my head to clear it and trying to get to my feet, I seen Fairfax and his bodyguard streaking it around the corner. A crowd of curious citizens surrounds me, along with a couple of equally curious coppers. I says I don't know who hit me or why, if at all, and I give the gendarmes a phony description of Fairfax and his playmate. I was out the eight hundred and security I was holding for it, but what

I wanted to do was to personally get Jack Fairfax and that boy which pasterd me. I didn't want to pinch 'em; I wanted to punch 'em!

Well, that sock on the jaw made me thoughtful. Rubbing the swelling tenderly, my ponderings swung around to Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien, and I decided on the spot it was high time I learned how to handle myself. I didn't intend then to become no professional box fighter; I only wanted to be able to make it interesting for one should he fuss with me. So I went around to Butch's gym and told him my needs. Both him and O'Brien got hysterical with delight, joining hands and dancing around me till the other inmates of the place was satisfied we was three cuckoos of the first water! But I wouldn't sign no contract with Butch or make him any promises, sticking to my plan of merely learning enough about the manly art of aggravated assault to keep from getting underfoot in a brawl.

I was deep in the mysteries of a straight left one afternoon, when who should stroll into Butch's busy training quarters but that fellow which floored me to amuse Jack Fairfax. Clinching with Left Hook O'Brien, I turned him around facing the newcomer and disregarded Butch's bellow for me to keep on sparring.

"Who's that guy?" I whispered to O'Brien.

"Him?" says O'Brien. "That's Jim Tierney. A tough boy, but he'll never get nowheres. He's just a swinger—still, he's hard to stop!"

"Yeah?" I remarks without a smile. "Well, I'm going to walk over and stop him right now!"

O'Brien and Butch stared at me for a minute and then let loose some loud guffaws.

"In six months, if you tend to your knittin' here, you might give that mug some trouble," says Butch. "To-day Tierney would lay you like carpet!"

That was all I needed. I wrenched away from 'em and walked over to Tierney, which was gazing at me curiously. He recalled me all right!

"If you hadn't run away the other day, I'd of licked you, you big stiff!" I says politely.

"I wish they was all as soft as you," returns Tierney, with equal courtesy, and at the same time he took a wicked punch at me.

Then the jollity begin!

Remember, I'd been sparring with Left Hook O'Brien, and I had on heavy training gloves—twelve-ounce cushions versus Jim Tierney's hard, bare knuckles. When I hit him it was like caressing him with a pillow, but when he hit *me* it meant something! I knew nothing whatsoever about infighting

and darn little about *any* kind of fighting for that matter, while Tierney was a veteran of over a hundred ring battles.

There could only be one ending to this fracas, of course, as this was real life and not no movie. Blood flowed like water. Ten minutes later Butch Ford managed to halt the thing with the aid of the other highly surprised athletes in the gym. The mill was stopped just in time to save a nice boy from serious injury. That boy was me!

"I'll meet you in the ring inside of a month and make you like it!" I gasped, when Butch pried my battered eyes open. "You knew too much for me, Tierney, but at that you wasn't able to knock me for a loop!"

"He couldn't flatten you with an ax!" enthusiastically says Butch, patting my heaving back. "I seen all *I* wanted to see—you can *take* it, Bill, and that's the one thing I wished to know for sure! I'll toss you in with this big palooka five weeks from to-day——"

"And I'll smack him out of the ring into your lap!" Tierney finishes for him—and walked out of the gym.

Never the less, though Tierney had twice took informal decisions over me, I couldn't get rid of the

idea that I could trim him. In those days I was a hog for chastisement, no kidding! It took a over-size week for my features to heal up, during which time I ducked both Barbara and Pansy. At that, when I begin hard and serious training for Jim Tierney—my first professional fight—I was wearing adhesive tape over my right eye and on my left cheekbone. Me and Tierney was to go ten rounds or less at a club up in the Bronx, and I was to draw down three hundred and fifty bucks for my efforts. It was a main bout too, and I learned afterwards that Tierney got a fifteen-hundred-dollar guarantee. For the time being I'd cast my lot as a box fighter.

A couple of days before my heart-rending scuffle with Jim Tierney, I heard through Butch Ford that Jack Fairfax was running a keen night club called La Palais on Fifty-first Street off Broadway. Butch says it was a Ritzy, evening-clothes joint which received a heavy "society" play, featuring a well-known jazz orchestra and fairly good Scotch. I immediately insisted on going up and getting my money from Fairfax, and I wouldn't take no for a answer. So with Butch and O'Brien I climbed into a tuxedo and up we went. We got past the hard-eyed doormen and lookouts without no trouble, our swell fronts helping us, and surprise

number one comes when I'm greeted by Pansy Pilkington! She's the hostess, she tells me, adding that Fairfax had amply apologized to her for his rough words in her apartment that day and he was now imitating a perfect gentleman. The fact that he was paying her two hundred a week and a cut of the five berries cover charge didn't make Pansy enraged against him either!

Fairfax himself wasn't there at the minute, but I was determined to wait for him. Butch and O'Brien sat down at a table and ordered chicken sandwiches and chocolate, while, like the sap I was, I give in to Pansy's pleading for just one dance. At the office from her, the orchestra put it on heavy for us, and I really enjoyed the thing. Pansy's feet fairly giggled, and I'm no Patsy on a ballroom floor myself. When it was over and I walked back to our table I got a fearful shock! At another table, not ten feet from us, is Barbara Baxter and a boy friend. Not only that, each of 'em had what seemed like a highball in front of 'em!

Oo-la-la!

Barbara happened to look up and see me staring at her, and she got first red and then white. At the same minute Jack Fairfax come striding across the floor, followed by three or four husky waiters. They

headed right for me, and, as usually, Fairfax got behind his bodyguards when we come together.

"I want the rest of that dough you owe me, Fairfax," I says, in a low but businesslike voice, "or I'll take it right out of your cash register!"

"Throw him out, boys!" snarls Fairfax to his merry men, just as Butch and O'Brien jumped to my side.

It was Barbara Baxter's companion which prevented what had all the earmarks of a grand free-for-all. He stepped over to Fairfax and laid a hand on his shoulder, at the same time grabbing a waiter's arm. Barbara ran to a open window and blew a police whistle which instantly threw the place into a uproar. The swell patrons fell over each other trying to get out into the great open spaces of Broadway where men are actors, while the coppers come plunging up the stairs. The fun waxed fast and furious for half a hour, and when the excitement died down a trifle Fairfax and a waiter had been pinched for selling whiskey. I found myself standing beside Barbara, wondering what it was all about!

"What are *you* doing in a place like this, and who's that bird which was with you?" I demanded.

She frowned and regarded me coldly.

"My escort is another enforcement officer," she

says. "We've been working together for a week, and I came here with him to-night in the line of duty!"

"How about that highball I seen in front of you?" I wanted to know.

"I had to order it as evidence," she says angrily. "I didn't drink it—the other detective did that. What right have *you* to question me? So you are now a frequenter of night clubs with Pansy—the girl who is just like a boy friend to you, eh?"

"Never mind curling your lip at me, Barbara!" I answered, as mad as she was. "I come here to get the rest of that sugar Fairfax owes me. Do you think it's a nice thing for a girl to have a job where she has to step out around cabarets, ordering drinks, at all hours of the night with men?"

"I do not wish to discuss that with you—that is my affair!" she snaps.

"O. K.," I says, taking another tack. "Listen, Barbara—I got a new racket now, a far better one than taxi driving. I'm going to fight Jim Tierney in forty-eight hours. It'll be my first scrap in a ring, and maybe it'll be my last. Will you come up to the Bronx and see me do my stuff?"

"You—you are going to engage in a *prize fight*?" she gasps, like she's positive her ears is kidding her.

"Absolutely!" I says. "If I get you a ring-side seat, will you be there to cheer me on like they do in books?"

"Well, I should say not!" she busts out, her eyes flashing fire. "And I'm terribly angry and disappointed with you!"

And she left me standing there flat.

I didn't do much sleeping on that particular night—just short cat naps from which I'd wake with a start sitting up in bed. Barbara, Pansy, Fairfax and Jim Tierney was all mixed up in my dizzy mind. Barbara didn't want me to drive a taxi, though I'd made good money at it. That was too common for her. She didn't want me to be a pug, though Butch Ford saw a champ in me. That was too brutal for her. Well, what else was there open for me—without family, money, education or backing? Butch took a look at my eyes when I arose, and, locking me in my room, made me pound my ear all day. I got up at seven P.M. and finished my last workout for Jim Tierney at two the next morning.

In the dressing-room that night while Butch banded my hands with the regulation soft cloth, his instructions to me was the same as they'd been hourly for the past five weeks, "Don't try to *slug* with Tierney, *box* him and take the fight on points!"

To which Left Hook O'Brien added as usual, "If you trade wallops with this baby, Bill, he'll knock you over. If you keep your left in his pan you'll make a chump out of him!"

My head was full of that till the very first time Tierney stung me. Then I forgot everything I'd learned about boxing and all that my trainers had told me. I remembered just *one* thing, which was that I wanted to knock Mr. Tierney as cold as a polar bear's nose!

The club, a small one, was packed to the rafters when I climbed through the ropes, escorted by Butch Ford, Left Hook O'Brien and Shifty Jones, a big colored heavy who'd been my chief sparring partner. A few minutes later Jim Tierney entered the ring with his handlers and got a rousing cheer. The customers didn't give me a tumble, not even when I was introduced to 'em—my name meaning a trifle less than nothing to the fans. On the other hand, Left Hook O'Brien, which was acting as one of my seconds, got a bigger reception than even Tierney when the crowd recognized him. O'Brien's knock-out record rated and got a salute everywhere!

The instant the gong rang to start us off, Tierney leaped at me with a swinging overhand right which caught me on the ear and sent me into the ropes.

"There he goes! Knock him out, Tierney!" promptly howled the gallery. I pawed desperately at the air and Tierney sunk his other glove to the trade mark in my mid section. My knees sagged, and I fought for my breath while a deep voice yelled, "In the stomach, Tierney; he don't like 'em down below!"

"Shut up, Monkey!" Butch Ford screamed back. "D'ye know anybody which *does* like 'em below?"

That brought a loud laugh from the crowd, and the next minute I made 'em all stand up shrieking by connecting solidly with a left hook to Tierney's chin. It shook him up, and he backed away, looking surprised and serious. I liked the effect of that punch and shot over a hard right to the same place. Tierney was slow in ducking and got the full force of it on the side of his head. He went to his knees, and the din would of made a boiler factory seem like a graveyard on Sunday! Half the mob was cheering me and the other half was imploring Tierney to get up and finish me. Butch was dancing around outside the ropes telling me what to do next, but I couldn't make out a word he said. One of my admirers bawled at Butch, "Sit down, Dizzy. Let the kid fight his own fight!"

Tierney took a count of nine and rose slowly,

immediately trying to clinch. He looked in a bad way. I followed Butch's instructions and showed him off, jabbing him three times to the mouth without a return. Then we both missed hard rights. Again Tierney wanted to get in close, but I shot a right to his ribs, and he reeled backwards towards his corner, a mark for a knockout punch. But I was too green to follow up that priceless advantage, and Tierney's handlers hollered to him, "Use your head, Jim, don't let him set!" He used his head, all right. He lowered it and butted me under the eye with it! Butch and O'Brien yelled murder and the referee warned Tierney. The crowd booed him enthusiastically, but that didn't help my eye.

The hisses seemed to refresh this bird, for he suddenly come at me like a crazy man with both gloves pumping like pistons. A experienced boxer would of ducked these wild blows with ease and cut Tierney to pieces with counters, but I was no experienced boxer—I was fighting my first battle in a ring!

I finally put two stiff lefts to Tierney's face, and, measuring him carefully as he come rushing in, I hit him flush on the jaw with my right. It was a terrible punch with everything I had behind it, and he dropped for the second time in a quivering heap.

But I thought I'd hit a concrete wall! Awful burning pains shot up my arm, and the clenched fist inside my right glove was just numb. I couldn't keep back a short cry of agony, and quick as a flash one of Tierney's seconds roared, "He's broke his hand, Jim, get up and take him!"

That handler made a wonderful guess. That's just what I'd done—broke my right hand with the blow that sent Tierney to the canvas! He staggered to his feet at nine again; punch-drunk but tougher than rhino hide. This time I couldn't keep him out of a clinch, and when the referee broke us I only had one good hand to stall him off. It wasn't enough! With a sneering grin on his battered lips, Tierney proceeded to make a punching bag out of me for the rest of that round. I was down twice for a count of four, once for a count of seven, and the welcome bell ending the massacre found me on the mat for my fourth trip. I did the best I could with only a left hand to work with, and as I dragged myself to my corner and flopped on the stool I heard the referee say to the sport writers as he leaned over the ropes:

"This lad can't fight—but, oh, how he does!"

And he jerked his thumb at me.

Left Hook O'Brien, which told me never to lose

my head in a fight, was so cool and collected that he shoved the sponge in my mouth instead of the water bottle. Butch pushed him away, kneading the back of my neck with thumb and fingers of one hand, while the other held the ammonia under my nose. Shifty Jones put collidion on a deep gash under my eye where Tierney had butted me. They was all talking in my ears, but what they said to me I never will know! All I could hear was a booming roar like the surf at the seashore. I was sick in my stomach, and I had a fearful headache. My right hand and arm was pins and needles—red-hot pins and needles! They had to push me out when the bell rang for the second round. I didn't hear that either!

Butch's parting slap on the back as he ducked down under the ropes helped revive me a bit. I shook my head from side to side to clear away the cobwebs, and something inside me whispered, "Feint with your right as if it wasn't hurt—outsmart him!" Like a machine I stuck my left in Tierney's face and drew my useless right back slightly like I was going to punch with it. Tierney covered up instantly. He looked puzzled and glanced quickly at his corner. "Be careful!" his seconds yelled. "He faked that right—he never broke it at all!" Tierney kept backing away, and I jabbed him viciously again and again

with my left, still using my bum right as a threat.

He swung his own right when the mob commanded him to take a chance, and I side-stepped the punch, with the same movement bringing up my left in a uppercut which caught him squarely over the heart. Why, I even seen the whites of his eyes turn up and his color go a pasty gray. He cursed and landed lightly below my belt, and the mob razed him, but I'd already started another wicked left for his jaw. It caught him right on the button, and he crashed to the floor, rolling over twice, to end up flat and motionless on his face.

They could of counted two hundred instead of ten! Jim Tierney wasn't able to leave the ring for twenty minutes after the fight and I'd won my first start by a knockout in less than two rounds.

It was just a jubilee in my dressing-room—Butch fixing up my bum paw and everybody talking at once, when through the open door walks Barbara Baxter! Her face is all aglow, if you know what I mean, and her eyes was sparkling.

“I—I couldn't resist seeing what would happen to you to-night, Bill,” she says softly, “and I want you to know how glad—how proud I am that you won. You were—oh, just splendid—I wish you could have heard what they were saying all around me—I got

quite a thrill! Bill, I'm not going to affect an admiration that I do not feel for your new profession, but I hope, since you have entered it, you'll become a champion!"

As I was shooin' Butch and the rest of 'em out, she whispered, "I'm the guest of some newspaper women, and I must leave. Good-night, Bill, and—and I shall be at home to-morrow evening if you call!"

I thought they'd be forty columns in the papers the next morning about my fight with Tierney. I had to go through 'em three times to find this on a inside page:

Bill Grimm knocked out Jim Tierney in the second round of a scheduled ten-round bout here last night. The men are heavyweights.

That was all! Three short lines for the Battle of the Century.

Well, such is life!

CHAPTER V

KEELEY CURED!

ONCE upon a time, friends of radioland, Jack Ruskin, a Englishman which could no more do without pen and ink than the Prince of Wales can do without a steamer trunk, made the following wise crack:

“Pride is at the bottom of all great mistakes!”

As luck will have it, Mr. Ruskin has been buried for twenty-five years, so it's pretty safe to say he's dead. Otherwise I'd like to give this master mind the satisfaction of knowing that he had pride doped out exactly right—at least in *my* case! Of all the ways of getting drunk, to be intoxicated with conceit is the worst souse in the world. Conceit is often mistaken for Confidence, but there's as much difference between Confidence and Conceit as there is between chicken pox and chicken salad! Against Fate, Confidence is your strongest defense, while Conceit makes you a set-up. I wouldn't fool you.

One of the greatest lines ever concocted by anyone is "Be yourself!"

In spite of the fact that I was temporarily saying it with right swings, I still remained true to my somewhat dilapidated taxi, hanging on to it both as a anchor to windward and on account of the kick I got out of my various fares. Honest to Darwin, I looked forward to each haul as a new and thrilling adventure—a wonderful chance to study human nature and accumulate a more pungent education than I'd ever get out of books!

My first victory in the prize ring had brought out two important facts: One was that I was a homicidal puncher and the other was that I was the victim of a weakness which has prevented many a great fighter from becoming a champion—I had a set of brittle hands!

The fists which made big Jim Tierney kiss the canvas wasn't tough enough to stand the horrible collision when driven against the other boy's jaw by my walking-beam shoulders.

As soon as the hand healed up, Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien, which seen the Scenario of a world's champ in me, took me in charge. They claimed they'd make my fists so hard I could split a slab of marble with a punch! You'll have to take

their word for that part of it, as I've never tried that difficult feat and can only say that these boys knew their groceries and seldom guessed wrong. At any rate, there was days when I sit for hours soaking my hands in a bucket of brine, days when I chopped wood, swung a sledge, walloped a heavy sand bag and partook of other exercises laid out with the praiseworthy idea of toughening up my glass maulers.

As long as I was in this racket I was determined to be a champion, for Barbara always claimed that a champ at *anything*, whether it was boxing, brick-laying, banking or street digging, should command the attention of the world and certainly commanded hers. *Better* be the greatest plumber on earth and recognized as such than be just one of a hundred thousand corporation presidents, for instance!

Speaking of mock turtles, I called on Barbara one day with my charming face just a background for a flock of court plaster and adhesive tape. I'd been sparring with Shifty Jones that morning and—well, we generally played rough. You don't pick up much about the manly art of aggravated assault by pulling punches, and this burly colored boy, which had a brutal straight left, seen no reason to show *me* any favors!

Barbara still lived with her aunt in a nobby apartment uptown, and as I'd phoned I was going to take her for a walk through Central Park she was all dolled up for the street when I arrived. And what a traffic stopper *she* was!

Her warm smile of greeting just froze on her tantalizing lips the second she witnessed my somewhat strife-marked features.

"What on earth has happened to your face?" she exclaims.

"Oh, nothing much," I grinned back, "I been trading rights with Shifty Jones, and I got the skin he loves to touch, that's all!" I sidled over and took a glance at myself in the mirror. "I'll be a great fighter some day—if my pan holds out!" I added.

"Your what?" asked Barbara, wrinkling her brow.

"My pan—my face," I explained.

"I do wish you would leave that vulgar slang in the gymnasium!" she busts out. "You know I detest it. And to think that last night I dreamed you had given up boxing forever!"

"That just goes to show you how unreliable dreams is these days—it's hardly worth while going

to sleep any more!" I says. "Come on, let's flounce out and give the sight-seers a treat!"

But instead she sits down on the couch and tosses her nifty little hat on a chair.

"I haven't the slightest intention of going out walking with you, with your face—er—all court-plastered," she tells me peevishly. "You look like—well—just what you are, a prize fighter!"

You should have heard the disgust she put on that word *prize fighter*.

Well, *I* heard it, and it burnt me up!

"I seem to be as popular as hydrophobia with you!" I says. "Nothing I do meets with your approval. You don't wish me to drive a taxi, and you don't wish me to be a box fighter. Yet you know that college is the only thing I ain't been through. With *my* education, just what is there open for me?"

Barbara seen at a glance that I was hurt and she instantly softened.

"Come over here and sit down, Bill," she smiles making a place on the couch for me beside her. "I don't want to quarrel with you. My lack of enthusiasm over your profession is caused mostly by the fear that you may be seriously injured in the ring."

"Don't worry!" I laughs, patting her hand. "I'm no world beater, Barbara, but I won't get bumped off in there unless the other boy hits me over the head with the bucket, and very few of 'em tries that!"

But I was tickled silly to think she was worried about my health. At least I'd registered *something!*

"Have you disposed of that comedy taxicab of yours yet?" is her next question.

"Yes and no," I answers. "I'm not driving it in the daytime no more, only when I'm not training, at nights. And I have to do that, Barbara, to take care of myself till Butch Ford gets me another fight. After that I'll have some serious money and I'll probably sell the old boiler. But I'm not satisfied yet that boxing is my trick; I'm just kind of feeling my way—maybe after a couple or three more scuffles I'll be fed up on battling."

"I certainly hope so!" sighs Barbara, deeply and fervently.

Then she suddenly changed the subject and asked me what Pansy Pilkington was doing. I told her truthfully I didn't know, and that furthermore I hadn't the phantom of a idea where Pansy was. Before I shoved off, Barbara told me she wanted to be friends with Pansy and was anxious to help her

till she landed another job. Surprised and highly delighted, I promised to look her up.

When I got back to the inn where I was parking with Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien, I was dumfounded to find Jack Fairfax waiting for me in the lobby. It was all I could do to keep from knocking this inveterate cheater as stiff as a dress shirt!

"Here's the eight hundred I owe you, Grimm," he says, pulling a fistful of bills from his pocket. "You'll find an additional hundred in that roll—call it interest on the loan."

This guy was so tight he'd change a penny into mills if he was addicted to tipping—which he wasn't—and here he wants to make *me* a present of a hundred iron men! I counted the jack thoughtfully. Not a word of thanks out of him, then or ever, for me saving him from the hoosegow!

"I'm not in the loan shark game!" I says, handing him back the extra hundred and slipping the other eight yards in my kick. "If you got so much sugar you might toss that century to Pansy Pilkington. The kid's probably not very fluent with money and could use it right now."

He laughed nastily.

"Pansy will never lack a cavalier while *you're*

in the offing, will she?" he sneers, and took a quick step backward when he seen my face harden. "I'd like a receipt in full, if you don't mind," he winds up hurriedly, "and—also your promise that you and that—er—Miss Baxter will stop hounding me!"

"You're all out of gear, Fairfax," I says scornfully. "I'm not pushing you around and neither is Barbara Baxter. You're your own most deadly enemy. Have you ever tried being on the level?"

"I asked for a promise—not a lecture!" he snaps.

"Take what you get!" I snapped back. "All the grief you been having is your own fault. Why—"

"Oh, spare me the moralizing!" he interrupts viciously. "All my grief, as you call it, is directly traceable to you and that female Sherlock Holmes! Who had me arrested in the Falls? Who had me raided and padlocked in New York? You ask me to give *Pansy* money! Why, I wouldn't give that double-crossing ex-hired girl the address of the nearest poorhouse! She was the one who tipped off your lady detective that I was selling, after I'd taken her off the streets and given her a job!"

"You never took *Pansy* off no streets, you prancing scissorbill, and you make another crack like that and I'll chalk up a decision over you right now!" I hissed in his ear gripping his arm in a vise. "The

trouble with you is that you're a bum loser. I don't want any part of you, Fairfax, and get a load of this—lay off me and I'll lay off you, but try to put any more fast ones on me or my friends and I'll knock you off!"

"You sound like a movie!" he sneers, wrenching away and rubbing his arm. "May I trouble you for that receipt?"

I walked over to the desk and wrote it out on a hotel card. Then I got Pansy's address from him and left him flat.

I'd scarcely got up to my room when Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien rushes in, all excited.

"You're as hard to find as a rooster with a toothache!" Butch complains. "I been lookin' all over for you. We fight in three weeks, Big Boy!"

"That's a pay-off!" I says, sarcastically. "So *we* fight, hey? You're coming in the ring with me the next time?"

"Be your weight!" snorts Butch, while O'Brien chuckles. "I want you in the hay early to-night, because you're goin' to be up at five to-morrow mornin' doin' road work."

"Have you got any serious objections to telling me who I'm going to box?" I asked him. "Or is that a secret?"

"It's all right, it ain't Dempsey," Butch answers. "His name in even figures is Eddie Thomas—a third-rate palooka which you should bounce in a round or two. Give him a nasty look and he'll take a count of nine! Does that tell you enough?"

"It tells me *too* much!" I says coldly. "I ain't going to fight no pushovers, Butch, for pennies, peanuts or pudding!"

Butch flops down on the bed and stares at me like I'm Niagara Falls and he's seeing it for the first time, while O'Brien looks from one to the other of us in equal amazement. But I'd made up my mind! My swift knockout of the tough Jim Tierney in my first appearance as a pug had made me all swelled up like a boil over my ability with the gloves. At that minute I honestly believed I could lick any man in the ring, and I was even surprised that the game was as easy as I'd found it. Oh, what a Jasper *I* was!

A couple of sport editors had written that they was afraid I'd be a success, that I was the best prospect shown in some time and that with a little more experience I'd stop many more than would stop me. I repeated this to the still gaping Butch, adding:

"I'll never learn nothing boxing chumps and if

you don't get me a bout with a first-class man, I'll manage myself! Personally I'd like to meet Keeley. Eventually, why not now?"

At this both Butch and O'Brien bust out laughing.

"So you wish a piece of Knockout Keeley, hey?" chortles Butch. "You crave to mingle with a killer which has flattened his last ten opponents in from one to two rounds. That's a thought for to-day! If I had your nerve I'd open up a shipyard on the Sara Desert. I seen Keeley go a couple of times and let me tell you *this*, young-feller-me-lad, Mr. Keeley would make a sucker out of you and knock you for a loop in the very first frame!"

"You're certainly one swell manager!" I hollered, fit to be tied. "You think I'm a mug, hey? Well, the man ain't been born which can knock me out!"

"Applesauce!" grunts Butch. "Tierney had you on the floor!"

"Sure!" I agrees. "But I got *up*—and *then* what happened?"

Butch didn't have one ready for that. Instead he commences walking up and down the room, chewing on a unlit cigar.

"Look here, Butch!" I went on. "You know I can hit and you know I can take punishment, so—"

“That’s just the trouble!” he interrupts harshly, turning on me. “That’s just the trouble! Because you’re green and not ring-wise, you take *too much* punishment! Tierney found you as wide open as Baffin’s Bay—even your sparrin’ partners reach you time and time again. That’s why I want you to box this proper punk Eddie Thomas. I want you to get experience. I admit you’re as game as a butcher’s choppin’ block, but the insane asylums is full of ex-pugs’ which was pigs for punishment—and nothin’ more! You got no defense, you’re just a catcher and your footwork reminds me of a guy with the gout. On top of that, you mail every punch by parcel post!”

“I don’t *need* no defense, once I sock ’em on the button!” I returned grimly.

Well, the argument got hotter and hotter. Left Hook O’Brien declared himself in and pretty soon the indignant room clerk called up from downstairs and told us the proper place to stage a race riot was on a vacant lot. But I won my point, and two days later, against the advice of Butch, O’Brien and even Shifty Jones, I signed to fight Knockout Keeley. I was to get twelve hundred bucks for displaying my wares; win, lose, draw or what have you? Left Hook O’Brien encouraged me by telling

me I was crazy and that this scuffle would set me back about one year in my climb to the top!

Right after that I made one of the biggest mistakes in a lifetime just cluttered with errors. To the dismay of Butch and my other friends, I started to duck my training and clowned when I *did* show up at Butch's. I'd begun to find the daily conditioning routine tiresome and being mistaken for Nurmi running through Central Park in the early morning made me feel like a sap.

Whenever the fancy struck me, I operated my taxi at nights or aced around with Barbara Baxter—theatre, dancing, auto rides and what not. Sometimes I got to bed early and sometimes it was different. I was happy and care free and thought I was the kitten's velocipede!

One Sunday, it being the first chance I got, I looked up Pansy Pilkington at the address I took from Jack Fairfax. The number turned out to be a kind of dingy, gloomy rooming house in the Roaring Forties, and it was certainly a startling change from the gorgeous apartment Pansy had on Park Avenue when she was hostess at Fairfax's night club.

"Why didn't you give *me* a tumble when you run out of dimes, instead of going in hock?" I asked her,

feeling pretty cheap for not getting in touch with her before.

Pansy regarded me curiously for a instant and then leaned over to pat my hand.

"I'm no quitter, Bill!" she says gamely. "New York hasn't got *me* licked yet, and the day isn't far off when I'll be the toast of Broadway!"

Lost in admiration of Pansy's courage and her charms, I believed her! As it was to finally turn out, she more than made good on that boast. If I told you just who Pansy is to-day—well, you'd laugh at me!

"You look as if you were putting on weight," Pansy remarks, eyeing me critically. "I hope you're taking this fight with Knockout Keeley seriously, Bill. The papers say he's a wonderful boxer!"

"He'll find it puzzling to box me while he's laying on the floor!" I says.

"You tell 'em!" agrees Pansy, which, unlike Barbara, was a blown-in-the-bottle fight fan and thought I could lick a squad of marines. "Just think, when you're heavyweight champion of the world and I'm in the Follies—"

"The Atlantic Ocean will turn into grapejuice!" I finished for her, with a grin. "Listen, Pansy—"

how would you like to come up and see Barbara Baxter?"

Immediately her sparkling eyes got hard and icy and away went the dazzling smile which not so long afterward was to wow Gotham.

"How do you get that way?" she demands, sitting up straight and putting on the chill. "Why should *I* call on your sweetheart?"

"Hold everything!" I says, flushing. "Barbara's by no means my sweetheart—but—"

"But you wish she was!" she interrupts swiftly.

I had nothing to say, and I said it.

Pansy sighed and lit a cigarette. I never knew striking a match could make so much noise!

"I get wonderful breaks—*wonderful!*" she murmurs gloomily, taking a long inhale and gazing at the ceiling. I arose and stood behind her.

"Pansy—you got Barbara all wrong," I says. "She's a peach, no fooling! She likes you and wants to be friends. Why, she's even offered to stake you till you—"

Pansy leaped to her feet.

"She—wants—to—stake—*me?*" she flames. "I love that! Are you trying to be funny? Do I look like a Dumb Dora? Am I helpless? Have I asked her for anything?"

"Barbara only—" I flounders.

"Blaah!" Pansy butts in. "I don't want to hear anything more about her! I wouldn't take a penny from that girl if I was starving—which I'm not. I'm fully capable of taking care of myself, and if you—if you had any sense, Bill, you'd never have asked me to accept anything from the girl you're in love with!"

Her eyes were blazing, and things had come to a pretty pass. I never felt so uncomfortable since the time I fell out of a pew in church.

"I—you—would you accept a loan from *me*, then, till you get on your feet?" I stammered.

At that her anger flickered out like a candle in a tornado. She smiled and held out her little hand.

"No, Bill," she says softly. "Besides, I *am* on my feet—all day and nearly all night! But many thanks, and I'll file your application for future reference. You never can tell!"

I shook her hand warmly.

"Listen!" I says relieved and yet somehow upset. "If you ever go broke again while I got money and you don't put the bee on me, I'll—I'll sneak in and put mucilage in your beauty clay!"

After I left Pansy I walked back to my hotel thinking how funny it was that I didn't seem to feel

at ease with her any more like I used to. We used to be—well, like brother and sister, you might say. I'd scold and advise her and I guess I kissed her a couple of times, but the same way you'd kiss your grandmother, if you know what I mean. But now there seemed to be a change of some kind. It was almost like calling on a girl I'd just met. Pansy was younger than me in years, but she seemed older in some ways. She wasn't a kid any more, that was it. . . .

She was all alone in New York, and in the world, for that matter, and there was the movie director which tried to make her, and Jack Fairfax, which claimed he hated her, but I knew different! Probably others too—Pansy was just a girl which men *don't* forget! She craved thrills and seldom missed 'em—she was the kind of a girl which would open a telephone directory at the last page simply to see how it ended!

The day before I stepped into the ring with Knockout Keeley I run into Fairfax on Broadway. I would have high-hatted him, but he stopped me.

"Well, to-morrow night's the big night, eh?" he grins.

"What d'ye want?" I asked him, frigidly.

"Er—how's Pansy?" he inquires, with a leer.

"How would you like a punch in the nose?" I shot at him.

"You better save it for Keeley!" he says. "You'll need it. They're betting three to one he knocks you kicking. I wish *I* could get some of that!"

My temper fighting for its head, I done some quick figuring. Butch Ford's cut of the twelve hundred I was to get for the bout was four hundred and twenty bucks—thirty-five per cent. That left me seven hundred and eighty, added to the eight hundred Fairfax had paid me back and a thousand I had in the bank. Twenty-five hundred to gamble—and at three to one!

"Will you lay me seventy-five to twenty-five I don't stop Keeley?" I asked Fairfax.

"What will I do with your twenty-five dollars when I win it?" he sneers.

"I'm talking about twenty-five *hundred!*" I says, quietly. "How d'ye like *those* berries?"

"Put the money on the line and I'll cover it!" he laughs—"if you really have twenty-five hundred dollars."

That last settled it! I knew I was crazy to do this, as the fellow remarked after kicking the tiger in the ribs, but I was too mad to stop and think. Our bets went in the safe of the hotel I lived at

and my head was full of the ten-thousand-dollar bank roll waiting for me when I slapped Knockout Keeley for a Japanese refuse container!

Left Hook O'Brien outpointed his man in the ten-round semi-final to the big fight and come back to my dressing-room to help handle me. It had been a furious scrap, and O'Brien's profile was plenty shopworn. A lucky knockdown in the last frame was all which give him the decision, and Butch was crabbing.

"Well, that's that!" pants O'Brien, sinking in a chair.

"What's which?" snarls Butch as he fixes some tape on a cut over O'Brien's eye. "You had that banana on the canvas—why didn't you put him away?"

"Why ain't you in Congress?" O'Brien snarls back. "If that guy's a lightweight, Dempsey's a junior bantam! Cheese, he weighed a hundred and fifty if he weighed a ounce. I was lucky to get the nod over him!"

"That's what the crowd thinks!" says Butch, grimly. "They're razzin' the referee yet, and when you go out there with Bill don't be surprised if a pop bottle crowns you!"

Further deponent sayeth not.

But beyond some mixed boos and cheers, Left Hook O'Brien was paid little attention by the noisy mob when he climbed in the ring after me, carrying the water bucket and sponge. Butch Ford and Shifty Jones made up the rest of my retinue. I got a mild hand when I come in and a big one later when the announcer introduced me as "The Fighting Taxi Driver!" A lot of the customers present had seen me trim Jim Tierney, and in spite of my inexperience and Knockout Keeley's record, they looked for *anything* to happen!

Without thinking to glance at the ticket numbers, I'd made the fearful error of giving Barbara and Pansy seats right next to each other at the ring side and when I leaned over the ropes to wave to 'em, both young women give me a cold nod in return. They probably thought I'd purposely placed 'em together to embarrass 'em!

There was a long wait before Knockout Keeley put in a appearance—a wait which didn't do my nerves a particle of good. The howling remarks of Keeley's admirers on the subject of what he would do to me when he *did* show up was no soothers either! Sitting there on my stool under the glaring lights and gazing out at the ocean of bobbing faces through the haze of tobacco smoke over the

ropes, I become very thoughtful. I begin to wish I'd paid more attention to Butch, instead of merely getting shaved and manicured as training for this fight!

Finally a roar from the back of the house signaled the arrival of Mr. Keeley and it continued, louder and louder, till he hopped lightly through the ropes and turned to clasp both hands and wave 'em to the crowd. Then he strode over in a businesslike way and shook hands with me, but he looked at my feet instead of my face, and he said nothing at all. I watched him out of the corner of my eye when he turned away to rub his shoes briskly back and forth in the rosin box. Knockout Keeley was a little taller than me, but not much huskier—the exact weights being 192 even for me and 207½ for Keeley.

Posing together for newspaper photographers, listening to the introductions of the boys which challenged the winner, ball players, actors and what not killed, by crucifixion, some more time. Then Keeley and his manager started a long wrangle about the weight and size of bandages on my hands. In the end the swearing Butch was ordered to change 'em by the referee. Just why I don't know to this day, but I *do* know that all this fussing around took

time, putting the big crowd on edge and putting *me* in a nervous frenzy. That, I learned afterward, was just what Knockout Keeley's pilot planned it would do!

However, at last the ring was cleared, we went to our corners and Butch snatched off my bathrobe, whispering a lot of advice in my ear which I didn't even hear over the din of the mob. I just had time to wish myself the best of luck, when the bell rung.

The usual deadly hush, thrilling in its suddenness, settled over the crowd like magic as we came to the middle of the ring. We'd agreed to forget about the regular handshake and come out fighting and we circled cautiously around each other, sparring lightly for an opening.

Knockout Keeley's footwork was a pleasure to watch, even though I was a bit prejudiced, being in there with him like I was. Somebody bellowed, "C'mon, *fight*—lead to him, Keeley!"

I thought I'd beat Keeley to it and I shot a stiff straight left at his scowling face. He drew his head back smartly and I missed him by a foot!

"Where *is* he, Grimm?" shouted Keeley's delighted friends.

Another well-meant left glanced off Keeley's protecting shoulder, and again the crowd give me

the bird. My timing was away off, my judgment of distance horrible and Knockout Keeley's face relaxed in a grin as he prepared to do some leading himself. I seen him feint twice with his left and heard Butch yell hoarsely, "Don't fall for that, Bill—look out for his right!"

Just a fraction of a inch was all I turned my head toward Butch to nod that I heard what he said. Then—I saw the punch coming, but I saw it too late! A dull roar and a flash of blinding light . . . I felt paralyzed from the waist down as I began a slow, soothing voyage up to the roof of the clubhouse . . . I remember wondering how it would feel when my head hit the rafters . . . also, why there was two referees and three Keeleys in the ring. . . .

I opened my eyes in my dressing-room, surrounded by Butch, Left Hook O'Brien and Shifty Jones. Shifty had the ammonia bottle under my nose, and I pushed him away, blinking uncertainly at their solemn faces. A goofy grin, which I couldn't seem to control, annoyed me greatly!

"It's about time we went in the ring, ain't it, Butch?" I asks, starting to get up.

"Lay down!" Butch grunts. "You *been* in the ring!"

“But you didn’t make no extended stay there!” adds Shifty Jones.

O’Brien starts to whistle kind of nervously.

“Yeah?” I says, a bit bewildered. “What—what round did I win in?”

“Stop it!” snarls Butch. “You wouldn’t listen to nobody—you wouldn’t train. Oh, no, you was too good! Well, Keeley knocked you deader than Adam with a punch! Get your clothes on!”

CHAPTER VI

WHERE THERE'S A BILL!

As busted as the Ten Commandments and as low as a caterpillar's tummy I went back to my taxicab, where I now figured I belonged. Left Hook O'Brien joined Butch Ford in urging me to forget the fatal past and make a fresh start in the ring. They still had faith in me, but I was fed up on boxing gloves. That unexpected setback to what I thought would be a swift march to the heavyweight crown had stunned me. I was through!

Having reached this decision after plenty of due consideration, I decided to tell Barbara Baxter. I naturally expected this panic would fall on my neck with joy the second I told her I'd gave up boxing forever and a day. But I got no service at all; in fact, gentle reader, my sensational announcement failed to click!

"Just what caused you to reach the conclusion that boxing is not your forte?" she asks me, with a odd look.

"Being kayoed by Knockout Keeley!" I answers promptly and a little bit steamed. "I thought you'd be tickled silly to hear I'd hung up my gloves, but you don't seem to get no kick out of it at all!"

"Bill," says Barbara, "what doesn't thrill me is the *reason* you give for leaving the ring! Evidently you are not retiring because you find prize fighting barbarous and sordid, as I do, but simply because you were defeated in your second bout. You have admitted a liking for boxing, you are physically fitted for it and you saw in it a quick route to fame and fortune. Before you faced Knockout Keeley you were convinced that you had at last found your talent. Isn't that right?"

"Well—yes," I says. "But—"

"But *now*, because through your own conceit you have been whipped, your confidence in yourself has vanished and you want to quit!" she interrupts, slightly scornful. "It isn't that I don't *want* you to give up boxing—if you regarded it as *I* do, I'd applaud your decision—but what I resent is your attitude in everything you attempt. In the beginning you are all enthusiasm, but if you are not immediately successful you lose interest. I can tolerate and sympathize with losers, but not with *quitters!*"

Well, that was putting it to me cold turkey for

your life, and I was just a human battlefield where amazement, pain and rage struggled for victory! But before I could rush to my own defense Barbara went on to coolly take me apart before my angry eyes.

"Bill, you are without balance!" she says, paying exactly no attention to my burning face. "You are irresponsible—a child of the wind! Instead of determinedly attacking each problem that confronts you, you turn from it at the first reverse. At an age when you should be planting the seeds of your future, what are you doing? Driving a taxicab and taking occasional futile pot shots at life!"

"I haven't found out yet what my particular gift is!" I growled, uncomfortably.

"Well, for heaven's sake *find* it and regardless of *what* it is stick to it through calm and cyclone until you have won the heights!" she busts out.

For the life of me, my countrymen, I could see no good reason why I should clutter up her home following that, so I copped a sneak a few minutes later to think matters over.

Feeling in the mood to devour a panther, I went to Pansy Pilkington for comfort. I was worried about that appetizing, wise-cracking kid alone in Manhattan, where she knew a single bat of her thrill-

ing eye at one of them big poultry and produce men would solve a lot of her troubles.

However, when I wheeled my taxi around to Pansy's I got quite a shock to find no less than Jack Fairfax leaving. I was certainly surprised to find him on friendly terms with her again. On the other hand, Fairfax seemed nastily delighted to run into me visiting this pulse-quickenning damsel.

"You just can't keep away, eh, Grimm?" he leers.

"Well, well, well—Egbert Stacomb himself!" I says, snubbing his insinuation. "How's the bootlegging racket?"

"Oh, I guess I'm doing as well in my game as you are in yours!" he returns coolly. "Knockout Keeley slapped you right back to your taxicab again, didn't he?"

"That ain't half the trip *you'll* make should I slap *you!*" I growled, in no mood for trifling.

Fairfax twirls his cane and glances to my taxi at the curb.

"Well, if you want to pick up a few pennies you can drive me to my hotel," he says, and then adds with a wicked grin, "or is your business with our charming Pansy too urgent?"

"I wouldn't haul you across the street if you cried your eyes out, you big boloney!" I snarled.

"Me and you will even up yet on that dough you won from me and if you don't think so you're crazy!"

"When you find out what I'm going to do with your money you'll take arsenic, Grimm!" says Fairfax. "My regards to the fair Barbara—if you are still *persona grata* with her!"

Honest to Baltimore, it was all I could do to keep from choosing him, but instead I shoved past him and run up the steps. I was still wondering what he meant by that remark about my money when Pansy greeted me.

"Yes—I just run into Fairfax," I says, reading her expression with no trouble, "and I can't understand why you don't give that cake eater the air and be done with it! You know he's always looking for the best of it and——"

Something in her eyes cut me off short and reminded me I was still holding her hand. So I dropped it.

"Is it possible you're jealous, Bill?" she laughs, but the giggle was faked.

"Speaking of mushrooms, do you know any reason why *I* should be jealous?" I grinned back, at my ease again.

"No—I don't," she says slowly, still standing close

to me. "You don't like me *that* way, Bill, do you?"

"What way?" I asks her, sitting down on the couch to put some space between us and wishing she'd lay off this kindergarten stuff.

"The way you like Barbara Baxter!" she shoots at me.

"So it's come to this, has it?" I says, trying to sound light and airy. "Of course I like you, Pansy, or I wouldn't be here. Now——"

"Bill—be yourself!" she interrupts and sits down beside me. "You can't like *two* women the way you like her! It's not being done. Sooner or later you'll have to make a choice—you can't keep on playing around with us both!"

"Look here, Pansy," I says peevishly. "A fellow don't have to be trying to promote a girl simply because he calls on her. You should try drawing something else besides conclusions! Just because you don't scream for police protection when I come around, I haven't figured you in love with *me*, have I? I like Barbara and I like you for the reason that you both been darn nice to me and give me a great deal more of your time and attention than I rate. But if either one of you think I'm obstructing traffic, I'm willing to check out right now and I don't mean perhaps!"

With that I reached for my hat.

"Don't go, Bill—I want to talk to you about something," smiles Pansy, laying her hand on my arm. "I was only kidding. You always get so serious, I like to tease you now and then."

"I'm the one which spoke out of turn," I grin, kind of sorry and shamefaced. "Excuse me, Pansy, but I'm pretty low to-day. You know how the breaks has been going against me, and that Knock-out Keeley thing's been preying on my mind. I guess Barbara was right when she called me a failure. That's what I am—just a flop!"

"Barbara called you a *failure*?" fumes Pansy, jumping up. "Well, I love that! The idea of her riding you *now*, when you should be bucked up and sent forth with fresh confidence in yourself. She ought to be ashamed of herself. Your poor boy—what you need is cheering up, not the razzberry!"

Well, it wasn't very long before Pansy's bright chatter and soothing sympathy chased the blues away from me—this kid was too full of life and laughs for a grouch to last long in her company. All went well till she hauled off and told me what had brought Jack Fairfax to see her that day, and then the fun begin. My personal villain had engaged Pansy for the chorus of a musical comedy to be produced by

himself and some confederates. In a flash I seen what he meant by saying I'd take poison when I heard what he was doing with that sugar he won from me. Fairfax had the crazy idea that I was partial to Pansy and that by doing this he was beating my time with her. The big clown—I looked on the girl as a kid sister!

Satisfied that Fairfax was trying to build up Pansy, I tried to get her to turn the job down. I might as well have tried to stop the flow of Niagara Falls by standing on the banks and yelling "Halt!" Pansy seen Fairfax's frolic as a stepping-stone to the Follies, and I was up against a stone wall. There was plenty steel under Pansy's silk—her "No!" with a sweet smile was harder to change than if she'd cracked her lungs screaming the word. There was a huff standing near, and I left in it, sore at Pansy, Barbara, Fairfax, myself and the world at large!

I went right to my room in the hotel, locked the door and spent the night there alone. Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien, incurable movie fiends, tried to get me to observe the galloping snapshots with 'em, but my own problems was far more interesting to me than the applesauce adventures of any movie hero! Hour after hour I paced the floor in conference with myself, bitterly bemoaning the fact that up

to date my efforts to put myself over had amounted to absolutely nothing!

I wished to Heaven I had pennies enough to wed Barbara so's she wouldn't have to be a detective and to stake Pansy so's she wouldn't have to be fair game for Jack Fairfax and birds of his type. It was no secret to me that I'd get no place driving a taxi, but without education, influence or capital, what else, in the name of Indianapolis, *could* I do?

However, I knew I had to make *some* kind of a move and at the witching hour of midnight, my head whirling from wrestling with matters, I decided to take one more shot at the ring! I craved another piece of Knockout Keeley, the killer which had knocked me for a loop with a punch. Deep down in my soul I felt that if I could stop Keeley, the first person or thing on earth to shake my confidence in myself, the world was mine for the taking!

Having made my decision I hopped gayly in bed and slept like Rip Van Winkle till the phone woke me up at eight the next morning. The voice which acts on me like catnip on tabby inquires sweetly:

"I hope I haven't disturbed your slumbers?"

"Your call fits in perfect, Barbara!" I says. "I was dreaming about you as usual, so why should I wake up?"

"Not bad at all," she laughs. "Bill, you're improving—I must find out what you do with your evenings. How would you like to have lunch with me to-day?"

"How would I like to be Henry Ford's weakness?" I says. "Where will I meet you?"

"You're going to be *my* guest to-day—be at my apartment promptly at twelve," she tells me.

I was at her apartment promptly at eleven!

Well, boys and girls, Barbara's aunt which shared the flat with her was elsewhere, and I'll state Barbara threw one grand party. This opium fiend's dream went out of her way to be nice to me, and with the aid of a chafing dish she tossed up some cruel chicken à la king. After we'd ruined a keen repast I stepped out of character and climbed into one of her cute little aprons to help her do kitchen police. In the midst of my hired girl's duties I suddenly bust out laughing.

"What's the joke?" asks Barbara, handing me a platter to massage.

"I was just thinking what Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien would say if they seen me bathing this crockery!" I grins.

"You could be doing worse things than this," remarks Barbara.

"Listen, Barbara," I whispers, standing close to her, "I'd part with my right eye if this trap was ours and——"

I was interrupted by a glass falling out of her hand and splintering in the sink, darn it—just when I might have got somewhere! I picked out the pieces so's Barbara wouldn't cut her little fingers, and I proceeded to cut one of my own. It was only a scratch, but she made a big to-do over it, peroxide and iodine flowing like water.

"Were you very angry with me yesterday for scolding you, Bill?" she asks me.

"I wasn't particularly mad, Barbara; I was kind of hurt," I answers. "I thought you were off me!"

"Well, I'm sorry I was so—so brutally frank," she says. "I thought a lot about it after you left. But I *did* want to shake you up—to open your eyes to your opportunities, for you have *great* opportunities, Bill. You're so young and clean, and you can be so earnest when you want to be—why, there's nothing you couldn't do—*nothing!*"

"Go on, Barbara," I grins. "You're selling me to myself!"

"That's it, Bill!" she cries, dropping the dish towel and facing me with shining eyes. "That's it.

That's just what I want to do—sell you your own possibilities!"

"Have you ever thought of getting married, Barbara?" I says, in a offhand way.

"Er—how is Pansy? Have you seen her lately?" she asks me quickly, crimson from neck to forehead.

I didn't want to talk about Pansy Pilkington; I wanted to talk about William Reginald Grimm; but, as the French says, what would you? We discussed her and Jack Fairfax too, Barbara being interested and sympathetic with regards to Pansy, but bitter against my lifelong enemy. However, she didn't see anything wrong in Pansy working for Fairfax, and her advice to me was not to interfere—unless my interest in that young lady was somewhat deeper than I claimed. I was glad at that point to hurriedly change the subject by telling Barbara I'd made up my mind to return to the ring.

Once I'd let the feline out of the sack, I plunged ahead and explained how and why I'd reached that decision after my battle with myself the night before. She listened in bright-eyed silence, and when I wound up by saying I'd selected Kayo Keeley as my first victim because he'd knocked me cold she gripped both my hands in her soft little white ones and I read my applause in her smiling face.

"Bill, if you fight Keeley the way you've just talked to me you cannot lose!" she cries.

And my spirits, easily raised or lowered, instantly topped all altitude records. Barbara was for me, and I was positive I'd lay Knockout Keeley like a carpet!

Well, Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien was overjoyed at my return to the gentle art of punching heads, but my ambitious plans to begin with Monsieur Keeley was a pony from another race track!

"You got to figure, Bill, that bein' bounced by Keeley has set you back about a year, both as a drawin' card and with regards to what is called your more—ally!" declares Butch. "It takes a long time to get the memory of bein' knocked kickin' out of your mind. You've forgot it right now, but once you get in there with Keeley again you're liable to get thinkin' about what he done to you before and—blooey! Plenty grief! I'll take you around the hick slabs and we'll work up to a fight with Keeley by pushin' over some hand-picked palookas. That'll give you a flock of experience and build up your confidence, get me?"

"You're all damp, Butch!" I says unsmilingly. "My confidence has already been built up, and I'll take no tour of the sticks smacking down dry-tank drivers. Till I wipe Keeley off my slate I'll

never be a success in this or any other game! I tell you I can't advance a inch with that defeat gnawing at my brain day and night, and that's what it'll do till a referee holds up my glove over him! I never got started in that other bout—you know it. Get him for me, and I'll knock him dead!"

"D'ye know what Keeley's been doin' since you fought him?" asks Butch. "Three knockouts in four starts and he copped the decision in the other one, which was one of them things. I saw it, and he held his man up so's the sure-thing gamblers could cash. The champ won't enter the same state with Keeley, let alone hop in a ring with him, since Keeley croaked Young Thomas in Pittsburg!"

"The papers says Young Thomas broke his neck when his head hit a ring post," I reminded him.

"What drove his bean against that post with force enough to crack his spine—Kayo Keeley's *fist*, wasn't it?" snarls Butch.

But all this rolled off me like water off a mallard's back! I wanted Keeley like a bank clerk wants a raise and within a week's time Butch give in and signed me to fight Knockout Keeley in Brooklyn, fifteen rounds to a decision. I had to take eight hundred bucks for my end, of which Butch's cut was two hundred and eighty. But I was glad to get it,

though it was four yards less than I got for meeting Keeley before. I wouldn't fool you, I'd have fought him this time for nothing—the jack meant little to me right then. I had a far bigger thing to fight for—my future!

This time I cut out the nonsense, training hard and faithfully. I even won the rare praise of Butch, Left Hook O'Brien and Shifty Jones by my strict obedience to the gruelling conditioning schedule. I wanted no excuse—I wanted to be *right* when I climbed through the ropes to again face the first and only boy which had ever made me take the count!

My training camp was open to the public at fifteen cents a head, but we didn't have to build no annex to handle the crowds. One afternoon Pansy sprung a little surprise on me by showing up dressed to thrill with no less than Jack Fairfax as a escort. Pansy made quite a fuss over me, wishing me luck and telling me I looked like a million, but Fairfax just stood there and sneered sarcastical cracks about what Knockout Keeley would do to me. Pretty soon this first-class tomato had me unfit to be at large, and I lost my head—the league leader of my thousand and one faults!

I was sparring with Shifty Jones, a master boxer, and my eagerness to show Pansy and Fairfax that I

was nobody's fool caused me to miss leads repeatedly. Fairfax suddenly laughed loudly and remarked that he didn't think I could punch my way out of a paper bag. At that minute Shifty stung me with a straight left, and before I thought I lashed out wickedly with my right and caught Shifty square on the button. He went down like a victim of heart disease and was out for five minutes. I was never much sorrier for anything in my life, but the giant Shifty cut off my apologies with a wide grin.

"Creepin' mackerel, Big Boy, 'at right of yores is what Ah calls plain ether!" he hollers. "Hot dam, does Misto Keeley git you mad they gwine dig 'at boy outa the clubhouse cellar!"

Seemingly bankrupt of witty remarks, Fairfax walked away with Pansy, looking very thoughtful.

Yet he paid me one more visit before the fight to offer me a chance to win back the money I lost to him on my first fracas with Keeley. I put the wasp on Left Hook O'Brien for twenty-five hundred and bet Fairfax even money I'd get the nod from the referee. Later I found out he should of laid me four to one, as that was the odds I was held at in the books. At that tasty price, my entire camp went down on me, hook, line and sinker!

Well, I entered the ring trained to the minute, and

I never felt better in my life. I hadn't the slightest doubt that I'd take Knockout Keeley in jig time! My first thrill come when I gazed out at the noisy crowd, which, drawn by the magnet of seeing the sensational Keeley perform, was hanging to the rafters. Barbara, Pansy and Fairfax was close to the ringside, Barbara sitting with a newspaper woman friend of hers. I waved my bandaged hands in a cheery greeting to my girl friends and grinned at Jack Fairfax, which scowled up at me. I was simply confidence itself!

To that blood-hungry mob, tightly packed around the ring, I was just another chunk of raw meat flung to the killer Keeley. But to *me*, this was my big test—the result of which would send me back to my taxi or up many steps to the heavyweight throne. It was likewise my chance to show Barbara Baxter for all time that I was no quitter, to be beaten by bullying Fate!

A half hour passed and no sign of Knockout Keeley. Twenty minutes more and still he hadn't entered the ring. The impatient, excited crowd yelled, whistled and stamped their feet and Butch swore fearful oaths at the delay, watching me anxiously. I began to get impatient and nervous myself and drummed a slow tattoo on the canvas with

my shoes, keeping time with the ticking telegraph instruments at the ringside. What the devil was keeping Keeley? I'd been all charged up, rarin' to go when I stepped through the ropes, but now the shrieking, sarcastical comments of the gallery and this unexpected wait begin to seep slowly through my confidence. The wild enthusiasm which carried me through the long training grind was swiftly growing cold—the frenzy which had drove me to try my luck with Knockout Keeley again was dying out. Serious doubts, questions from nowheres, begin to attack me!

Here I was back in the same ring where not so long ago the fighter I was soon to face had crashed me to the canvas unconscious. With stunning suddenness the memory of that terrible punch came back to me, just like Butch had warned me it would! I rubbed my chin thoughtfully, without hardly being aware of what I was doing. That immediately brought harsh laughter from the ringsiders, watching my every move and seeming to read my thoughts. I recognized Fairfax's scornful voice above the others, howling something I didn't catch, as Shifty Jones and Left Hook O'Brien stood in front of me to shield me from sight. With every dragging second I was getting more panicky—finding it harder

to sit there on that stool and wait! I cast my eyes to the floor of the ring and turned 'em away quickly from a splatter of gore, a grim reminder of the semi-final bout, stopped in the second round to save Left Hook O'Brien's helpless victim from being beaten to death.

But Ford sensed my fleeing nerve and tried desperately to kid me back to the cool-headed control I'd had when I climbed through the ropes—years and years ago, it now seemed to me! His well-meant efforts was wasted. I didn't hear a word Butch was saying. All I could hear was the dull drumming in my brain. . . . “And Keeley *killed* his last opponent—*killed* him!”

While the big crowd rocked the house with cheers, Knockout Keeley finally stalked down the aisle with his handlers and entered the ring, cruelly calm and collected. He was all business—a butcher reporting for work at the abattoir! Unsmilingly he bobbed his head to the applause which greeted him, sized me up with one short, sneering glance and turned his back on me. I bet I felt then like Abel did as he sat in his corner and gloomily watched Cain hop through the ropes! Drenched with a cold sweat and painfully afraid my knees was shaking, I hugged my faded bathrobe closer around me and prayed for the

bell to start the assassination and get it over with.

We stepped to the middle of the ring for the referee's instructions and I nearly slugged a newspaper photographer for exploding a flashlight right in my face. Keeley grinned at my nervousness, and, schooled in every trick of the ring, he cut in on the referee with a cool, "Do I walk to the ropes each time I knock this fellow down?"

I winced, and, a minute later, Keeley calmly put his left glove under my chin and shoved my head back viciously. "Is *that* punch allowed?" he asks the frowning referee, with pretended seriousness. These raw plays on my quivering nerves got Butch red-headed and he missed a wild swing at Keeley to the roaring glee of the crowd. Don't ask *me* what the referee instructed us—I heard nothing but the buzzing in my head, and, at length, the bell!

With the dousing of all lights but the blinding battery above the ring and the sudden, deathly silence of the mob, my confidence had completely deserted me. Butch's orders to me was forgotten—I could only remember that in the other fight Keeley had knocked me cold! Hypnotized, I walked to meet him in mid-ring and the next thing I knew I was dumbly listening to the referee counting over me, "—six—seven—eight—"

I was up at nine. Down again! Up again. Down again! You'll have to excavate the old files if you wish a punch by punch account of that fearful first round. I'm a bit clouded on it, myself. All I remember is that the thing was as one-sided as a painting! I was sprawled on the boards either five or twenty-eight times, without the slightest idea of how I got there. I do recall the customers razzing me unmercifully as I fell on my stool at the gong, half conscious, and that I could only see out of one eye!

Butch, O'Brien and Shifty Jones worked frantically over me during the minute's rest and I managed somehow to stagger out for the second frame of this massacre. The coldly smiling Keeley began where he left off in the first round and pounded me from pillar to post. I didn't have brains enough to dive into a clinch and hang on, though Butch howled himself hoarse begging me to do so. I was taking cruel and unusual punishment and I don't mean maybe! Only my youth and the wonderful condition I was in saved me from going out—maybe for keeps!

Already there was yells of "stop it!" and many was milling towards the exits, convinced I was through. The referee kept looking to my corner for the sponge to come splashing into the ring, but had

Butch Ford ever tossed it in I'd have murdered him. I didn't want to lose standing up—Knockout Keeley might kill me like he did poor Young Thomas, but he wasn't going to make me quit!

And now a funny thing begin to happen to me. Keeley was tiring and panting from his own efforts to put me away. His blows was less accurate and less crushing, too. The punishment I'd taken seemed to have the amazing effect of steadying my nerves and my head was clearing. Slowly it begin to dawn on me that I was winning a much more important fight—my battle with the memory of that knockout at Keeley's hands! Like a flash, on top of *that* thought came a realization which braced me like a electric shock. . . . *I'd taken everything Knockout Keeley had and I was still on my feet!* Something kept shrieking in my ears, "He's shot his bolt—go after him *now*—beat him down—he's all yours!"

A cold, deadly rage took the place of my nervousness and I glared at the still smiling Keeley out of my good eye. If this was the sport of beasts, like Barbara said, I might as well go the whole hog! For the first time in the fight I took the offensive, wowing the crowd and stopping the parade to the exits by sending Keeley back on his heels with a

stiff right to the head. I followed that up by whipping a left and right to the body and Keeley danced around, changing feet and looking serious. "Where's 'at smile *now*, Keeley, you big bum?" screamed Left Hook O'Brien and the crowd joined in the jeers, quick to switch to the man in front. Keeley feinted with his left to make a opening for his deadly right, but I just grinned a bloody grin at him and hooked another one-two to the body. He clinched and looked wildly to his corner for advice, but I shook him off and drove him around the ring with a storm of punches that had him hanging on for his life at the bell. The crowd was just ten thousand raving lunatics!

There seemed to be a private panic in Keeley's corner and nobody in the house was sitting down. The bedlam was terrible . . . deafening! "Keep on top of him—don't give him no rest!" Butch roared in my ear and Left Hook O'Brien, shoving a half orange between my battered lips, grunted, "You'll knock him dead in the fourth round, sure!" I stared at him dazedly. The fourth *round*? I thought we'd already gone ten!

Hurt, weary and apparently dumfounded at my ability to take it, Keeley tried desperately to end the mill in the third, but, throwing caution to the winds

and science with it, I traded punch for punch with him, and it was Keeley which first dived into a clinch for protection. We battled along the ropes at close quarters, and Keeley looked worried when I took two hard rights to the jaw without batting a eyelash, putting both gloves to his head in return.

The crowd was now begging me to knock him out, and I was certainly trying to oblige! Keeley went into a clinch, holding my arms pinned at my sides and trying to bring his head up under my chin. These unfair tactics soon got me boiling, and I sent the neighbors' children into a fresh uproar by dropping my hands and walking to the center of the ring.

"Quit wrestling and *fight*, you big false alarm!" I half sobbed at Keeley and turned him completely around with a sizzling right to the face when he charged in. He was on the ropes at the gong, trying to lose on a foul. Twice he threw stiff rights inches below the top of my trunks and the referee obeyed the angry crowd and warned him.

Wild with joy, Left Hook O'Brien and Shifty Jones pointed to Keeley's seconds laboring over him with ammonia bottle and caustic. The whispering Butch, his voice gone, was sending me out to wind the thing up in this round. To me it wasn't the

result of a single bout which was at stake—my whole future career depended on my efforts right then! I just *had* to win quickly, for I was as tired and winded as Keeley. The pace of those first three frames had been simply terrific, and it was now only a question of which of us would land the first clean punch. As Shifty Jones skillfully massaged my midsection and whispered encouragement in my ear, I had the positive hunch that I was going to win in the coming round. I just *knew* it, and I begin to feel sorry for Knockout Keeley, picked by Chance to be the emblem of my victory over my jinx!

The bell found Keeley slow to get to mid-ring. We both led lefts, and Keeley immediately tried to clinch, as ordered from his corner, but I beat him off with a suddenly discovered straight left. Keeley missed with a torrid uppercut and then staggered me with one that connected.

Victory in his eyes, he rushed eagerly to follow up his advantage, and I slipped to my knees in trying to duck his swinging gloves. Hopping quickly up, I ran into a wild right which put me on Queer Street. My knees sagged. I was badly shaken up and I heard yells of "Go on, Keeley, he's out on his feet! Do like you done to him before!"

That yell rallied me. Keeley was *not* going to do

to me like he done to me before. *No*, by Heaven! Butch told me afterward I charged Keeley like a maniac, howling, "*No—no—no!*" Keeley stopped my rush with two wicked lefts to the mouth which brought blood, but he was short with another jab, and, steadying myself, I crashed a right to his jaw, toppling him to the floor. He wouldn't take a count, but sprang up full of fight, and, both punch-drunk, we stood toe to toe tossing 'em in till it sounded like a race riot outside the ropes. Hats, canes, programs and what not were being thrown into the air by the fight-mad mob, which kept up a continual din.

Unmindful of Keeley's desperate blows, I finally backed him into a neutral corner. Groggy myself, I feinted for his wind with my left and he fell for it, dropping his guard for a half second. A half second was enough, for in a flash I whipped over my right to his jaw with every quivering ounce of my hundred and ninety pounds behind it. It wasn't a punch from my battered body; that blow come from my soul—a protest against Fate delivered with a five-ounce glove, the last punch I had left in me, and I let Keeley have it! I wasn't going to be a loser *again!*

Keeley tottered for a instant, then crashed face down to the canvas as stiff as a board, and if they

hadn't swept him up he'd be there yet. But what *I* saw stretched there motionless at my feet was my own weaknesses, fears and former lack of the courage to stick to my job to the end!

I had to be carried to my corner by the joy-crazy Butch and Shifty, and I wasn't sure I'd really won till Pansy Pilkington hysterically climbed over the reporters to throw her arms around my neck.

CHAPTER VII

GYPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT

New York, N. Y.—“Bust-’Em-Bill” Grimm scored his eighth consecutive victory by stopping Rough House Gallagher in the first round of a scheduled fifteen-round bout here last night. After Gallagher had hit the canvas four times in two minutes, the referee stepped in and ended the slaughter. Grimm, the leading heavyweight contender, ran from his corner at the bell and tore into Gallagher with maniacal fury. The fight was said to be the settlement of an old grudge.

APPLESAUCE! I’d no more grudge against Rough House Gallagher than I got against you. I wouldn’t fool you; I never saw this lad before in my life till I touched gloves with him that night, and I never seen him since. You can’t believe all you read in the papers, as Nero coldly remarked when charged with setting fire to Rome. I’ll tell you what made me tear into Mr. Rough House Gallagher with “maniacal fury” and ruin him in less than a round.

Speaking of terrapin, my sensational comeback in that gory win over Knockout Keeley, the boy which had rocked me to sleep before, saturated me with new determination and ambition. I'd proved that first upset at Keeley's hands hadn't made me punch-shy and that I'd gotten over the toughest obstacle a boxer has to get over; viz., the chilling memory of a previous knockout slipped him by the scrapper he's again facing in a ring. So having marked Keeley "Paid!" I begin broadcasting challenges at the heavyweight champ, satisfied that a battle with him would bring me the title, a chance at a million bucks and fame. I figured eventually why not now?

But the heavyweight rajah was strutting his stuff in the movies and, his fighting spirit being on location, he turned two deaf ears to my pleadings. He didn't wish no part of me, even though in desperation I hauled off and offered to fight him for nothing—just the chance at his crown. This caused Butch Ford to think I'd gone out of my mind by a large majority. Butch claims anybody which indulges in fisteycuffs for anything but money is somewhat silly.

"Besides that," this master mind reproves me, "you're gettin' fearful selfish, Big Boy. You ain't showin' *me* no consideration what the so ever with that idiotical yen to box the champ for nothin'. I

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got to scheme and worry gettin' you work and hand-pickin' you palookas to tip over, whilst all *you* got to do is put on a nice clean pair of trunks and go in there and take your cuffin'. Pretty soft for you!"

Don't you worship that?

While raving in helpless fury at the heavyweight champ's refusal to trade smacks with me, I agreed with Butch and Barbara Baxter that this should be no bar to me piling up a flock of dimes. Though this pretty lady liked pugilism and pneumonia with equal infatuation, she pointed out that if I kept on for a time boxing—the gag I seemed most fluent at—I'd soon click off enough sugar to leave the ring flat on its spine and get into something "more respectable," as she put it.

Well, gentle reader, love is another thing like pyorrhea which attacks four out of five. I wanted to make good with Barbara and I thought her advice first class, so I took on all and sundry which would climb through the ropes with me, barring no color, weight or distance. Likewise I begin to see quite a little of the Land of the Spree. In boisterous mêlés at New Orleans, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Buffalo and Jersey City I kayoed Tommy Kane in two rounds, Young Rogers in one, Kid Mears in ten, Battling Price—a colored socker—in six, out-

pointed Speedy Burns in fifteen and won a foul from Frankie Young in five rounds. I'll state that none of these babies was cake eaters either!

The net results of this highly successful campaign as a leather pusher was the nickname "Bust-'Em-Bill," a bankroll of around twenty thousand florins and a broken nose. I took my unfortunate smeller to a costly beauty doctor and had it trued up, against the advice of Butch Ford. Butch sourly reminded me that I was a box fighter and not no show girl and it made no difference how I looked. My charming manager added that the new beak would tend to make me overcareful in the ring, which would cause the fans to give me the razzberry, or else some smart egg would make my nose a target and bust it again for me. I wowed the gang when I showed up at my training quarters after that with a old-fashioned football noseguard on.

Feeling that I was commencing to get somewheres in the world, I begin stepping high, wide and handsome. I bought a nifty auto, made a part payment on a speedy motor boat and a four-carat diamond ring and parked myself in the swellest drum on Park Avenue.

Honest to Boston, the only thing I bought ready-made was postage stamps! I was putting on dog

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heavy, living on the fat of a very corpulent land and spending serious money like a Big Mutton Chop Man from England. A few months before that, where I'd get my coffee and cakes was a daily mystery. As the French cleverly puts it, oo-la-la!

Left Hook O'Brien, which owned four apartment houses, beseeched me to save my nickels while it was rolling in. Butch Ford wanted to put me on a allowance and bank the rest for me. I told 'em both to tend their own fruit stands and I begin to mull over the idea of hiring a secretary to answer any mail I got or write me some if I didn't get any. The money had simply went to my head, where, of course, there was the most room.

At first Barbara laughed and then she begin to frown. She didn't see no percentage in me buying a motor boat when it would soon be winter and I'd have to lay it up. She thought my four-carat diamond ring was too big by three carats and smacked of yokelry. My twelve suits of Fifth Avenue clothes, eight pairs of shoes and seven hats was something else which didn't thrill her, and one day when we were rolling along Riverside Drive in my sport model Elegant Eight, which set me back seven grand, we had matters out.

"Bill," says Barbara, toying with the cigar lighter

in the dash, "was it necessary to hire such an expensive car?"

"What do you mean *hire?*" I exclaims, a trifle indignant, "I *own* this boiler, body and soul!"

I called her attention to the outside of the door, where a boxing glove and "Bust-'Em-Bill Grimm" was engraved in silver letters.

"Oh, I see!" she murmurs, with a odd smile.

"Four-wheel brakes, balloon tires, every gadget in the accessory line known to man or beast!" I says. "Why, it was a *steal* for seven thousand bucks! It's a mean job—hey, Barbara?"

"It *is* a darling, Bill," she admits, patting the genuine leather trimmings beside her, "but—do you really think it was sensible to spend seven thousand dollars for a car? Or to buy such a *big* diamond and that boat—now, honestly?"

"Barbara, I *got* to put on a swell front!" I says. "I *mean* something in New York now, and the more I look like ready money the more I can jimmy out of the fight promoters. That's why I checked into the Fitz-Charlton and——"

"You have moved to the *Fitz-Charlton?*" she gasps, turning around to fully appreciate the beauties of my manly countenance. "Why, Bill, it must cost you a fortune to live there!"

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How did *I* know her expression was irritation and not admiration? I can't read women's faces no more than I can read Siamese!

"Fifty berries a day, not counting tips!" I grin proudly. "And what a pasting that trap is giving my bank roll! I only got six hundred left out of that twenty grand I saved. Well—easy come, easy go, as the field hand cracked when he blew three years' wages in one night!"

"Well, I suppose it is none of my business, but I think your spending money like that is positively criminal!" exclaims Barbara with no little spirit. "Success has ruined your sense of proportion, Bill, and, I warn you, you are riding to a fall!"

"You're sore at me?" I inquired, frowning.

"I'm not particularly pleased with you, to be frank!" she says, looking away. "You are doing nothing whatever to better your position in life, just drifting along aimlessly with no thought of the future. If——"

"And the only reason I took you on this ride was to ask you to marry me!" I butted in, a bit peeved myself, and, stepping on the gas, I made promising broad jumpers out of a couple of wildly cursing pedestrians. Barbara blushed—but not at the oaths.

"The girl who married you *now*, Bill, would be a reckless gambler indeed!" she says, like *she* didn't figure in the thing at all.

"And *you* object to gambling—that it?" I growled.

She answers sharply: "I object to being pointed out as the companion of 'Bust-'Em-Bill!' And I would not be your friend if I did not voice my unqualified disapproval of the way you are wasting your young life and throwing away your money, instead of settling down to serious endeavors. What most upsets me is your failure to get out of the sordid, beastly prize-fight atmosphere, when you had saved enough to escape it!"

"Escape into *what?*" I snapped, bumping over a traffic button. "Where do *I* fit in with the schooling *I've* had?"

"Oh, there must be *many* things you can do, Bill, besides fighting!" she busts out. "Just what your forte is, I don't know. That is your own problem that you must solve yourself, as I'm sure you will—and quickly—if you simply set your mind to it! You attach far too much importance to your lack of—of a college education. You have other qualifications that should take you far in a score of careers. At the same time, you can enroll at some night school, and there are always interesting and helpful

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lectures at Columbia, for instance. Bill—what do you read?”

“The Evening Planet, the Police Gazette and the Crazy Confession Monthly,” I says. “What’s that got to do with it?”

“The books you read have everything to do with your mental equipment!” declares Barbara. “Haven’t you ever read Shakespeare, Dickens, Kipling, Balzac or—or *any* of the classics?”

“Don’t be silly!” I says. “I been scrambling for the old calories and proteins since I threw away my rattle! Where would *I* get time to be a bookworm?”

“Well, you have time *now!*” she returns. “If I give you a list of books to get, will you read them?”

“I’ll take the matter up with the Des Moines office,” I grins, trying to laugh the thing off. “Are you trying to slip me this ‘Culture-in-Ten-Minutes-a-Day’ gag?”

“Don’t you *want* it?” she angrily demands.

“I don’t box with adverbs and prepositions,” I says calmly. “I know my groceries, Barbara, and I’m getting past nicely the way I am!”

“Bill, drive me home!” is her immediate comment on that. And the only witty retort I could think of was, “You’re the doctor!”

Creeping swordfish! Another swell day shot to pieces!

After I dropped Barbara outside her apartment, with a cold silence the answer to my pleasant "Good-by!" I went for a spin on the Hudson in my motor boat to mull things over. I'd left Barbara fit to be tied, and I was a four-alarm fire myself! Not only had my suggestion of honest wedlock been made the mock of, but on top of that she'd hinted I was a sap for the ages. A pretty kettle of fish, my masters, as they say in the novels of gay cavaliers which I finally *did* read!

Well, lads and lassies, I was so burnt up at Barbara Baxter that day as I shot up the river in my nobby speed boat that I give a thought to the matter of propositioning Pansy Pilkington on the subject of matrimony. I'd every reason to believe this tasty maiden would fall right on my neck and awake sleepers in far-off Shanghai with her "Yes!" I'm not conceited—just truthful. But as quick as I memorized Pansy, I knew I didn't love her and that I *did* love Barbara in spite of her hobby of bawling me out!

About a hour's swift run up the Hudson I shut off the motor, finding the towering Palisades above me and the soft lapping of the water against my boat in

the silence great aids to important pondering. I did quite a piece of thinking, drifting along with the tide—my favorite habit. Looking back over what Barbara'd said that day and at other times, I was satisfied her panning of me was justified but how to correct my lavish faults was a soda of a different flavor! For the life of me, I couldn't see then where Jack was of any use except for spending on the harmless tomfoolery which makes existence easier to withstand. Why should I be annoyed scrimping and saving when I could now drag down five thousand milreis and up for a single fight?

In consultation with myself along these lines, I realized I was a professional scrapper simply because I was built for the racket and the pickings was huge and more or less easy. I felt absolutely no other call to the ring! As I trailed my fingers in the water overside, I tried to console myself with the thoughts that I always tried to win every bout with the first punch, never deliberately cutting a man up to please the customers, like a lot of 'em do. That failed to stop the inside whisperings which said, "Quit kidding yourself, Bill! You don't belong in the prizefight game—get out of it before it's too late!"

Well, I was still young enough to dream at other

times besides when I was asleep, and Barbara's talks with me was steadily adding to the craving to turn in my gloves and take a stab at some other business. But my scanty education, it seemed to me, narrowed the field brutally! I spoke English like I picked up the language in Turkey, and I thought geometry was another new dance. The chance that the heavy-weight champ would forget about the movies and give me a shot at his title was too tempting to toss away yet, but why should I go on smacking down these catchers in the meanwhile? That last question was answered by my ruined bank roll. I knew I had to hop in a ring again and hop quick, because a couple or three payments on my jewelry and motor boat was due!

When I got back to the Fitz-Charlton that afternoon I took my pen in hand and dashed off a note to Miss Barbara Baxter. No matter what faults that exorbitant inn had, their writing paper wasn't one of them. That grand stationery, with a engraved coat of arms at the top, was much too elegant to ruin with ink, no fooling! This is what I wrote, with the kind assistance of "The Ready Letter Writer," which I bought for two bits in the lobby. Where I didn't like the samples in the book, I used my own words:

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My Dear Miss Baxter:

Barbara, I am taking the liberty of writing to you to tell you I have thought over your proposition of recent date regarding the undersigned's reading. Give me that list of bed-time stories by Frank Shakespeare and the etc. and will be pleased to read same; object, education. Meanwhile, how about going to a show with your humble servant?

Respectfully and with every felicitation for yourself and associates, yours truly,

BILL GRIMM, ESQ.

P. S.—Please answer, as I love to get mail.

I sent that registered and special delivery, and it done the work! Two days later I was getting a load of Plutarch's Lives in Barbara's apartment, while she dolled up for the theatre. I was imbibing the low-down on a gil named Cleomenes, whose motto was "Kiss 'em and check out," when Barbara appeared in the doorway looking like she just stepped from a magazine cover. What a disturbance she was!

"How about seeing 'Yes, Yes, Yvette'?" she says.

That was Jack Fairfax's frolic which Pansy Pilkington was trouping in! I was something more than surprised at Barbara wanting to view *this*

one, when she hated Fairfax like arsenic and we'd had so many arguments over my friendship for Pansy.

We had seats in the third row orchestra, and it looked like Fairfax had a winner in the show. The music was a set-up for the radio, the ungarbed chorus was as soothing to the eye as smoked glasses and the mock plot was a longer stag-party joke than most of 'em. It was well toward the end of the first act before pretty Pansy appeared, and when she did she started something. As scantily draped as the day she was born, Pansy did a Charleston, and how! The number stopped proceedings for several minutes and she took a half dozen bows. Up the aisle comes a big basket of flowers for her and Barbara turns to me suddenly.

"Oh, I wish *we* had thought of that, Bill!" she whispers. "It would have been awfully nice of you to have sent Pansy flowers!"

"That's the way I figured when I ordered that basket she's getting now!" I remarks quietly. "I'm sure tickled the kid's gotten across. She's not a bad fellow at all, Barbara, and you must admit she *has* got stuff! That was a cruel piece of hoofing she just tore off, wasn't it?"

"I do wish you wouldn't *always* be so slangy,

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Bill!" says Barbara, frowning. "And if you want my candid opinion, I think your friend Pansy is extremely obvious, bold and shameless in both costume and action!"

"Here, kitty, kitty, kitty!" I grins and squeezes her arm.

She turned on me, her face ablaze, and then she laughed.

"Perhaps that *was* feline of me!" she says. "Still, I don't know why I don't get up and leave you here to enjoy your Pansy complex alone!"

"If I was you I wouldn't give me the satisfaction!" I smiles.

In the lobby during intermission I run square into Jack Fairfax, parading around in a tux which fit him like a grape's skin and swelled up like a toy balloon. I tried to duck him, but no such luck.

"As I live!" he exclaimed. "The boy wonder, Bust-'Em-Bill himself! Aren't you sorry now you let Pansy slip away from you?"

"I'm sorry to see her mixed up with *you*, that's a cinch, you big tomato!" I answers courteously.

"You small-town boys are out of your element in New York," sneers Fairfax. "It requires real money and some finesse to capture lilies of the field such as Pansy! I happened to have the necessary ingredients

and you didn't. You're not a very good loser, Grimm!"

"So's your Uncle Oscar!" I says, scornfully. "I've lost nothing to you, Fairfax—Pansy's too level and far too wise to fall for any such crude worker as you. She gives your kind a run around and makes you like it!"

"Well, you keep away from her, Grimm, or I'll find a way to stop you!" he snarls, suddenly ugly.

"Why, you poor, dizzy boob, I never was Pansy's heavy boy friend!" I says. "Don't start getting rosy with *me*—I could flicker a muscle at you and you'd be out for a week!"

I knew the only athaletics he'd ever engaged in was to take a jump at a conclusion.

"There are other weapons besides fists, you rough-neck!" he spits at me and loses himself in the crowd. I felt like the hero in a movie!

When I went back to my seat I told Barbara about this little incident, and she likewise advised me to cross Pansy off my list, warning me that Fairfax was just the kind of a mug which would stop at nothing. Positive that Pansy was now well started on the road to success, I made up my mind that I was about as necessary to her as another ear, so I decided to keep away.

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After the show I took Barbara to a place where it's never too late to spend for a bite and a couple of dances, but we left when Pansy and Fairfax blew in a little while later. Like all the others, this night club was selling, and Fairfax promptly tipped off the manager that Barbara was a revenue agent, so our exit was greeted with a sigh of relief.

Before prohibition, this eat, drink and dance palace took down a \$2,000 net nightly, but since the amendment a \$7,500 gate is nothing at all. The one thing which strikes me comical about prohibition as it's played now is that some poor chump named Tony Lazzaretto or the like gets pinched for selling a watery wine, while in Times Square there's a million gilded scofflaw joints running wide open where you can buy any kind of poison. They ain't even under cover and don't tell *me* them places couldn't be closed if the authorities wanted 'em closed! The trouble with prohibition enforcement is that there's none so blind as those which get graft. It's the bootlegger which pays and pays and pays!

Well, while I had nothing to do and was doing it, Butch Ford signed me to box Rough House Gallagher, heavyweight champion of Earthquake, California, at a club in Harlem. Left Hook O'Brien was carded for the same show against anybody the

promoters picked out for him to mangle. O'Brien would fight the marines if the purse was right.

Easing up on my training one day as I was getting a bit fine, I released Shifty Jones to a crap tourney and invited Barbara for a ride in my speed boat. On the way to the landing on the Hudson we met Pansy skipping along upper Broadway. I give her a warm greeting, but got back the icy stare, on account of me being with Barbara, I suppose.

At better than thirty miles per hour we roared up and down the river in my boat, which I'd named "Miss Barbara." I whizzed past the downtown docks and like to collided with a ferryboat, when some bird balances himself for a instant on the rail of the ferry and then jumps kerplunk into the Hudson!

I tossed him our big white doughnut and Barbara let fall a horrified gasp. The ferryboat began reversing, with many whistle blasts. Two more life preservers comes flying from their upper deck. One of 'em fell in my boat and the other one's skimming the air yet, for all I know. It seems there was plenty life preservers on hand—what was needed was a good quoit pitcher!

Well I tore off my shoes, shed coat, coilar and shirt in the well-known twinkling and dived. The Hud-

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son in the late fall is no Gulf Stream by no means and that water was as cold as a mother-in-law's caress! But I got to this drowning umpchay with a few strokes, and then the fun waxed fast and furious. This fellow would have baffled Billy Sunday—he didn't wish to be saved, what I mean! He fought me tooth and nail, while the neighbors' children crowded the ferryboat rails and cheered—which of us, I don't know. We was both under a half dozen times till finally I managed to tap my vis-à-vis on the chin and he went limp.

Barbara had maneuvered the motor boat around and held him against the side of it till I pulled myself aboard and dragged him in. The ferry tooted goodby and churned off, while I dropped flat in my boat to pant my own way back to life.

Our gasping would-be suicide was close to a total loss, and while we worked over him Barbara whispered that he seemed to be shot to pieces from drugs. He was about medium size and looked to me like a gunman, and the minute he could talk at all he snarled his first words of gratitude:

“Who the hell told *you* people to butt in? Why didn't you leave me bump off?”

His voice was cracked and high-pitched, and he seemed on the brinks of busting out crying. I

started a naturally angry retort, but Barbara shook her head at me, so I floundered back to the engine and got under way for the boathouse. I was what you might rightly call all wet!

When I walked back to Barbara and our new traveling companion, he held out a shaking hand and thanked me kindly for saving his life. I guess we run along for about ten minutes in dead silence before he begin his story, and a wild tale it was!

His name in round numbers was Johnson, and he freely admitted being a drug fiend. Johnson had belonged to a mob of dope smugglers, working with the crews of certain steamers making New York as a regular port. Coming into Quarantine at night, the crews would drop packets overboard attached to floats, and the smugglers would cruise by in the darkness later and pick 'em up. According to our tête-à-tête, this dodge was a very common one till the activities of the revenue boats after rum runners had made the bay hot, and now it was seldom attempted.

Johnson claimed he'd been trying to break the drug habit and quit these gyps which pass in the night, who'd figured he was going to make a squeal and threatened to cook him. Terrified by their warnings

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and driven cuckoo by hop, Johnson had decided he was taking the exit nearest him when he leaped off the ferry.

Well, we was both sympathetic, but Barbara's professional interest was aroused. This drug-smuggling thing was right in her line of duty, and she managed to worm out of Johnson that a boat was due the following week to toss off dope for the gang. Now, if there's anything I despise it's a trafficker in drugs. Beside them guys bootleggers is public benefactors, no kidding! Anybody which will make another a slave to dope, which will sell it to high-school kids like they do and ruin thousands of lives yearly,—anybody low enough for that rates no mercy!

When we got to the boathouse I phoned Butch Ford for dry clothes for two, and Barbara took charge of Johnson, who was close to the heeby-jeebies. After he'd repeated his story to her superiors and been promised protection, they sent him to a hospital for treatment.

A few days after that little experience I was working out in Butch's gym for this Rough House Gallagher brawl before a crowd which each put four bits on the line to see me ready myself. I'd just got done sparring four fast frames with Shifty

Jones, when who walks in but Pansy Pilkington. As usual, she closely resembled a million dollars and got plenty attention from the gathering of admiring fight fans and pugs, but I didn't give her a tumble. I was starting for the showers when Shifty run over and says the lady wants to see me. I told him to give her a chair over in the corner of the gym, and after I fooled around under the hot and cold I flung on a bathrobe and returned to where she was waiting. First she begs my pardon for high-hatting me that day on Broadway when I was with Barbara and then she thanks me fluently for the flowers I sent her.

"How did *you* come to be back in here?" I says, anxious to get the interview over. "I thought you had a *matinée* to-day?"

"Not to-day—or any other day, Bill!" smiles Pansy, a bit sorrowfully. "I'm not with 'Yes, Yes, Yvette' any more. I'm—er—resting!"

"You—you threw up a chance like that?" I exclaims, believing my ears to be liars.

"Pardon you—I did not!" returns Pansy. "Fairfax fired me!"

"Well, I'll be a cup of cocoa!" I breathes. "Look here, Pansy, you was the hit of that show. Why, some of the critics was afraid you was a success and

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predicted your name would soon be up in the lights! Another thing, Jack Fairfax has been trying to make you for months, to my knowledge. He wouldn't give you the air for no ordinary reason! Now, what's the answer?"

Well, she stalled for a bit, but I'm hard to discourage when I'm interested, and finally I got the low-down.

"Bill," says Pansy, toying with her hand bag and looking down at the floor, "you scored a bull's-eye with your guess that Fairfax's interest in me was—was, well, for no good reason! In fact, he—his demands became so insulting that I had to stop him from calling on me. Did—did you know he is a drug fiend?"

I shook my head, amazed.

"And that isn't all!" continues Pansy. "He's mixed up with a gang of dope peddlers! I found that out when I let him use my apartment one night for what he called a conference with his business associates. Naturally, I thought he meant his partners in the production of his show. When they left I told him what I'd eavesdropped, and he tried his darnedest to get me to—to take cocaine, I think it was! Of course I was furious and ordered him out. Then he got raving mad and carried on something

awful. He told me the real reason he'd helped me and wound up by giving me my notice!"

I'd jumped to my feet before she got half finished, and now I grabbed her arm.

"Wait till I get dressed!" I says, and, believe me, I was running a temperature. "I'm going up and shellac Fairfax till he'll have to be introduced to his own mother! Then I'll have him pinched. He wanted to make you a hophead, hey? I'll knock that Humpty-Dumpty bow-legged!"

But Pansy jumped up too, looking much alarmed.

"Hold everything!" she says. "For Gossakes, lay off Fairfax, Bill. He's poison! It's just one more tough break for me, and I'll have to make the best of it. Fairfax carries a gun now, and if he found out I'd squawked to you he's just crazy enough to do anything. Why, Bill, if I hadn't come in the night he had those men up to my flat he'd have shot one named Johnson then and there for trying to quit him!"

"*Johnson*, hey?" I hollered, thrilled to the core. "Eh—look here, Pansy, have you got any money?"

"Enough to get by till I land on Broadway again, thanks!" she says. "My press notices on 'Yes, Yes, Yvette' should mean something!"

"Kayo!" I says. "Run along now. I'll see you

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all of a sudden. As far as Fairfax and his artillery is concerned, I ain't shivering. Did you ever hear of dead reckoning?"

"Why—yes," she says, puzzled.

"Well, I killed it!" I grins, patting her shoulder. "So long!"

Overjoyed by the knowledge that the trap set for the dope smugglers would nail Fairfax and rub him out of my life maybe forever, I declared myself in when Barbara and the hard-boiled customs men went down the bay after them in my speed boat. They jumped at the chance to use mine, because most of the revenue boats was known to the rum and drug runners.

Without lights we made the run to Quarantine in jig time, in spite of a pitch-black night, a high wind and a pelting rain. We arrived off the stern of the big freighter Johnson had tipped us off on just in time to hear the putt-putt-putt of the smugglers' craft going away, and then the panic was on! We'd mounted a high-powered searchlight on my boat, and by swinging this back and forth we quickly picked out our prey zipping along in a wallow of foam. Then the chase began!

People, that was one exciting evening! The smugglers replied to a megaphoned command to stop by

turning loose a volley of shots which spattered all around us. The customs guys promptly returned the compliment, and as I'd brought a gun along just in case, so did I. Bullets flew right and left—no kidding, it was just like Chicago! I made Barbara crouch down out of range and stood in front of her as much as I could, when three or four times flying lead splintered the rails and sides of my boat.

The smugglers headed for a dock, and it's a good thing for us they did, because my expensive "Miss Barbara," riddled with bullets, sank like a stone a instant after we'd all leaped out on the dock after 'em. There was my swell motor boat at the bottom of the river, and I still had six payments to make on it!

Well, we fought all over the dock in the storm, socking whenever a head showed up which didn't resemble a revenue agent. I remembered to back my victims against a post before letting 'em have it, as in that way you drive their head against whatever's in back of 'em and get much more horsepower. We finally beat the gang into listening to reason and rounded them all up, handcuffed and quite a bit shopworn. But Mr. Jack Fairfax was not in their midst, although I went over them five times with a flashlight!

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I hadn't seen him during the free-for-all, and the prisoners claimed they never heard tell of him. When we got to headquarters we found that this Johnson baby had copped a sneak from the hospital, so that the only witness we had to pin the wrap on Fairfax was Pansy and she shut up like a clam! Pansy declared if she got implicated in the thing it would ruin her chances of getting in the Follies, and wild horses wouldn't drag another word out of her!

So again Fairfax escaped the law—and me!

I nearly fell through the ropes when I seen this jazzbo in a ringside seat the night of my fight with Rough House Gallagher. Left Hook O'Brien had lost his bout on a questionable foul and was in my corner telling me about it, when I lamped Fairfax. He was sporting a black patch over one eye and some court plaster on his pan. This proper clown had the nerve to grin meaningly at me, and I was immediately positive he'd got his wounds in that mêlée on the dock with the smugglers the other night. Infuriated by that conviction and the fact that I couldn't prove it, the loss of my unpaid-for motor boat and the knowledge that Fairfax was plainly enjoying what was running through my mind, I simply run amuck!

The instant the bell rung I let off steam by charg-

ing madly at Rough House Gallagher and swarming all over him. "C'mon—like it!" I invited him, but he never got started. I just sprayed him with lefts and rights, battering him all over the ring and dropping him four times in the first two minutes. The customers was on their chairs screaming wildly and Rough House Gallagher was on the ropes, out on his feet, when the referee stepped between us and motioned me to my corner, just as a sponge come flipping in from Gallagher's handlers. The fight lasted less than a round, and now you know what made the reporters think I'd swore a vow to kill the unfortunate Rough House Gallagher.



CHAPTER VIII

THE KNIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

ONCE upon a time, gentle reader, Mr. Titus Maccius Plautus hauled off and remarked laughingly to, probably, his bride:

“It is a great plague to be too handsome a man!”

The chances is that by the way of a witty retort Mrs. Plautus immediately crowned this master brain and not with no wreath either, but as Tite did his stuff eighteen hundred years ago the details escapes me at the minute. However, I agree with him that being a handsome dog is bound to cause you a clock of grief. I wouldn't fool you, being beautiful is strictly a woman's business. It certainly ain't the business of a box fighter, as for no reason what so ever I hope to show you.

Some time before, I'd went to a costly beauty doctor and let him work his will on my nose, which had been socked out of true in one of my first battles. This pan-retreader knew his oil, and he sent

me out of his deadfall with a smeller as classic and pleasant to the eye as one on a statue in the park.

And, believe me, I'll state I took that grand nose around the highways and buyways where people could see it! Starved for luxuries after my long years of famine, I went the whole hog, blowing my dough as fast as it come in and frequently faster.

Well, boys and girls, sitting in my elegant suite at the Fitz-Charlton one cold and snowy day, I gazed gloomily out of the window up to my ears in brooding. Knowing I couldn't pin that drug-running thing on him, Fairfax was going around laughing at me for a Patsy, and on top of that my cash on hand was commencing to make me thoughtful. The panic was on! I was still on the nut for six payments—three thousand bucks—on my speed boat, now one of the points of interest at the bottom of the Hudson River, and staring me coldly in the face was a hotel bill which was something brutal! Some work with the multiplication tables showed me I had in the vicinity of twenty-five hundred to my name, though my earnings so far that year had been close to forty thousand dollars. Not so good!

Christmas was only a stone's throw away for a fair pitcher, and naturally I wanted to Santy Claus

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my playmates. I sat down at the writing desk and begin to check 'em off: Pansy, Butch Ford, Left Hook O'Brien and Shifty Jones. I listed Barbara separately, of course. I had my eye on a five-thousand-dollar engagement ring for her to take the place of the eight-hundred-dollar one she was wearing. After sizing up my list, I guessed that about ten thousand fish would cover my presents. I couldn't fake it, because the gang knew what I was taking in, and I figured they'd look for something substantial in the gift line and not no gewgaws which smacked of the five and ten.

My next problem was where would I get the sugar to take care of the jolly Yuletide?

My kayo record had filled the heavyweight champ with a great respect for my punch, and he didn't wish no part of me, preferring to box for the movies and get Sunkist in dear old Hollywood. But the sport editors, which makes or breaks the tin-ear industry, rode him in their columns night and day till he had to make *some* move to keep his next picture from being a box-office flop. So he come out with the statement one day that he'd give me a shot at his crown—if I polished off Pete Oliver and One-Round Carney, the other two outstanding challengers. As both these babies was murderers, the

champ thought *that* would stop my squawking, and he laughingly went back to his cameras. Within twenty-four hours of the title holder's announcement, Butch Ford had signed me to meet Pete Oliver at Indianapolis. I bet that caused Mr. Champion to bite his nails!

While the ink on the articles was drying, I went up to tell Barbara about that—and some other things. She looked like a billion as she and her aunt greeted me warmly. I joined 'em in wishing me the best of luck against Oliver, and then Barbara's aunt done a fadeout. Barbara motioned for me to come over and sit down beside her on the lounge. I give her no argument about that!

"I'll have a report for you to sign tomorrow," she says. "I've made out a compensation claim for the loss of your motor boat, and my superiors have indorsed it. I'm certain the government will reimburse you, as your boat was sunk in its service." She lays her little soft hand on top of my pay-off fist. "Bill," she adds, pleadingly, "you won't buy another expensive boat, will you?"

"I'm all washed up on going down to the sea in ships on time payments!" I feelingly told her. "And that ain't all—Barbara, I'm through with the high life! I'm going to move from the Fitz-Charlton

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to some cheaper drum, pay off every dime I owe, exchange that seven-thousand-buck car of mine for a snappy little roadster and commence saving till it's painful. I got a object in view!"

"Fine!" exclaims Barbara, clapping her hands and staking me to a dazzling smile, "I knew you'd come to your senses! What are you planning now?"

"Well," I says, "I'll fight Pete Oliver, and if I take him my next dish is One-Round Carney. If I get past Carney, the champ will *have* to meet me, and after that fracas I quit the ring; win, lose or draw. I'm fed up on the manly art of breaking the other lad's jaw or versa vice, and I don't mean maybe! If I wasn't cleaned, I'd turn in my gloves and call it a day right now. But I'm broke, Barbara, and these three bouts will net me close to a hundred grand, after I give Butch his cut. With a hundred thousand iron men I can make a fresh start—crash into some business, open a string of gas stations, stores, garages or what have you, sell anything from radios to real estate! I'll figure *that* part of it out later. The thing *now* is to win this bank roll and check out of the box-fighting racket while I still look like a human being!"

With that I patted my nobby new nose tenderly.

"Oh, Bill, I do hope nothing will swerve you

from that splendid resolution!" says Barbara. "I'll help you to keep it in every way I can. If you only knew how disgusting that sport of animals called prize fighting is to me!"

And she give a little shiver to prove it. As it would only put me on the losing end of a hot argument, good people, I let the "sport of animals" part slide.

"As if wonders would never cease," I went on, "I took your advice, and I'm catching a lecture at Columbia now and then on this and that. The other night I got a load of a chat on a bozo entitled Darwin, which claims the first man was a baboon—it's a cinch Eve made a monkey out of Adam with that apple, anyways! Well, after the lecture I buzzed the professor, and now I'm reading some books he slipped me. The first thing you know I'll break out with a education and wallop Butch for saying ain't!"

Barbara bust out laughing and then patted my arm.

"Bill, you have pleased me immensely!" she says. "I'm proud of you! Stick to your lectures and reading; you're coming along famously!"

"But I don't seem to be getting nowheres with *you!*" I remarked quietly, taking hold of her hand

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and plunging ahead with nerve I didn't know I had in me. "Suppose I *do* quit the ring for some game you think more tasty? What about me and you? When are you going to marry me, if at all?"

"Why, Bill—I—I—" she stammers, while that schoolgirl complexion goes crimson and I held my breath. "You—you musn't look at it *that* way. Don't you want to be a success for your own satisfaction?"

"You're ducking the point!" I says, letting her take away her hand. "Let's get down to brass tacks, as the hammer remarked. You know full well I'm overboard over you, Barbara, and while I got the patience of a animal trainer, I want something to shoot at! I'm the kind of a guy which has simply got to have a target or my best shots is wasted. Tell me you'll marry me next week or next year, but give me *something* to look forward to!"

"Matrimony *now* would triple the odds against you, Bill," she answers gently. "You haven't found yourself. I—I think more of you than any man I've ever known, but I'm—I'm not sure yet that the feeling I have for you is love!"

"Take a chance—I'll gamble with you!" I busts out.

"Ask me something else," she smiles, all cool and collected again.

I figured that a good time to drop the subject of wedlock. She didn't like being pestered and—well, to-morrow was another day!

"A little while ago you said you'd do anything you could to help me keep my good resolutions," I says. "Was that level or banana oil?"

"I meant what I said," she tells me, toying with a cushion.

"Good!" I says. "Now—eh—I suppose if I—I guess if— Hey, listen; if I kissed you, would you leap out the window?"

If her face had got red before, it was a four-alarm fire *now*. Good night, I thinks, I've gummed up matters forever and a day! I kicked myself in the shins as she jumped up quickly and stared at me, and I was just concocting a humble apology when she murmurs with a odd smile:

"You forget this window is seven stories high, Bill!"

I wasted a whole second getting what she meant and then I fairly leaped over and—say, it just struck me that I'm a proper umpchay to tell *everything* in this true confession, so I'll leave out this type of details. Still, there's nothing to prevent

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you filling in here and there with guesses, get me?

But I want to say to you this afternoon that my upward climb really begun with that clinch! It was the first time I'd ever touched Barbara, and I felt like Napoleon must have felt the first day he tried on his crown. I'd crashed the gate of Heaven! I got a kick when I knocked my first adversus for a Japanese mustache cup and I got a kick when I took in my first thousand dollars, but, honest to Buddha, the thrill I got when I kissed Barbara Baxter the first time has lasted yet. That chaste salute put me across! A woman is at the bottom of everything, as the guy says, pulling his wife out of the elevator shaft.

Well, we talked of this and we discussed that, and I sold Barbara the idea of being engaged to me, but the date for donning the ball and chain was left open for the present. That was the best I could do, which I thought far from a bad night's work. Everything was hotsy-totsy, and with my arm around her I took a chance on another subject of importance.

"Barbara," I says, "now that I'm going to give up scrapping, why don't you quit your career as a female gumshoe? You know what I think about

you being a detective. It ain't a woman's racket, but we won't go into all that again. The point is that it steams me up when I think of you risking your life and—and, well, look at the scissorbills you got to mix around with when you're getting evidence. Smugglers, dope fiends, bootleggers, yeggs, counterfeiters, murderers and others I won't even mention! Why—"

"But I'm a stenographer now, Bill!" she interrupts.

"A *stenographer*?" I repeats in overjoyed astonishment. "Since when?"

"I went to work yesterday for Philip Hartford, a wealthy Wall Street broker," she explains, plainly enjoying my surprise and delight. "I'm really his private secretary, not just his typist," she adds; "it's—very interesting work."

Something in the way she said that give me a sudden chill.

"I suppose your boss is one of them old, bald-headed, bewhiskered crabs, hey?" I inquires, in what I hoped was very careless tones. But how I hung on her answer!

"On the contrary, Bill," smiles this young and beautiful damsel, "he is very youthful and quite good looking!"

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That ruined me! Well acquainted with my own uncountable shortcomings, I looked with dismay on the close daily contact which Barbara would have with her rich, "youthful and quite good looking" boss. Jealous? How d'ye get that way? But—

"A penny for your thoughts!" laughs Barbara, waking me out of my gloomy ponderings.

"Sold!" I says. "I was just wishing that when you was choosing another calling you had gave some thought to the profession of housewife!"

She kidded me plenty after that, and when I left the memory of that first kiss—and others—was what you might call badly diluted with the thoughts of Barbara's new job. Well, we can't have everything, as the five-footed calf says when he seen the two-headed cat.

Shortly afterwards I journeyed to the wide open spaces of Indianapolis, where men are authors, and fought Pete Oliver in the first championship elimination bout. I was guaranteed ten thousand dollars, and the boxing board held up my dough for a week after the muss.

I made up my mind before going into the ring that nothing what so ever was to happen to my remodeled nose, come what may! So I fought a cautious and very protective battle, taking no

chances, to the disgust of Butch Ford and the rage and hisses of the customers. The mob had paid fancy prices to view bloodshed and violence and not no exhibition of waltzing, and they barked and meowed terrible when me and Oliver simply dallied and toyed with each other.

Oliver was strictly a counter puncher which let the other boy do all the leading, and when I refused to open up and leave my handsome beak at his mercy he just stalled. The bout was one long, continual clinch for the full fifteen rounds without no knockdowns to liven up proceedings, and several times the indignant referee threatened to throw us both out of the ring. Butch told me my work had been so poor that I'd have to knock Oliver stiff to get a draw.

My charming manager then promised to bust my nose with the bucket if I didn't start something in the last round, so I woke up and chased Oliver all over the ring. But I couldn't knock off this prancing Humpty Dumpty in no three minutes, he was too tough—a good boy with a awkward style which would make anybody look bad.

As the result of my safety-first tactics the best I could get was a draw, and the crowd booed me to a fare-the-well when I left the ring—the first

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time I'd ever been gave the bird, and it wasn't pleasant. My startling form reversal made the sport writers believe I'd deliberately carried Oliver, and immediately after the decision I got handed a indefinite suspension in Indiana for not trying.

That wasn't all. When I arrived in New York the Boxing Commission had the referee's report putting in the rap for me, and they called me and Butch up on the carpet. We had to do some tall talking, but I managed to convince the stern officials there was nothing crooked about the fight, except that I'd been trying to save my comely nose from disaster. They let me off with a bawling out and a warning, ruling that I had to box Pete Oliver again before I could swap wallops with anybody else.

Well, the reporters on hand when I was explaining matters to the boxing czars seemed to think my story was the cat's lipstick and columns was printed about my new nose and my wild fears for its safety. They certainly give me a fine pushing around, and don't think they didn't! Some of 'em even went so far as to predict that the next jazzbo to lure me in the ring would play a tune on my precious snout and they rechristened me "Nosey Bill!"

For a couple of weeks after my return to Gotham

I tried to interview Barbara Baxter, but it was like trying to get Coolidge to bust out laughing. Her duties as this Philip Hartford's secretary made her too busy to see me in the daytime, and these duties even kept her on the job at nights. My attempts to get her to go places, see people and do things with me was met with a polite:

"I'm sorry, Bill, but Mr. Hartford wants me to go over some important documents with him at his office this evening!"

Leaping tuna! And me the heavy boy friend!

This turn of affairs got me both redheaded and hurt. On top of that, these newspaper cracks daily about what they called my faint-hearted efforts against Pete Oliver at Indianapolis kept me at a continual boil. So when the promoters of a big Christmas boxing show for charity propositioned me to headline the bill against Oliver I jumped at the chance to redeem myself. The heavyweight champ was coming East to be introduced at the fight and see two of his most persistent challengers perform. I planned to dump Mr. Oliver right in his lap at my earliest convenience after the first bell!

I contented myself with light workouts and heavy worry about Barbara and her new boss, which demanded her services night and day. Things had

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come to a pretty pass, and it didn't look kosher to *me!* Not being able to talk it over with her made it worse. Where did *I* figure against a entry like this Philip Hartford—young, good looking, as rich as prune whip and probably Ritz and Harvard from hat to heel? This sheik spoke Barbara's language and knew drawing-room capers which would always be mysteries to *me*. I was satisfied that the best I could look for was the worst of it!

I begin hunting around for some kind of a business which I could operate as a side line till I quit pushing leather and stepped in it as a regular game. I knew that would make a hit with Barbara and the quicker I could show her I'd started a new future, the better. Searching the "Business Opportunities" columns of the newspapers, I run down a lead one day which wound up with me taking over the lease of a high-hat tea parlor on Park Avenue. Don't scream! It didn't call for much money on the line, and I signed notes for the rest of it. What the Kansas City did *I* wish with a tea-room, you're probably thinking? Well, that wasn't as cuckoo as it sounds. I knew what I was doing, as I'll show you in a few more minutes.

When Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien heard I was running a tea parlor they both got a bad at-

tack of the hysterics, and some of the cracks these cut-ups made had me favorably contemplating the sport of manslaughter! Some informer in my camp tipped off the newspaper guys, which had about run out of jokes on my synthetic nose. That started the ball rolling again, and the sporting cartoonists drew pictures of me in girlish poses serving tea to my opponent between rounds and the etc. This free-handed joshing from all sides made me foam at the mouth, but I stuck to ye old tea shoppe and pretended I was razzberry-proof.

I had six girls working in the joint as waitresses, and any one of these cuteys could have tow-ropeed the field in that Atlantic City beauty rodeo. Butch and Left Hook strolled in one day to partake of some tea and kid me. Left Hook immediately took the count for my thrilling cashier and from then on was a constant visitor. He become a tea-drinking idiot and got shaved twice a day, while my cashier must have had a weakness for cauliflower ears for she didn't seem to be able to cross the street without Left Hook O'Brien as a traveling companion. Butch Ford come to sneer and remained to cheer—one of my big blondes.

One frosty morning I was doing road work over hard-packed snow in Central Park, wrapped in heavy

wool sweaters and with Shifty Jones trotting along at my side. Coming around a bend, we like to bump into a taxi, the chauffeur of which was trying to change a flat shoe by simply cursing at it. This being my former gag, I pitched in and give him a hand, with Shifty assisting at the jack. We had the tire off in no time, and I dropped the spare on Shifty's feet when a familiar voice says sweetly out of the inside of the cab:

"If Barbara Baxter could see you now!"

I gaped down into the pretty face of Pansy Pilkington, smiling at me impishly.

"I like you in a cap and sweater, Bill," says Pansy, powdering her nose. "Long time no see! What on earth are you doing running through the park?"

"I'm training for my next start," I explains.

"My—you must be going to fight Nurmi!" she wise cracks. "Big boy, I have a grand surprise for you. What do you think happened to me this morning?"

"That depends on where you was," I says. "Put me Jerry, I'm no good at figures."

"Oh, Bill, my lifelong ambition has been realized!" chatters Pansy. "Why—I—even now I can scarcely believe it! I—"

"This suspense is killing me!" I butted in impatiently. "Quit raving and tell me what happened, will you?"

"Hold everything—I've been engaged for the Follies!" she busts out proudly. "Laugh *that* off!"

Well, I was as overjoyed as she was, no kidding. The poor kid had caught one tough break after another since she hit New York and had took it all with a grin. Down to her last dime she'd played her hand out, when she was the kind of a girl which didn't have to do without *nothing* if she didn't wish to do! Pansy had sand and ambition, and now at last she was cashing on 'em both. I was tickled silly, and I told her so.

"I knew you'd be glad, Bill," she says softly. "I guess you're the only real friend I've got. You're the one man who has never asked me for anything in return for a favor, and the one man who could have—"

"Where's Fairfax now, d'ye know?" I cut her off, a bit embarrassed.

"I saw the cat eating something!" says Pansy scornfully. "That false alarm's show is on the verge of closing, and he's been begging me to rejoin it, telling me I can write my own ticket as far as salary's concerned. I hate him, Bill, he's—he's

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snaky! Still, I owe him my Follies engagement, I guess. My Charleston in his show is what got me the job."

"You should go over and wave your Follies contract in his pan!" I grins. "It would poison him! Well, I got to blow, Pansy, I—"

"Look, it's starting to snow again!" she interrupts, and sure enough it was. "Let me give you a lift in my cab. Did you know I was on the bill with you at that big Christmas benefit?"

"No," I says, getting inside—I'd long since chased Shifty Jones. "Who are *you* going to box?"

"Be your age!" smiles Pansy. "I'm going to do a Charleston in the ring before you fight this Pete Oliver. There's five acts of vaudeville, you know, besides the bouts."

"Well, I trust we both click," I remarks, and then I told her about Barbara's new job as a Wall Street mogul's secretary. Pansy sneeringly commented that in *her* candid opinion my girl friend was putting over a fast one on me.

To change the subject, I talked about my tea-room, and nothing would do but she had to see it. On the way our taxi gets held at a busy corner in traffic. I leaned out to see what was holding us up, and I looked square in the eyes of Barbara, stand-

ing at the curb. O sole mio! My gasp caused Pansy to look out with her arm around my shoulder to balance herself, and that's how Barbara seen us. Traffic moved on, but my heart stood still from that swift, scornful glance Barbara give us before turning away without a greeting.

The day was all damp for me from then on, but Pansy was pleased. Before we parted she'd made me promise I'd catch her opening in the Follies, for old time's sake. I tried to raise Barbara on the phone a dozen times that day and night, but the best I could get was "They don't answer!" The words seemed a bad omen.

The next day it was the same way, and I couldn't seem to snap into my work at the gym. When I'm worried about Barbara I'm a total loss and I was worried plenty! So I decided I'd go Christmas shopping, and that's what I done, taking with me the mob of ragged little dirty kids which hung around my training camp and looked on me as the eighth wonder of the world.

No matter if I really was just a ordinary socker, them kids thought I was the oyster's lavalliere, and if I as much as give one of 'em a pleasant smile, why, he was the envy of the gang for a week! So I piled 'em all in a couple of hired cars and down

town we went. My first imitation was to buy shoes and overcoats for the mob, thinking how *I* could have used a similar set while battling poverty when I was a kid myself. Then we descended on the toys and had what you call a field day, with me having fully as much fun as the kids. I practically bought out the toy department and left my young admirers there while I scouted around for Christmas gifts for my friends.

I got Pansy a embroidered handbag, a white wool sweater for Shifty Jones, a stickpin for Left Hook O'Brien, and a watch for Butch Ford. I'd made up my mind to give Barbara my own four-carat diamond, reset in a Tiffany mounting. Figuring this would be my last spending orgy for some time to come, I done matters up brown!

When I got back that night to the inn where I parked, I managed to get Barbara's aunt on the phone and found that Barbara had been called out of town "on business with her employer." This information put me all out of gear and to me was the tip-off that Barbara's wealthy boss had beaten my time! So I not only went to see Pansy open in the Follies but I took her to supper afterwards at the swellest night club on Broadway. The former Fairfax Falls biscuit shooter was a riot in her dance

—in fact, she stopped the show and was famous long before the last curtain fell. Pansy had arrived and no one was more prouder of her than me.

Yet in spite of the envious glances tossed at me in the cabaret for having her in my company, her open enjoyment of being with me and her dangerous charms, I had the blues thinking about Barbara apparently giving me the air and I spent a rotten evening. Twice I set Pansy ablaze by unthinkingly calling her Barbara, and before I lay me down to sleep that night I'd made up my mind to see Mr. Philip Hartford's charming secretary the next day and have a cold-turkey showdown!

I got it with a smash in the morning paper! All over the front page was the startling news that Philip Hartford had been pinched by government coppers, charged with a big stock swindle! There was no mention of Barbara Baxter, but a rush of brains to the head showed me at once why she took that job! Dressing as fast as a fireman, I rushed up to her apartment and found her at breakfast with her aunt.

I'd took a chance on the reception I'd get and was greatly relieved when Barbara acted genuinely glad to see me. She was garbed in some soft clinging business and simply hypnotized me sitting opposite

her at the table, as they wouldn't have it no other way but that I have coffee with 'em. I'd hit a homer on my guess—she'd been ordered to go to work for Hartford to get the goods on him.

I explained how I happened to be in the taxi with Pansy that day and Barbara made no comment, only saying she'd seen what the papers said about Pansy's success in the Follies and was glad to hear it. Glad, she says, looking straight at me, that Pansy was now in a position where she could get along without the help of her "many friends."

When I told her I'd bought a tea parlor, she was highly interested and full of questions. After breakfast I took her over to see it. With Barbara in ye shoppe, them knockout waitresses of mine was just so many girls!

"Why, your place is just darling, Bill!" raves Barbara, looking around. "We—you must get an intriguing name for it, and those lights in the rear should be softened a little. I'll—I know where you can get the cutest little shades and—"

I butted in, playing my ace.

"Barbara," I says, "why not turn in your badge to the government right now and take charge of this place for me? With your classy ideas you could put this tea saloon over, and maybe later we could open

a chain of 'em, putting in high-class soda fountains, candy, ice cream and that kind of stuff. I'm offering you a woman's job, which has the one you got now cheated! I'm going to quit the ring after three more fights, like I told you. Can't you do something for *me?*?"

This was why I'd bought the tea parlor, and I staked it all on that speech!

Barbara looked all around the place with shining eyes, and then she turned her attention to me.

"Yes, Bill, I will!" she says softly. "I've already sent in my resignation to my superiors. I'm simply sickened by the methods I've had to employ to bring about arrests. Hartford stole from the poor and deserves his fate, but there have been others who have given me bad dreams! Besides," she adds, with a quick little smile, "an engaged girl should not associate with criminals. I shall try hard, Bill, to make this delightful shop a success!"

At that point I presented her with my four-carat diamond ring, remodeled so's she could wear it. At first she wouldn't take it, but when I explained I couldn't sell it for what it cost me and that I'd really saved dough on her Christmas gift by having it reset for her, she let me slip it on her finger.

She give me my Christmas present that evening

—a set of Doc Eliot's Classics and a dozen hand-embroidered handkerchiefs with my initials on. She said she'd sewed on 'em most of the time she was forced to be in Philip Hartford's company. That give me a kick!

Well, at last the night of the big Christmas benefit vaudeville and boxing show rolled around. Me and Pete Oliver was scheduled to step in the ring at ten o'clock, but I took Barbara down early with her aunt, and seen they was seated ringside. It's a good thing I did because by nine o'clock you couldn't get within two blocks of the big auditorium where the entertainment was held. My bout with Oliver was what the promoters call a "natural"—viz., a house packer—and two thirds of the mob was in soup and fish, high society being well represented, as they'd promoted the affair. Lots of 'em had never seen a box fight before in their lives, but you should of heard 'em yell right with the gallery fans when Left Hook O'Brien knocked out tough Tommy Neil in the second round of the opening bout.

On the way into the arena we met Pansy with the Follies press agent. Pansy deliberately put on the chill for Barbara and her aunt, and called me aside to hand me a box of imported cigars for Christmas. As I was a fighter in training and didn't smoke,

that was exactly like giving a guy in Sing Sing a cane, but I thanked the kid lavishly, anyways. It made a extra present for Butch Ford.

The scantily clothed Pansy stepped into the ring surrounded by a hot jazz orchestra and tore off her now famous Charleston to applause which split the roof. She was as attractive as sin, and all the society guys had opera glasses on her, while she just killed the gallery. There was a few other acts—the last one cut off in the middle when the fight fans begin to yell raucously for me and Oliver. The song-and-dance stuff was great, but them birds come to see a murder!

Pete Oliver was already in his corner when I climbed through the ropes with Butch Ford, Left Hook O'Brien and Shifty Jones, to go fifteen rounds—or less—to a decision. This battle would finish one of us as a contender for the world's heavyweight championship, but I was no longer the nervous, excitable novice of a few months before. To me this was just another fight, and from what Oliver had showed me at Indianapolis, I didn't look for him to extend me.

Besides being well cocoa-battered, my face was heavily vaselined to keep down the chances of Oliver cutting me up, preparations which Butch had super-

intended with disgust. As we went to our corner, Butch whispered hoarsely to me that I better forget about my new nose and tie into Oliver, or the blood-hungry customers would lynch me!

Instead of the frenzied applause which had formerly greeted me when I entered the ring, I was received with a storm of boos and hoots. Sarcastical cracks about my new smeller fell around me like a cutting hail. I seemed to be about as popular as a mad dog since that first fight with the scowling giant I was now facing again. It upset me, and I might as well admit it! My pride was hurt. I looked over the ropes and, sure enough, there was Jack Fairfax in his usual ringside seat—a seat he occupied every time I fought—with the hope he'd see me beaten to a pulp and then knocked dead, as he once confided to me.

The heavyweight champion was introduced amid mingled cheers and groans. He shook hands coldly with both me and Oliver and then flopped in his seat, looking bored.

Pete Oliver got a great hand, and the gallery howled for him to get to work on my nose and ruin it. But I wasn't going to be marked up by this big ape and that beak of mine cost too much and looked too good to take chances with!

Oliver knew all about my nose and changed his regular tactics by forcing the fighting from the first bell. He stabbed at my face with his long left, but I went into a shell and covered up, content to let him do the leading. He began bulling me around the ring, landing a right uppercut which made me change feet, and I dived into a clinch where he immediately brought the heel of his glove over my nose. The crowd roared—half approval and half hisses—and when the referee broke us with a warning to Oliver I shot a right and left to his mid-section which made him gasp and look serious.

“Keep on top of him, Bill; he don't like it!” yells Butch. “Applesauce!” I thought. “I got a nose at stake here!” And I let the worried Oliver take the play away from me to the accompaniment of the royal razz from the mob. He lashed out with three lefts to the head, and I was short with a right cross at the bell. Oliver took the first round on his aggressiveness, Butch snarling that I didn't land three clean blows.

“You're as yellow as they make 'em!” sneers Jack Fairfax up at me as I sank on my stool. A faithful admirer of mine next to him give him a argument for me.

The second round was the same as the first, Oliver

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doing all the work and me blocking as best I could, countering only when that was the way to save my noble proboscis. Every time we clinched along the ropes near where Fairfax sat, this parsnip let loose a string of filthy abuse which was gradually driving me nutty! Though it looked like I was dogging it, I was simply boxing a careful fight. I wanted Oliver to tire himself out swinging and then *I* was going to get busy. Most of his punches were landing on my arms, elbows and shoulders, but from the gallery it seemed as if he was giving me a fearful pasting. I took some stiff punishment, at that, in this frame in trying to save my face, and just before the bell Oliver smashed a left to my head which was a *darb!*

When the referee pulled us out of a clinch I walked goofily to Oliver's corner instead of my own and the crowd howled. I was dizzy from that last punch, and the cheers of the fans and Fairfax kept making me dizzier. But my attractive nose was still intact! I nodded cheerfully to Barbara, who seemed white and tense. From a box, Pansy fluttered a handkerchief at me.

During the rest, Fairfax kept up a running sarcastical comment on me which revived me more than the frantic work of Butch and Shifty Jones. I was

just going to kick the water bucket down at Fairfax when the bell stopped me.

Now confident he had me faded, Oliver threw caution to the winds in the third and waded in with both gloves flying. A storm of sizzling rights and lefts to the body soon raised big red welts, and before the round was half over I felt like he was socking me with a sledge. The house was in a continual uproar, simply going wild when Oliver staggered me with a right to the jaw which made me hang on. He was a good boy, this Oliver, and I'd liked to have boxed him again!

I come out of the clinch and missed two lefts to the face, walking into another hard right which landed too high up to do much harm. Still, it didn't do me no *good*—this guy could hit! We roughed it up at close quarters, both landing stiff rights to the head. I put a torrid left to the heart, but took three perfect jabs to the mouth in return, the last one splitting my lips. The gong found us exchanging short hooks in mid-ring. Oliver caught me on the chest with a right after the bell, but I didn't think he'd heard it, and I grinned and shook his extended pardon-me glove.

As I reached my corner Butch sprang forward

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and doused me with a shower of water from the sponge.

“You know you’re behind, don’t you?” he growls in my buzzing ear.

Before I could answer, Fairfax stands up, shoves his head through the lower ropes and hisses:

“The big white-livered hound is trying to lay down for the gamblers! He’s not only yellow, he’s crooked!”

Without a word I leaned over swiftly and took a punch at him, knocking off his hat. Like a flash, Fairfax brought his heavy cane upward and across my face, hitting the bridge of my precious nose and—*breaking it!*

Instantly the house was insane with excitement, nobody sitting down and bedlam in charge. I dropped on my stool, the gore from my busted smeller making my face a red mask, and after one frowning stare the referee wanted to stop the bout and give it to Oliver, as I certainly didn’t look able to continue.

While we’re arguing in my corner, the bell rung for the fourth round, and I shot out like the maniacal killer I was and looked at that minute. With no Greek god’s nose to be careful of no longer, I

showed the fans that "Bust-'em-Bill" of old! Oliver stabbed a vicious left to my bleeding beak which I didn't try to block, taking the punch to cross my right flush to his jaw. Arms dangling at his sides, he staggered backwards halfway across the ring, and as I tore in to finish him I slipped. A wild swing glanced off my shoulders, upsetting me, and I got to one knee, resting, thinking and listening to the count: "One-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight—"

"*Nine!*" I barked, leaping to my feet and shoving the startled referee aside. "*Ten!*" I yelled and knocked Pete Oliver cold with a right hook to the button.

Then, as the saying is, pandemonium reigned! I stood panting in mid-ring looking down over the ropes at the shining-eyed Barbara, while twelve thousand lunatics surged about the ropes cheering a guy named "Bust-'Em-Bill" Grimm, whose arm was being held aloft by the referee.

The heavyweight champ turned on his way out to give me a thoughtful look. Three husky coppers was pulling Butch Ford and Left Hook O'Brien off a battered wreck entitled Jack Fairfax. Shifty Jones, which had called the finish and the round and bet that way at sweet odds, was hurling towels and sponge over his head.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIGHT THAT FAILED

NINETEEN hundred years ago Titus Livy struck a attitude on the main stem of Padua and bellowed the following pungent thought at a harmless passer-by:

“Nothing stings more deeply than the loss of money!”

The chances is that the pedestrian thus attacked sneered, “So’s your old man!” at Tite and continued on his way. However, good people, that wise crack qualified Mr. Livy as a expert on stings. There ain’t no wasp, bee, mosquito or hornet in captivity which can cause you as sharp a pain as the sting of sudden poverty!

The babies which that sting don’t kill outright generally finds it just what they needed to bring out that extra burst of speed in the race to success. It acts like a stroke on some, like a spur on others. By a odd coincidence, it acted like a spur on *me!*

Right after my four-round kayo of Pete Oliver,

I went in training for a fifteen-round scuffle with One-Round Carney. Among the assault and battery fanciers which jammed my training quarters daily at four bits a look was a fellow about my own age entitled Carlton Herne. He was a sixty-eight-carat fight fan and a full-fledged millionaire to boot. Herne had a unbreakable habit of stalling around the gym after the mob left and we got to know each other that way. In no time at all, gentle reader, you'd think we'd been bounding around together for epochs.

It seems we sized up most things the same way, in spite of the fact that I was self-made and unhindered by grammar, while Herne was a product of Harvard and millions. That hadn't stopped him from being a face card and he seemed to get quite a kick out of being the intimate buddy of "Bust-'Em-Bill" Grimm, the heavyweight flash. He was ringside at all my starts and thought the champ would be a push-over for me.

Snubbing Butch Ford's squawks, I insisted Herne be gave the run of the camp, and one day he busts in on my workout, all excited.

"I've just made a wager so absolutely certain that I shall be ashamed to take the other fellow's money!" he chortles.

"You must have bet Niagara Falls is a liquid," I says wittily, as he was a good audience.

"I've just as much of a sure thing!" he declares. "My bet is that you'll defeat Carney in a round!"

"Well, I'll be a glass of ink!" I bust out in dismay. "Somebody's made a umpchay out of you—how much did you gamble?"

"Oh, only ten thousand," he says carelessly, ten grand coming under the head of trifles with *him*; "I got odds of four to one!"

"You should have got odds of *forty-four* to one!" I told him. "Listen, Carlton, you got to hedge that bet. Your ten thousand's gone!"

"You don't think you can whip Carney?" he gasps, like his ears has to bring affidavits.

"Certainly I think I can take him," I says. "But I wouldn't dream of trying to call the *round* I'll knock him off in! This Carney's nobody's chump—he was good enough to hold the champ to a draw before the champ win his title. Carney didn't get nicknamed 'One-Round' on account he gets bounced in a round—it's versa vice. Not even my warmest admirer, which is myself, thinks I can stop him in no three minutes!"

"Well, *I* do!" says Herne, confidently. "Bill, you carry heavier guns than either the champion or One-

Round Carney. I've seen the three of you box and if the odds were sufficiently attractive I'd wager you would knock Carney out with the first punch!"

"Carlton," I says, pityingly, "please don't bet nobody I'll slap Carney stiff in the dressing-room, *will* you?"

I worried a lot about his ten thousand dollars, which I figured was the same as in the ash can, for I seen no chance of knocking out in a round a boy which had coped with the champ for twenty rounds to a draw. And then, again, what would the burly Mr. Carney be doing while I was trying to flatten him? This fighting idiot was a sweet puncher himself, and the sport writers claimed it was merely a question of which of us could take the most punishment, as we was even in every other department of the game. One guy wrote that a single lucky break might bring victory to either of us. That gil knew his bananas!

Well, little by little I begin to take Carlton Herne into my confidence. Honest to Coolidge, if it wasn't that we got along so well, you'd think we was brothers. He cheered my determination to get a home-made education and leave the ring with a bank roll and a future—I was still going to night classes at Columbia and reading the ink off the classics.

Barbara was highly delighted by our friendship. I guess the novelty of me knowing a refined guy like Herne pleased her, as most of my other playmates was scarcely what you'd call drawing-room pets. Thoroughly sold on my rich buddy, Barbara said she was sure he'd have a good influence over me. Herne retaliated by bringing his high society friends to my tea parlor, christened "Ye Tiffin Shoppe" by Barbara, and it soon become the nobby place to go. From 4 P.M. on, Rolls-Royces with liveried pilots cluttered the curb, and within a month my joint was going over like Florida!

Another constant visitor to my training camp was Pansy Pilkington, now slaying Broadway with her Charleston in the Follies. We both held a decision over New York, now, though not without knowing we'd been in a fight. If you play your cards right, Manhattan can be had, but it's nobody's set-up and, unless you can take your shellacking without whimpering, lay off it. It took me some of the toughest years of my life to find out there was much more difference than a few electric lights between Gotham and Fairfax Falls!

One blustery, winter day at the gym I pegged Carlton Herne gazing at Pansy with a far-away and long-ago look in his eyes, and I suddenly remem-

bered I'd never introduced 'em. Getting into condition for this muss with One-Round Carney had took my mind off my social duties. So when I wound up the day's gruel with Shifty Jones, I give Herne a knockdown to Pansy, and right away it looked like I'd started something! My boy friend had plainly took the count for this charmer, and Pansy didn't seem to find him nauseating either.

This situation tickled me silly! Being strong for both Pansy and Herne, I hoped to see something serious come of the acquaintance. Pansy'd grab off a handsome Butter and Egg Man which was a real guy, plus fours and all, while Herne would win himself a girl worth *anybody's* million!

I'll state that Mr. Carlton Herne was a swift worker, and his line must likewise have been snappy, because he clicked with Pansy from the start. His nightly attendance at the Follies was gave due consideration by the newspapers and scandal sheets, but it didn't seem to trouble him a particle. As for nature's gift to the footlights, well, like her press agent grinned, it all helped! What Herne's blue-blooded folks said to their lovelorn son was nobody's business. Personally, I felt that both Pansy and Herne could have done far worse, and I was hugely proud of my success as a Cupid.

Herne tried hard to arrange parties of four, as misery ain't the only thing which loves company, but Barbara and Pansy just didn't mix. The only way in which these two was alike was that they was both girls and both boss lookers. But Barbara had the crazy idea that I'd been unduly interested in Pansy and Pansy thought Barbara was high-hatting her. At that, Barbara was willing to let bygones be bygones, but Pansy balked.

I put in a grand Italian marble soda fountain and a high-class confectionery at "Ye Tiffin Shoppe," which by this time was known all over New York, thanks to Herne and his classy friends making it a regular hangout and Barbara's nifty ideas for making it attractive. Everything was hotsy-totsy and I was satisfied that at last I'd hit my stride. I figured a few years would see my catsy tea parlors all over the country, with me sitting back with nothing to do but count the jack which overflowed my cash registers. It was just like you read in a story!

Barbara's job had rose from manager to "hostess" and I'd boosted her cut till she wouldn't take any more.

"If you knew how it thrills me to see you making good, Bill, you wouldn't pay me a penny for my services!" she told me one afternoon. "You would

think I was being overpaid in joy—and you would be right! Pretty soon we'll be looking over locations for at least one more shop and——”

“Why can't we start looking over locations for our *home*, Barbara?” I cut her off. “I like being engaged, but I'm double cuckoo about being married! This engagement of ours is getting too permanent, what I mean. Let's run down to the City Hall or some place, get wed and be done with it!”

“Let's don't and say we did!” Barbara laughs, standing on her toes and ruffling my hair. “You see, you have *me* slangy too!”

“Is marrying me just a giggle to you?” I demanded. I can be stern when needs must.

“Indeed, it isn't!” says Barbara quickly and adds shyly, with a pulse-jumping blush, “I shall be very happy, Bill, when—when we are married and have our home. Oh, you don't know how I look forward to that—it is never out of my mind day or night, not even for an instant!” She buried her face in my coat and her voice come kind of muffled, “You *will* be good to me, won't you, Bill?”

I wonder if I'll *ever* be able to touch her without wanting to get down and say a prayer of thanks to Heaven for throwing us together.

“Barbara, I don't get you,” I says. “You claim

you're as wild to be married as I am. Well, what's holding up proceedings? A word from you and your name's Mrs. Grimm!"

"I want to wait—just a little while longer," she says—"until you have a firmer foothold, Bill. You know, letting down with the goal in sight is your besetting sin. I've watched you in the ring fight hard when you are losing and ease up when your opponent is in distress. And in other things, once you have obtained your immediate object, you—you lose interest. If I married you now, you'd forget all your promises to quit the ring and soon fall back into the rut!"

"But, listen—" I began, a bit irritated.

"Aren't you always telling me you must have a target to shoot at?" she interrupts with a smile. "Well, I shall not remove the target until you have scored a bull's eye! I'll marry you, Bill, when you have definitely retired from the prize ring and are well started on your new career."

And although I raved and pleaded, that was all the satisfaction she'd give me. I could get no further arguing with Barbara than Adam and a gorilla would get arguing which started the human race!

I was even more gloomed up by Barbara's refusal to put on the handcuffs immediately when Left Hook

O'Brien, my stable mate, hauled off and wedded Rhea Cohen, the cute disturbance which acted as cashier of my tea parlor. Nothing would do but I had to accept the exacting portfolio of best man, while Barbara attended Rhea in case she fainted with joy or something. Butch Ford declared himself in as a eyewitness. As O'Brien's real name was Izzy Rabinowitz, I got a laugh when a lady newspaper reporter wrote it was the romance of "the Irish prize fighter and the Jewish girl."

Left Hook O'Brien's first imitation after becoming a groom was to get himself knocked kicking by the lightweight champion. In the fifth round O'Brien forgot the first rule of boxing, which is to keep from kissing the canvas. I was behind him in this fatal fracas, and Butch Ford made haste to point out to me what married life had done to O'Brien. When the kid come to life in his corner after taking it on the chin, his first words was, "I'm through! From now on I'm a cake eater and I'll do all *my* battlin' with the missus!"

O'Brien wasn't making believe either. He turned in his gloves and devoted all his time to managing the four apartment houses he'd bought with the ring earnings of twelve years. Never a champ, O'Brien was a crowd pleaser which always give his best. He

fought all the topnotchers of his day, clicked off heavy sugar as a drawing card, ducked the Good-Time Charleys and saved his pennies. Although Barbara liked box fighting and scrappers the same way she liked diphtheria, she held up Left Hook O'Brien as a object lesson to me.

One night I picked up the paper to read that the father of Jack Fairfax had died abroad and left his dizzy son about everything but Niagara Falls and the Panama Canal. The old man had once cut Jack off, but relented on his deathbed, according to newspaper accounts.

Well, this money, money everywhere and not a drop for me, had me fit to be tied! Left Hook O'Brien was married and settled down, sitting handsome financially. Pansy Pilkington was copping serious money in the Follies and had Carlton Herne, a millionaire, in tow. Jack Fairfax had just come into a fortune. Butch Ford was a bloated bondholder. Where was *I*? Still plugging along, getting no place, putting every penny of my spare jack into improvements on my tea parlor and living from fight to fight!

Carlton Herne used to play the stock market now and again, just to keep from yawning himself to death. Sometimes he'd win, sometimes he'd lose,

and neither made the slightest change in his daily routine of life. He seemed to get more kick out of dropping fifty or a hundred grand than he did out of cleaning up the same amount. It must be a wonderful sensation not to have to give dollars a thought! One day Herne smacked the ticker right on the pan for a quarter of a million, which he needed like he needed a third leg. He put Pansy jerry, and she likewise done herself plenty of good, but although Herne had slipped me the same tip, I laid off for a while. I was no Carlton Herne by no stretch of the imagination, and if *I* lost it meant something!

But that night I dreamed of nothing but stock tickers and mints. Came the dawn, and I staked every dime I had in the world on Herne's hot information. The fact that the notes I still owed on "Ye Tiffin Shoppe" would be due in a couple of days didn't stop me. I figured I'd be sitting on the top of the world by then.

For about six hours, I *was* sitting on the top of the world—then there was an earthquake! The stock took a nose dive, and when the smoke died away and my brokers got done phoning me, I was as busted as the Ten Commandments. I'd took one on the button, and in a daze I rushed to my tea parlor to tell Barbara, like a kid with a scraped knee running to

his mother. Before I could unload the bad news, Jack Fairfax come swaggering into the place. I hadn't seen that ape since he socked me with the cane and he sure picked a swell time for *this* meeting! I was red-headed, anyways, and the sight of him made me gnash my teeth. Without a word to Barbara I made a lunge at Fairfax, but she grabbed my arm.

"The wild man of Borneo, eh?" leers Fairfax and then his voice changed to a nasty bark. "You and your lady love get off my property!"

"*Your* property?" says me and Barbara in chorus, and my amazement elbowed my rage aside.

"My property!" repeats Fairfax, scanning our faces with a relish. "I have bought up the notes outstanding on your business, those notes are due, and I want my money or the shop!"

"How would you like a bust in the mouth?" I raved, taking a step toward him as Barbara gasped. He turned pale, but stood his ground.

"Nothing would please me more, Grimm, than to have you arrested for assault," he says coldly, "only I have no wish to interfere with the beating you will get from One-Round Carney. I will have a ring-side seat at the abattoir, just as I have a ringside seat here at your defeat in business!"

"So's your old man!" I says. "Do you feel like betting anything on my bout with Carney?"

I was trying to control my feelings, as I suddenly had a great thought.

"Betting that Carney will knock you out is like betting that there are Frenchmen in Paris!" he answers, curling his lip. "Besides, what are you going to use for money?"

"I'll make you a proposition, you big false alarm!" I says. "If you really hold the notes on this joint—well you're now in the tea-parlor game, for I can't take 'em up. But I'll lay you twenty-five thousand bucks against the shop that I'll knock One-Round Carney as dead as Mah Jongg!"

"Put up the twenty-five thousand and you've made a bet!" says Fairfax. "Grimm, you're a glutton for punishment!"

"I'll have the dough on the line tomorrow morning," I promised him. "And all I crave is one look at your face when I upset Carney. Now shove off before I break in a right hook on you!"

"I shall leave after I've sampled a cup of your famous tea," he grins coolly. "Or, *my* famous tea, as I should say, *now!*"

And I hope to get ill if this lounge lizard didn't

flop down at a table and commence giving my pretty female help the once over. That baby had nerve enough to open a gondola plant on the Sahara Desert!

"I'd like to see those notes, if you please, Mr. Fairfax," says Barbara, as cold as a polar bear's nose.

"Why, my dear girl, surely you do not think I would jest about this matter, do you?" he says, leering at her, and he pulls a sheaf of papers from his inside pocket. "Here they are, fair lady, read 'em and weep!"

One look was ample. Strangling a wild yen to smack him down, I took Barbara back in the stock-room and lifted her onto a packing case.

"Honey!" I says, slipping my manly arm around her, "don't bawl me out. I'm up to my comely ears in grief, and I don't mean perchance! Yet with any kind of a break I can still outsmart Fairfax. I lost about everything but my appendix in the stock market, but don't swoon, I'm guaranteed twenty-five grand for this battle with One-Round Carney. I'll put the bee on Carlton Herne for that amount, bet it with Fairfax and pay Herne back when the fight promoters give me my gravy. Then——"

"Why not get the money from the promoters now

and buy back your notes from Fairfax?" interrupts Barbara.

"I thought you'd think of that!" I grins, tweaking her silky cheek. "Because *this* way I can win back my tea shop and make Fairfax tear his hair! And look what I'll have to fight for when I go in there with Carney. You agree that I always need a target—well, what's at stake in this scrap gives me a barn door to shoot at, and I can hit pin points dead center!"

Then the excitement commenced. My plans was all damp. Suppose One-Round Carney put me away? I should have consulted *her* before trying my hand at Wall Street, etc., etc., etc.

But by noon the next day I'd borrowed the twenty-five thousand from Herne and bet it with Fairfax.

For no reason at all, Carlton Herne threw a big party for Pansy Pilkington at his sultan's palace on Long Island Sound, and I managed to get Barbara to go with me, though she was still peeved at my bet. It was a soup-and-fish affair and considerable blow-out. Both "Who's Who" and "Who's Through" was well represented, and besides that a hot orchestra and a flock of Big-Time entertainers did their stuff. Of course Pansy obliged with her wicked Charleston

and also warbled "Insufficient Sweetie" before the evening was over, registering her usual wow. A well-known singer which was there tore off a couple of grand-opera hits, and I kept out of sight for fear they'd ask *me* to punch somebody in the nose, as long as each guest was performing their own particular trick.

Barbara and Pansy was coldly civil to each other, but the whole three of us got the shock of our lives when we discovered Jack Fairfax among those present! Two more jolts come when it developed that my best friend and my worst enemy did time at college together and it was Fairfax that Herne bet ten grand I'd lay Carney like linoleum in a round. Creeping mackerel!

Fairfax seemed to get a big kick out of this situation and went out of his way to be mockingly polite to me and Barbara. I give in to Barbara's orders that there was to be no scenes, so I didn't tip Herne about what was between me and his old college chum.

My refusal to knock over a highball, of which there was rivers, went big with Barbara, which in a clinging, sky-blue evening gown had the other cuteys biting their nails. I fill a tuxedo easy, and Herne told me once during the evening's merrymaking that

me and Barbara together made a pair off a magazine cover. Snicker *that* away! Barbara was something more than sweet to me, never far from my side except when tripping the lightly fantastical with some society mug, while I was strutting my stuff with one of them snappers from the Sunday rotogravure sections. I asked Barbara how I was getting by in this semi-Ritz mob, and she said she was proud of me.

During one of the endless dances we strolled out in the big gardens around Herne's mansion and sat down on a stone bench. It was a braw, bricht, moonlicht night which not only made me sentimental but it give me the blues. Here was Barbara not three inches away from me, but with my ability to lose money she seemed further away than Heaven!

"Why so pensive?" Barbara's voice broke in on my broodings.

"I got the willies!" I bust out bitterly. "I'm the original Dumb Daniel from Stupidville! I was the baby which was going to dumfound Europe, and here I am back again where I started, without a dime and still a flop. If this Carney gets lucky and socks me for a trip, Fairfax will have my tea-room and my twenty-five grand to boot! Not only that, I'll have fought Carney for nothing but the exercise. What

a fine oil can *I* turned out to be—I've lost everything!"

"You still have *me*, Bill!" murmurs Barbara softly.

Hot Fido! That braced me up like a cold shower! The yellow in me vanished like magic, and I sat up straight with my arm around this hashish eater's dream and throwed out my chest, ready at the word to take on the world and feeling highly capable of giving it a battle. Who *couldn't* make good for a girl like that?

"You must find Fairfax and get him to release you from your foolish wager, Bill," says Barbara, arranging her hair after a wonderful intermission in which talk was at a premium. "Offer him the twenty-five thousand you borrowed from Mr. Herne for the notes on the tea shop."

"But, suppose——" I started.

"Bill," quietly remarks Barbara, "did you hear my suggestion?"

One look educated me.

"Kayo, honey!" I says. "I'm off."

I searched the gardens for Fairfax close to half an hour before I finally found him with no less than Pansy which was supposed to loathe the very sight of him. They both glanced up when I stumbled on

'em, and I give Pansy a stare which must of put a permanent wave in her hair. She flushed and looked uncomfortable, but Fairfax deliberately blew his cigarette smoke in my face and grinned nastily.

"What's the trouble, Grimm—lonesome? Or do you feel out of your element among ladies and gentlemen?" he sneered.

Pansy jumped up furiously, before I could select which hand to make a witty retort with.

"Be yourself!" she flares at this Airedale. "*You're* the only one out of place here! You ride Bill because you know he won't hit you for fear of killing you—like a devilish child teasing a too-easy parent. You're a coward, Fairfax!"

Before he could give her a answer which would probably have forced me to cuff him, I spoke my piece.

"Fairfax," I says, dying in agony of having to crawl to this bozo, "I'd like to call our bet off, and I'm ready to take up my notes——"

"You'll call nothing off!" he interrupts, with a snarl like a wolf. "You won't welsh on *me*, you big, cheap squawker! I'm going to break you and make you like it, do you hear that? You can stay here with your ex-sweetheart—I'll inform Barbara Baxter where you may be found!"

He ducked like a rabbit through the hedge before I could make a move. I whirled on Pansy, boiling with rage.

"What are you doing off in corners with that parsnip?" I demanded as she tremblingly lit a cigarette. "You know he's trying to promote you, and you're playing with dynamite. You're a big girl now, Pansy, and I can't be looking after you for the rest of my life!"

"Don't be so rosy with me, Bill," says Pansy soothingly; "I only wanted to make Carlton Herne jealous!"

"There's guys which that kind of stuff don't make jealous; it just makes 'em disgusted!" I says. "So you like Herne, hey?"

"Absolutely!" returns Pansy. "I'm wild about him, Bill; he's a dear! And—aren't you going to dance with me at *all* to-night?"

"C'mon!" I says and we started for the ballroom. "Listen here, Pansy, you give Herne a run-around, and I'll take you over my knee and spank you!"

And I meant it!

About a hour later we're all inside the big house clowning, and me and Barbara was getting ready to leave. Herne was telling us about something, and Fairfax was hanging over Pansy at the other end of

the room with a lit match between his fingers, too busy talking to light his cigarette. I seen Fairfax bend down swiftly like he was going to kiss Pansy, and she shoved him away. The next instant Pansy screamed and jumped up, beating frantically at her dress with her hands. The burning match must of fell on her gauzy evening gown and set it ablaze!

It sounds much worse than it actually was, though there was reams of excitement for a few minutes. The rest of 'em just stood around helpless with panic, so I had to act like a movie star and smother Pansy's flaming dress with a costly rug and my equally costly dinner coat. To make it even more scenario, Pansy executed a faint in my arms. Darn it, I hate this grand-stand stuff, no fooling! However, she wasn't burnt very much, but my hands was a mass of blisters. Fairfax's drunken laugh caused Herne to do a snap in, and he chased Fairfax out of the house with orders to come back never.

I was busy for the next half hour ducking the gushing girls which mistook me for a hero. Herne had a doctor there in no time, and the scream of it all was that Pansy got the hystericals and wouldn't stand nobody near her but—Barbara! The three of us wound up by going home in Herne's big Rolls-Royce, with him at the wheel, and when Pansy

kissed Barbara good night I nearly fainted. The guy which can figure out women can also figure out what a pussycat means when it says meow!

Burns is slow in healing, and my hands was in bad shape the night of my bout with One-Round Carney, as I showed the newspaper boys in my dressing-room before the massacre. Some of 'em said I was a sap to go in there with a murderer like Carney with my maulers in distress, but a postponement would of cost me a ten-thousand-dollar appearance forfeit, and that was out! A row over the referee had gave me a five days' delay at that, and helped. Butch beefed purposely to give my hands a chance to get well. We didn't care actually if Carney's old man refereed the fight; all we wanted was somebody which could count up to ten.

Though I had on all the bandages and tape the law would allow, my working tools was far from right. As Shifty Jones boosted me into the ring I peered through the tobacco smoke and picked out Barbara and Pansy in Herne's ringside box, and I waved to 'em with a confidence I certainly didn't feel. Jack Fairfax was parked only a few feet away from 'em, and when the huge mob greeted my entrance with a roof-shaking cheer, he actually turned around in his seat and glared at my well-wishers!

Thinking I'd lose the fight on account of my burnt hands, Pansy had a tear in her eye, but that hadn't stopped her from betting a thousand bucks on me.

One wait after another put the excited crowd on edge and kept 'em there—and me with 'em. Carney was late showing up and when he did he started a long argument with Butch Ford about my bandages. Monsieur Carney was hep to the fact that my hands was burned, and he was there to make the most of it. This was a big shot for us both, and I didn't blame him—it's all in the game—but the customers wanted action and they razzed Carney to a fare-thee-well.

They razzed plenty more when the camera men crawled into the ring to get some pictures for the movies which was to be taken of the fight. That was more delay, while they fixed the batteries of blinding lights and we posed for this and that. All the while my mind was in uproar. If I didn't knock out Carney, I stood to lose my tea parlor, my share of the purse and my chance to meet the world's champion. Likewise, Pansy would drop a grand and my buddy Carlton Herne would lose ten thousand to Fairfax, which would have the laugh on us all!

Finally the nerve-racking stalling come to a end. The ring was swiftly cleared of everybody but me,

Carney and the referee. All the lights went out but the high-powered ones over our heads, the cameras begin steadily clicking and a hushed buzzing settled over the tightly packed thousands, slumping back in their seats to witness a long, hard-fought battle. Fifteen gory, hair-raising rounds of felonious assault and battery was what they looked forward to, with maybe the referee having to call the decision on a hair line.

But, boys and girls, *I* had entirely different plans! *My* idea was that the quicker this one was over the better for all concerned. That's the way Carney sized up the situation himself, and at the bell we both charged from our corners with one idea in mind—to win with a punch if possible!

I wasted no precious time in feinting, but immediately started a vicious left hook to the jaw. At that exact instant Carney let one go to the same place. Both punches was perfectly timed and perfectly delivered. Each glove connected solidly, *and we both went down with a crash*, while the neighbors' children went simply insane! The first I heard was the referee saying "Five!" in a kind of trembling voice. I rolled over and blinked up, but I could see no signs of Mr. Carney. Then I seen a hairy leg on top of my heaving chest, and the next

thing I make out is One-Round Carney sprawled on top of me, dead to the world, and the referee dazedly counting us *both* out!

I felt very slapstick, but otherwise I was O. K.

At "seven" I throwed off Carney's leg and at "eight" I was on one knee against the ropes—there seemed to be a thousand of 'em! You should of heard that race riot outside the ring—sixty-four boiler factories and twenty-two Marnes! Butch Ford's working face under the lower rope looked like a drunken moon. At "nine" I grabbed the ropes frantically and managed to pull myself erect. Carney hadn't flicked a muscle, and the referee grabbed my glove, holding it up to the frenzied mob.

I'd just got up in time to win!

The bout had lasted exactly thirty-one seconds—I trained two months for it. The enraged patrons of the manly art, which had paid famine prices for seats and waited weeks in the expectations of a hour of thrills, showered the ring with cushions, pop bottles and baffled howls of "Fake!" The coppers had their work cut out for them for a couple of hours afterward.

But I'd won back "Ye Tiffin Shoppe," saved my own twenty-five thousand, and Herne's crazy bet on a one-round knock-out, so I should be annoyed!

CHAPTER X

THAT BIG PUNCH CLIMAX

THEY tell me there's still hordes of otherwise normal people which in spite of prohibition has a horrible yen to crash into the movies and make a monkey out of glorious Swanson, Rin-Tin-Tin and birds of a feather. I think it's only fair to broadcast to these parties my own grief-stricken experience with the galloping tintypes in the hopes they may snap out of it and be themselves.

I was now the leading candidate for the exacting portfolio of world's heavyweight boxing champion—a good, well-paying job, though just a trifle wearing on a man's profile. Having met the title holder's exorbitant demands by knocking the other challengers as dead as the crossword puzzle craze, me and Butch Ford was impatiently waiting the heavyweight king's pleasure to step into a ring with me and get his ears slapped off.

But study of my knockout record made the cham-

pion one of boxing's bitterest enemies, and while I raved in the newspapers with the help of the sympathetic sport writers, this banana stalled and laid down impossible conditions for a fracas. He was strictly what Gjuro McGuff would call a "price fighter" and he finally named a amount for his services which made a bout out of the question.

Me and Barbara was on the brink of opening up another tea parlor as the start of a chain of these traps, when Pansy gummed my praiseworthy plans and come near putting a end to my big romance with the fair Barbara.

One night we stepped out to one of Carlton Herne's supper parties for Pansy after she'd done her chores in the Follies. When the crockery had been cleared away and we was down to dancing, watching the cabaret and the out-of-town buyers viewing our famous party with awe, Pansy made the fatal crack.

"Carl," she murmurs with a murderously promoting glance at the lovelorn millionaire, "do you know what I'd love to be?"

He missed out as a guesser.

"I'd love to be a movie star!" says Pansy, point blank.

"You better lay off them cocktails!" I bust out

with a snort. "You're sitting pretty right now, with Broadway at your feet. Why don't you leave good enough alone?"

"Are you Pansy's guardian?" inquires Barbara, with a slight frown.

Herne turned to Pansy, which was regarding me and Barbara with the smile which always reminds me of a Maltese.

"Well, Pansy, I see no reason on earth why your ambition should not be realized," says Herne. "You were in pictures once, were you not?"

"Yes and no," laughs Pansy. "I was an extra—an enter with others at one stage of my battle with New York. But that wee nip of the clicking cameras has given me a fearful thirst for more. Bill should remember that—he worked in a picture with me, also as a super."

"Hush your mouth," I growls. "I been trying to live that down. Anyways, they took me out of the movie and put in a title instead."

That wasn't strictly true, but I felt a laugh was needed—for no reason whatsoever Barbara seemed to be getting steamed at me.

"Why, I never knew that," exclaims Herne. "That *is* interesting! So you and Pansy both reached the top together, you might say." All at

once he smacks the table with his hand. "By Jove, what a picture combination that would make today: Pansy Pilkington and Bill Grimm—the star of the Follies and the man the champion is afraid to fight!"

I looked up to find both Barbara and Pansy staring at me—and, oh, what a difference there was in their expressions!

"That team in a film production would be an unbeatable box-office attraction," goes on Herne, all hopped up about his thought and noticing nothing. "I say—how would you like to try it?"

"That's kosher with me!" breathes Pansy. "All we'd need is the proper story!"

"I'll form a company, buy a suitable story and star you two!" Herne rattles on. "I'll personally put up all the money—fortunately I have more of that commodity than I know what to do with, and I'm tired of being an idler. The picture company will give me something to occupy my time and—"

But what else he said is past *me*, good people. I wouldn't fool you; I was in what you might call a trance. Already I seen my name in the electric lights, important jack pouring in and more fame than I could handle. The champ didn't wish no part of my game and was simply giving me a run around,

while here was a chance to make a quick clean-up. With pressing my foot with hers under the table and everything she had on the come-hither eye work she was giving me, Pansy added her pleadings to Herne's. "If only *Barbara* would make some comment on the thing," I kept thinking.

"We'll be twin stars, big boy!" cried Pansy, suddenly reaching over the table and clasping my hand.

But the twin stars which was Barbara's glaring eyes had me leery. I remembered the set-tos I'd had with her in the past over what she claimed was my undue interest in Pansy, and I could fully understand Barbara being cold on any arrangement which would throw me constantly in Pansy's company if not in her arms. Undoubtedly I'd have to make love to Pansy in this funny picture Herne was going to throw—even hug and kiss her. Cold cat! I knew how Barbara would stand on that little matter, and with Herne and Pansy awaiting my answer I just hung fire.

Being a woman, Pansy read my hesitation like you read a billboard. She glanced like a little imp from me to Barbara and then shook her finger at my fiancée.

"Bill is simply waiting for you to yes him, Barbara," she smiles. "Come on, be a sport! You

needn't be afraid that I'll steal him—I'm sure you've got him hobbled, bound and chained!"

"It is refreshing to know that at last *you* are sure!" comes back Barbara, smiling too, but fit to be tied. "But, really, I hadn't considered *that* phase of the matter. I'm naturally interested in Bill's future. I want to see him hitch his wagon to a star, but not necessarily a movie star! Frankly, I'm opposed to Bill's going into pictures, not because I fear for his constancy, but because he is not an actor and would soon tire of efforts to make him a synthetic one."

"Oh, I don't know," remarks Pansy thoughtfully. "I wouldn't call Bill exactly stupid."

She built me up perfect.

"I don't think I'm no mug either," I says, my pride walloped. "I got as much chance of being a actor as the next one!"

"Then by all means accept Mr. Herne's proposition," snapped Barbara, as cold as a loan shark's eye.

"Drag out your cameras—you're on!" I shot at Herne, yet I felt a strange lack of satisfaction which I simply couldn't account for.

Pansy and Herne immediately begin to dash off gay toasts to the success of the picture, but they

was alone in their celebration. Barbara give all her attention to the floor show, while I just sat there with my mind in a whirl. What I was trying to figure out was whether it was worth while to get in wrong with her merely to become the sensation of the movie industry.

The more I gazed at Barbara's beautiful face the more I felt I was exchanging Niagara Falls for a glass of water, and a couple or three times I cleared my throat to tell Herne I'd only been kidding. But some friends of his pegged our party and come over, among them a newspaper writer, and of course they had to be told all about our daring project. That put me in the position where I couldn't lay down on Herne without making him look silly and me even more so. I was plenty glad when Barbara give me the office for a shove off and we bowed out. As we was leaving, Pansy smiles this at Barbara:

"I hope you won't be angry with me for borrowing Bill—I promise to return him to you intact and famous."

"You are *so* good to me!" says Barbara sweetly.

To put the finishing touch on a horrible night, on the way down the stairs me and Barbara is staging a lover's quarrel when we run full tilt into Jack

Fairfax. He couldn't miss hearing Barbara riding me, and the look of delight on his pan made me want to bury my fist to the hilt in it!

Well, lads and lassies, Herne lost no time getting the machinery turning over for foisting me and Pansy on a long-suffering motion-picture public. My millionaire buddy become a hundred horsepower go-getter overnight. Studio space was rented at one of the big Long Island film distilleries, a slightly goofy director was hired and the story bought, which was to put me and Pansy on a par with Norma Valentino, Rudolph Talmadge, Marion Menjou, Adolph Davies or what have you?

The scenario sported the high-sounding title of "The Fighting Lover," and it was the dizziest collection of hokum either you, me or anybody else ever laid a eye on. There was everything in this pungent bedtime story but the battle of the Marne and the Johnstown flood. It was the elephant's brassiere, no fooling! I was supposed to leap off cliffs, bridges, piers and airplanes, be shipwrecked, caught in a blazing building, a blizzard and other maniacal escapades in season. In the second reel I was doomed to run a racing auto into a speeding railroad train. At this point in the first reading Butch Ford, which was present, arose and called all bets off.

“You guys is all out of shape!” snorts my manager. “I got a battler here which may yet be a world’s champeen—d’ye think I’m cuckoo enough to let him risk his neck doin’ *that* lunatical stuff?”

“He’ll do it and like it!” snaps our production manager. “He may be risking his neck, but Mr. Herne is risking a hundred thousand dollars on him!”

“That makes him a elk!” sneers Butch. “Well, fun’s fun, but the movie’s out, as far as we’re concerned, and I don’t mean perhaps!”

The director holds up a soothing hand.

“We have no intention of subjecting Mr. Grimm to injury,” he says. “All of those stunts will be performed by doubles, and your coming champion will personally be handled like a crate of eggs!”

A half hour later Butch had been pacified, though everybody was gasping and hoarse. Then Pansy tuned in.

“That title, ‘The Fighting Lover,’ is all damp,” she says firmly. “I rate equal prominence in the billing, and that label only covers Bill.”

This started the ball rolling again, and hot words was bandied about till it looked like the conference would wind up in a free-for-all. Finally the pic-

ture was retitled "The Fighting Lovers," and Pansy signed off.

One of my first acts was to create parts in this frolic for Butch, Left Hook O'Brien and Shifty Jones. I believe in always taking care of my friends, and should I of known you, you'd of been in "The Fighting Lovers" too!

But I want to say to you this afternoon that not even the comforting presence of these boys could kill off my swiftly growing dislike of being in the movies. Barbara called the turn—I was satisfied I was no actor, and I hadn't the suspicion of craving to be one. I personally thought the mock picture we was committing was a terrible thing—a far-fetched, silly burlesque which would be razed off the screen. Added to that, the daily bickerings with the director and Pansy kept me on a constant raw edge.

Pansy had now fallen prey to the idea that she was Pola Negri, and she put on dog till it would of been comical if it hadn't been goat-getting. She got to speaking of "her public," and she arrived at the studio whenever she felt like it.

She carried a couple of maids and a secretary and couldn't perform for five inches of film without a orchestra playing while she emoted. Acting both

on and off the lot, Pansy ritzed everybody, even our director, but that didn't worry him a particle. That flat tire had a good paying job which looked to be permanent, as with Pansy's stalling it seemed like it would take a lifetime to film "The Fighting Lovers."

Carlton Herne thought everything she done was exactly right, and a squawk to him was a squawk wasted. It was his dough and his girl!

I felt I was being made to look like a fool when cheaply hired professional daredevils disguised to look like me risked their lives to do the desperate stunts I'd be credited with in the picture. All I was actually doing was appearing in a endless series of close-ups with Pansy, which daily kept insisting that her part be built up more and mine be cut down. They could of cut my part right out of this hippodrome and it wouldn't of made *me* tear my hair!

While all this was taking place Barbara treated me like I was poison ivy. When I did manage to slip away from the studio to see how matters was going at my tea parlor she got busy with the girls or the customers the minute I darkened the threshold of the drum. At nights she was generally "too fatigued" to give me the boon of a interview. When she did it was like calling on your older sister. My

nerves was shot to pieces between that and the opium fiend's dream I was appearing in. Believe me, gentle reader, I would of give plenty to check out of the noiseless drama!

Butch Ford, Left Hook O'Brien and Shifty Jones was about the only ones which was thoroughly enjoying themselves as actors. They wasn't getting much money, but they could laugh out loud. One morning I seen Butch tumble out the door of the projection-room followed by our director, which, red-faced and pop-eyed, shook his fist at my manager.

"And if you ever come in here again you moron, I'll have you barred from the lot," shouts this egg and slams the door.

"Aw, so's your Aunt Emma!" growls Butch.

"How come?" I asked him, walking up with the interested Left Hook O'Brien.

"Say," answers Butch, "this movie of yours is goin' to be a terrible flop, no kiddin'! I doubt if even me and Left Hook can make it click. I was just in there gettin' a look at the alleged comedy scenes, and they're painful, what I mean. All them yes-men was goin' into hysterics over our near-comedian, and I started in to weep. At the first sob they streeeted me, like you seen!"

"For cryin' out loud!" remarks Left Hook.

"Exactly!" says Butch.

Vaudeville would of been a pushover for them two monkeys!

As we stalled and capered about the big lot and the days went by with the production cost steadily airplaning, another thing happened which was to lead to the final wow. Jack Fairfax made his peace with Carlton Herne, humbly apologizing for the matter in which Pansy figured which caused Herne to give Fairfax the air. Herne, a nice clean kid, was a colander when it come to holding grudges. So Fairfax begin aceing around the set where me and Pansy was working, careful to cheer Pansy's acting and agree with Herne in everything. Trying to get rid of him was like trying to get rid of asthma. Him and our director got to be quite chummy, dollar cigars and a flask which Fairfax kept in constant circulation helping no little.

Well, the very sight of this guy was enough to burn me up, but his sarcaistical cracks about my acting and my allowing doubles to take the risks for me soon had me unfit to be at large! One afternoon I was in the midst of a very serious scene with Pansy, and at the critical moment Fairfax, in a chair beside the director, let out a loud and raucous hee-haw. When we both stopped running, Fairfax

must of been a good nine blocks from the studio, and I was at the gates being held back by four soothing watchmen.

I didn't see that humpty-dumpty again for a week.

Then one day he shows up on the set with a big, husky young lad for a companion. If his boy friend had a set of wheels on him I'd of figured he was a box car, and he looked as tough as thirty days in the hoosegow. Butch looked the burly newcomer over, scratching his chin in a thoughtful way.

"Get ready for some grief!" mutters Left Hook O'Brien, nudging Shifty Jones, and they ranged themselves beside me just in case. Fairfax brought his find right over to where we was standing.

"This is Young Hoffman," he says, with a short grin.

Young Hoffman, blinking at the high-powered lights and sneaking open-mouthed looks at the somewhat ungarbed Pansy and the other actors, neither denies or agrees with the charge. I remembered reading about him in the sport pages for the past couple of weeks—a new heavyweight sensation which had been knocking off all and sundry out in the tanks. Me and my handlers viewed him with interest. He looked like a good boy. But you can't tell nothing about none of 'em till the bell rings.

"I thought I told you to keep away from here?" I snarled at Fairfax.

"Mr. Herne has rented this studio—you're just one of the hired help," he says, careful to keep Young Hoffman in front of him. "You've been doing a lot of crying because you can't get a fight. Well, I'm so sure this boy will dispose of you that I'll give you a bonus, over and above the purse, merely to see you get into a ring with him!"

"How long since *you* been a matchmaker?" grunts Butch Ford before I can answer. "You and this chump beat it or you'll each drop a decision right here and now! We can take Young Hoffman without displacin' a hair of our heads, and if he wants a piece of us I'll do business with his manager."

"I thought you'd crawl!" sneers Fairfax.

Not a word out of Young Hoffman—he's busy getting a eyeful of the movies from the inside.

"My contract with Carlton Herne stops me from fighting till this picture's finished," I says, boiling over but trying to keep my head. "Besides, I ain't going to box no boloneys while there's any chance at all of me getting a fight with the champion!"

"You fight *this* fellow, Mr. Movie Hero, and you'll never box the champion or anybody else, I promise you!" says Fairfax savagely.

Left Hook O'Brien made a sudden warlike move towards him, but I pushed him back. The argument had drawn a mob of highly interested listeners around us, and I felt I was getting much the worst of the debate. The grin of satisfaction on Fairfax's face ruined what little judgment I had.

"Look here, you big stiff!" I bust out, "we shoot the last of this opera next week. It's a fight scene, get me? Well, you bring over Young Hoffman and I'll take him on in that scene instead of the tenth-rate set-up they got hired for the part. I'll box him for nothing, and you can pay him. Why d'ye think of *them* berries?"

"We'll be here!" cries Fairfax with a look of joy, and walks briskly off the stage with Young Hoffman, which had looked hard at me, but never opened his pan from the time he come in till he left. The movie studio had simply put *that* gil in a trance.

"That was a sucker play if there ever was one!" hisses Butch to me angrily, when the director had called the others back to their places. "I could of got twenty-five grand for a muss with this Hoffman, and—"

"Shut up!" I says. "If I hadn't done what I did, the story would get around that I'd ducked Hoff-

man. Where would my movie be then? Would the champ have another out or wouldn't he?"

"You're right, at that," sighs Butch after a minute. "Well, when you get in there with him, hold this tramp up. Make him think he's good, and I'll smoke up a match with him later for Rickard."

It was quite a while later before I fully realized what I'd done. I'd talked myself into a real fight instead of a *reel* one, for what our director was always calling "the big punch climax" to our movie.

Butch circulated around Fistiana for the next few days getting a line on just what this Young Hoffman had, and the reports he brought back was anything but encouraging. While most of the birds Hoffman had knocked stiff was little more than catchers, he'd performed his job in a workmanlike manner and had done all that was asked of him. The low-down seemed to be that he was a fair boxer with a sweet sock in his left and was as game as a football. He'd won his last eleven bouts by kayos, and even if they're all hand-picked you can't be no bum and keep smacking 'em down!

Butch was bothered, moaning what a tough break it would be if Fairfax had put over a fast one and jobbed us out of a crack at the title. But I wasn't

worried—much. Not because I thought I was a world beater, but because if I couldn't cope with Hoffman then I had no business in a ring with the world's heavyweight champion and I might as well find it out now as any time!

The night before the filming of this "big punch climax," which was to cause me so much disaster, I managed to get Barbara to go for a auto ride with me. Before we'd covered a dozen miles I'd told her all about the jam Jack Fairfax had foxed me into, and I begged her to come over to the studio and see this fight the following day. I always fought better, or did *anything* better, with Barbara where I could see her!

She'd never changed her attitude from the time I began this infernal movie, and she'd steadily refused to visit the studio and see her future lord and master—on paper—do his stuff. But now it was all different! I was in a tough spot and needed her encouragement and she didn't even hesitate about letting me have it. Of course she'd be there and of course I'd flatten Young Hoffman. There was a kiss went with that too. Me and Barbara had our little mixups, the course of true love is no macadam pavement, but when it come down to cases and I was in trouble she was always in my corner, right

or wrong. If you can't get *that* kind of a girl try and do without *any!*

The next day the studio was as crowded as a can of sardines, and getting inside was no mean feat. Carlton Herne had brought down a mob of his fight-loving society friends for this choice tidbit, and as everybody on the lot had been tipped on the scrap, why, everybody on the lot waited to view it. Somebody had wised up the sport writers, and they were there in full force, our director having brains enough to see that they got the best ringside seats. So instead of a audience composed of hired extras the ring was surrounded by experts, blown-in-the-flask fans and everybody else which by hook or crook had managed to crash the gate.

Butch Ford kept hoping that Young Hoffman would take a run-out powder on Fairfax, as soon as he figured what a sap he'd be to box me in a movie when he could get a raft of doubloons for meeting me in a ring. But this hope was without the slightest foundation, for Young Hoffman turned up on time, with his pilot, Fairfax, and a couple of handlers. I heard afterward this little stunt had cost Fairfax a even ten thousand dollars.

The scenario called for me being doped by a bribed second in my dressing-room before the fight,

and this Thomas-foolery was just one of the thousand things I'd hollered at as being ridiculous. It was not only old stuff; it was well nigh impossible for a thing like that to happen in real life, and I knew the case-hardened fight fans would laugh their heads off when they seen me pull that doped business in the movie. But our director told me that it supplied the proper "menace," was great dramatic stuff, and as it had goaled 'em hundreds of times before there was no reason why it wouldn't goal 'em again.

That's the way that baby figured everything—give 'em the old hokum, the home run in the ninth with the bases full, the touchdown at the critical minute, the doped fighter, the bought jockey, the framed auto race, etc., etc. One idea would last that guy a lifetime!

Well, while the cameras clicked merrily away, I took the drink supposed to be doped—and *almost immediately I got dazed and sick at my stomach!* Don't grin; it was far from a joke, as I'll soon show you. I staggered around the dressing-room, and in a dim haze I heard our director howling that my "acting" was simply marvelous. I tried to tell Butch there was something most decidedly wrong, but my tongue got twisted and my mumblings was mean-

ingless. Like a man in a dream, I could feel myself being half shoved through the ropes into the ring to meet the smiling Young Hoffman, which stood waiting, alert and confident. The sport writers were watching me with puzzled looks on their faces, but on Jack Fairfax's face was a triumphant leer.

Stumbling around and shaking my head to try and clear away the cobwebs, I heard the bell and with it Butch's shrill shriek, "Stop—this here's a frame-up!" There was a rising roar from the crowd, and I seen not one, but three or four Young Hoffmans and every one of 'em was socking me plenty! I just couldn't seem to snap into it, and I kept doing a Leon Errol all over the ring while Hoffman followed me up, ripping in rights and lefts which shook me from head to heel. A torrid right uppercut dropped me to my knees, and I got up without a count, a sick boy. But by instinct I covered my head with my gloves to protect it from the hurricane of blows I knew would follow that knockdown.

The hurricane came, all right, but somehow I managed to weather the punches and hang on to Young Hoffman for my life. I didn't seem to be nearly as much hurt as I was annoyed. I was terrible sleepy, could hardly hold my eyes open, and

this Hoffman was keeping me awake. Then the shouting of the crowd begin to get me sore.

"Why don't this palooka knock me kicking and be done with it?" I thought dreamily. Both gloves locked around Hoffman's heaving body, I glared over his shoulder at the mob, but everything was a blur—like one of them snapshots you see of a auto doing a hundred miles a hour.

Young Hoffman suddenly shook me off, and I'd of fell right down on the canvas and took the nap I sure wanted if the ropes hadn't held me up. Hoffman was trying desperately to measure me, but I kept swaying from side to side, and he wasted a dozen haymakers on my elbows and shoulders. I let fly with a right hook, missed him a foot and promptly sprawled on my face in the rosin.

I don't remember getting up, but the next I knew we was against the ropes again and I was mechanically giving him wallop for wallop. No kidding, I couldn't seem to get up no more interest in this mêlée than if I'd been punching a bag!

Pansy was supposed to jump into the ring, stop the fight and expose the villain which had doped me. As per the story, Pansy hopped in, but the next second she'd screamed in alarm when Young Hoffman brushed her roughly aside and went to

work on me again. A lucky swing of mine caught him on the side of the head and he crashed into the ropes to rebound into a clinch. It must of looked shriekingly funny when I yawned in his face.

Our charming director, which now seemed to realize that things was all out of order, was clanging the bell frantically, but neither me or Hoffman give it a tumble. I was too sleepy and Hoffman wanted to finish me, bell or no bell! I got the bright idea that the only way to get rid of this jabbing, hooking gorilla in front of me was to knock him dead. It took a few seconds for that great thought to get firmly planted in my pounding head, but once it did I acted on it. Hoffman stepped back out of the clinch, and with probably the greatest effort I ever made in my life, I grimly rallied myself and stood toe to toe with him, while we slugged madly like a couple of stevedores on a dock.

I missed a right to the face, but landed a hard left to the body, taking two stiff lefts to the mouth in return. (The next day I had to get a couple of loose teeth pulled on account of them two clouts!) Hoffman sent another wicked left to my head, and we traded body punches at close quarters. When Hoffman begin to give ground I just grinned at him sleepily. We both missed lefts, and then I upper-

cut Hoffman twice with my right and the second one changed him from a fighting fool into a set-up. He had the sleeping sickness too now, and with great difficulty I picked out one of his many chins dancing before me and shot my pay-off right hook at it.

The next thing I knew the ring took a few terrific whirls around and around and the canvas rose right up and smacked me in the face. Then—total blackness and peace and quiet at last!

When I come to life again I was laying flat on my back in the ring with my head in Barbara's lap. That part of it was okay with me, but Butch Ford was dousing my face with icy water, and I weakly waved him to lay off. I still had a dull roaring in my head, and on top of that I'd picked up a horrible taste in my mouth. I seen Carlton Herne, Pansy, Left Hook O'Brien and Shifty Jones in the crowd around me. Everybody's face had a anxious look on it. Jack Fairfax was not among those present.

"Well, c'mon, I got to hear it *sometime!*" I says faintly. "Did Young Hoffman stop me?"

"It was the other way around, Bill," grins Butch. "Hoffman's out yet—you socked him pretty before you went to sleep! You knocked that banana cold and then curled up yourself for a little shut-eye."

"Who put *me* to sleep?" I inquired, with some natural curiosity.

"This guy!" snarls Butch, pointing.

I stared upward and seen our very frightened-looking director held by Left Hook and Shifty. Barbara, smoothing back my hair, spoke in my ear.

"I ran to your dressing-room and got that liquid you drank just before you entered the ring," she tells me. "It was chloral hydrate; I've saved enough of it for evidence!"

"But why should anybody give me knockout drops?" I interrupted dizzily, and remembered I was the guy which claimed such a thing could never happen.

"This maniac which calls himself a director done it," says Butch. "What we'll do to him will be ample! He claims you was such a rotten actor that he was afraid you'd clown the scene where you was to act doped, so he slipped you a little chloral. This master mind says he didn't think it would make no difference in the fight, as he figured Young Hoffman must be a tomato or we'd never of stood for him goin' in there with you."

"Hoffman was told to take a knockout, and he crossed us all!" speaks up our director nervously. "I never dreamed he'd make a fight of it. I only

wanted the scene to look real for my big punch climax, and when Mr. Fairfax suggested giving you a little narcotic—”

“Take him away,” I roared, “before I make a murderer out of myself!”

Well, people, this movie, starring me and Pansy Pilkington, would of made a ton of money, only for one thing. We couldn't get no release.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAN WHO SHOULD BE KING

IN a book which I got from the library the other day, full of hand-picked nifties pulled by the world's greatest wise-crackers, I tripped over the following remark:

“By speaking of our misfortunes we often relieve them.”

This typical example of the use writing materials can be put to is the work of a gent entitled Pierre Corneille, which become a full-fledged phantom in the fiscal year of 1684 A. D. (After Dying). Taking Pierre's statement as the text for to-day's lesson, I'm going to break down and confess one of the greatest misfortunes I ever fell a prey to in my life. If speaking of it doesn't relieve me, like Mr. Corneille claims, I'll see my cordon of lawyers with the regards to a suit against his heirs and assigns.

I hadn't been a former actor either a fortnight or

two weeks when Butch Ford signed me to trade swings with the heavyweight champ.

I'd been pretty low after "The Fighting Lovers" failed to click, but now I simply went wild with joy. I figured this match a wonderful break for me. Forty promoters wanted to stage it, as it was a box-office "natural" from every angle. The heavyweight king had made himself as popular as chicken pox with the fight fans on account of changing his evening clothes from trunks and boxing gloves to a tuxedo and a cane. The customers craved to see the champ on the floor and most of 'em rated me a nine to five shot to turn the trick. Not only clubs, but cities bid against each other for the privilege of producing this two-man carnival of aggravated assault and for months there was little else in the newspapers but maybe Helen Wills.

Finally a big New York matchmaker landed the scrap, something which was a cinch from the start, as in no place but dear old Manhattan will they pay crazy prices to view crazy sights. The champion was to get four hundred thousand bucks, win, lose or draw; while I was guaranteed seventy-five thousand under the same conditions. A purse of almost half a million and when Bob Fitzsimmons fought Jim Corbett for the title in 1897, the entire

gate receipts was just twenty-two thousand dollars. No wonder Pompadour Jim bites his nails off when he scans the sport pages these days!

Me and Young Herne was planning to open a flock of tea parlors all over the nation along the lines of Ye Tiffin Shoppe, the joint I already had. Herne had declared himself in to the extent of a quarter of a million and he was all set to put the sugar on the line when along came grief and—but I'm getting ahead of my story, as the fellow in the elevator yells at the absent-minded operator.

Under the watchful eye of Butch Ford and my chief handlers, Left Hook O'Brien and Shifty Jones, I plunged into what the sport writers calls "the gruelling grind" for my coming muss with the champion. This was the fight I'd wanted with all my heart and soul since I first climbed through the ropes of a prize ring! It was my big chance to be king of all the heavyweights and while I felt as confident of the throne as a crown prince with a ninety-nine-year-old father, I was taking no chances of being out of condition. Too much confidence has licked just as many boys as too little ever has. Ask Jess Willard—*he* knows!

Pansy and Herne was constant visitors to my

training camp, which my slightly Scotch manager had thrown open to the public at fifty cents a glimpse. Butch figured the gate on this would cut down our overhead, which was running into real dough with my retinue of sparring partners and whatnot to pay off and feed. My jovial pilot thought no more of currency than you do of your mother and he'd much rather take a kick in the ribs than take a counterfeit penny in change.

One afternoon, Herne calls me aside after my daily workout with Shifty Jones. Wearing a green hat, pour le sport, and smiling mysteriously, Pansy's clinging to Herne's manly arm.

"We're going to let you in on a secret, old chap!" he says, matching her grin.

"I don't think it will be much of a secret to Bill," Pansy giggles.

"Well, go on, broadcast!" I says impatiently, waving Butch away and pulling my bathrobe over me. "You're getting me all unstrung, as the ball of yarn says to the kitten!"

"We're—we're going to be married!" whispers Herne, with a soulful glance at the blushing bride-elect.

"I can't help it!" I growls. "It's all your own fault. I knew if you two kids kept bounding around

together night and day it would come to this! When do you put on the ball and chain?"

Herne looked slightly disappointed at my failure to leap into the air and click my heels together with delight at his announcement, but Pansy busted out laughing and pinches my arm.

"Bill's line simply kills me!" she says to Herne. "Don't let him ride you, Carl." Then she turns back to me, "As soon as my contract with the Follies runs out, we take the big leap!"

"It will only be a few weeks from now," adds Herne, all swelled up like a human yeast cake. "And, of course, you and Barbara will act as best man and bridesmaid, respectively."

"Absolutely!" Pansy says, before I can answer. "Come on, Bill, give us a little service. I once swore I'd never get married without you being present—er—in *some* capacity! I'm sure you won't make me break my solemn oath, will you? And—how about some congratulations?"

I snapped into it and grabbed each of their hands, giving 'em a mighty squeeze.

"I don't know when I heard anything which tickles me more," I told 'em truthfully, "unless it was the first time Barbara Baxter called me 'dear.' I hope you'll both be as happy as——"

"For Gossakes, look who's here!" suddenly interrupted Pansy, nudging me.

I looked—and gnashed my teeth, which is bad for the enamel but good for the nerves. Sauntering in through the doorway to the gym was nothing less than Jack Fairfax. I hadn't laid a eye on this proper tomato since he tried—and failed—to get me knocked stiff in the big ring scene of "The Fighting Lovers."

Well, Mons Fairfax strolled over towards us, with his usual sneering smile tilting a gold-tipped cigarette in the corner of his mouth.

"Hey, you—take that butt out of your pan!" snarls Butch Ford at him. "Don't you see that sign, 'No smokin' allowed in the gym'?"

Fairfax curled his lip and deliberately flicked the lit cigarette on to the canvas of the training ring. Left Hook O'Brien jumped in and stamped it out and I would have smacked Fairfax down for that trick only I drew the color line on this scissorbill—he was yellow! Pansy kissed Herne swiftly on the cheek, gave my hand a little squeeze and shoved off for the theatre. As she swept past, Fairfax bowed to her and tipped his hat but Pansy cut him dead. She once told me that every time he looked at her she felt she wasn't properly dressed. No kid-

ding, Fairfax had about as many warm admirers as a rattlesnake!

"Our little girl friend doesn't appear to like me any more," he remarks, with a short, ugly laugh. His breath would have gave you a bun on.

"Do you know anybody which *does* like you?" I scowled at him. "You better lay off that little girl friend thing or you're liable to get socked on the whiskers. Pansy's on the brink of getting wed!"

Hot dog—you should have seen his color change! He stared from me to Carlton Herne, which was gazing at him coldly.

"Who is the—er—lucky man?" Fairfax finally asks, seemingly a bit dazed.

Herne presents him with a bow, garnished with icicles.

"*You?*" exclaims Fairfax, pretending to be horrified, "you are going to *marry* Pansy? What sort of a joke is this?"

"I see nothing particularly humorous in my approaching marriage, Fairfax," snapped Herne, tightening up and frowning. "I think an explanation of your comment is in order—an immediate explanation!"

"Why, my dear fellow!" Fairfax says, like he's highly shocked. "I cannot believe you seriously

contemplate matrimony with a—with a girl from the Follies. . . . more or less of a public character a dancer who performs nightly in a costume, or lack of one, that is as daring as her contortions on the stage! Think of your name, your social position, your——”

“That will be all from you, sir!” Herne broke in, his face flaming. “I do not wish to discuss the lady—or *anything*—with you!”

With that Herne turned his back on Fairfax, but that dizzy egg wouldn't let good enough alone.

“Why, you poor fool, you should have a guardian!” he busts out. “I'm going to give you a little of your charmer's past history, whether you want it or not. Pansy has been the sweetheart of this pugilist standing beside you, she has also been mine and when she was a waitress in Fairfax Falls her—er—gentlemen friends were far too numerous for tabulation! Do you imagine your family will receive *that* sort of a woman, or that Pansy herself wants you for anything else but your money? Have your fun and good luck to you, Pansy is not without attractions, but why *marry* a——”

With a swift rush, Herne beat me to it. I'd just set for a punch, when his swinging right caught Fairfax flush on the mouth and that lying hound

immediately dented the floor with his carcass. Calling Shifty Jones, I told him to douse Fairfax with the water bucket, get him up and get him out. Then I turned to the still boiling Herne.

"I hope I don't have to tell you that Fairfax is a rotten, cowardly liar!" I says. "I've known Pansy Pilkington for years—we been pals and that's all. The fact that it was me which introduced you two and sicked you on each other ought to be the tip-off on *that* part of it. She never give Fairfax or nobody else more than a handshake till *you* come along and that kid had tough going when she first hit New York—*plenty* tough. They don't make 'em no straighter than the girl you're engaged to and if you hadn't cuffed Fairfax I'd have been off you for life!"

"Good Heavens, man, do you suppose I have any doubts about Pansy?" explodes Herne. "If that filthy cad as much as mentions her name again, I'll kill him!"

"That's okay here," I smiles. "I'll split him with you!"

Supported by the grinning Shifty Jones, Fairfax stopped at the door on his way out.

"You haven't heard the last of this, Herne!" he mumbled viciously.

"So's your old mantilla," I says. "You better do a fade-out while you can walk. You're a terrible matchmaker for yourself and it's positive you can't win here!"

"There are other fields of battle," he snarls, "as you both will soon find out!"

We both did, too. He'd been fouling the world all his life, so Fairfax seen no reason why he should shoot square now. What does this gilaygo do but sneak around and put Carlton Herne's proud old family hep to the fact that their son is about to enter wedlock with Pansy Pilkington as his accomplice. Fairfax then added his own description of Pansy and before he got through Herne's people wasn't fit to be at large!

Herne's father sent for his lovelorn progeny and told him he'd have to think of another way to bust up a dull week-end, because marrying Pansy was out. Then the fun began! Naturally, the boy give his haughty parent a argument, but papa was in no mood for debates. He promised to rub his son right out of his will if he dragged Pansy to the altar and likewise to cut off his present allowance if he didn't instantly give the girl the air. In a way, I couldn't blame the old man. He'd never had the rare treat of meeting Pansy and Jack Fair-

fax's stories about her had gave him the idea that she was just a gold digger, pure and simple—with the chances against her being either of these last two things.

Well, all this was a stiff wallop to Pansy and Herne, but it failed to ruin their plans. My boy friend continued to ace around with the young lady and Fairfax soon reported this to Herne's father, which made good his threats by amputating his son's pin money.

The raft of gelt in Herne's family had made it unnecessary for him to hustle for his daily nutriment and the kid was a bit bewildered at being suddenly thrown on his own. The panic was on! However, he wasn't licked by no means—that baby had lots of stuff. He'd been quite a plunger in Wall Street when the gravy was at his beck and call, so now he rushed down there in the lowly subway instead of his former imported limousine and made a connection with a brokerage house through the business he used to do with 'em. The salary was meaningless, but it was a job of work and the commissions was tasty. Young Herne put everything he had on the ball and within a couple or three weeks he was getting past nicely.

One night I managed to slip away from Butch

Ford and my handlers to pay Barbara Baxter a visit. This was no mean feat, for with a world's championship fight staring me in the face these master minds watched every move I made like they was my mother and I was a four-weeks-old infant! I was hitting the deck, as the gobs says, at five every morning and hitting the hay at nine every night. In between I did roadwork, boxed, tossed the medicine ball, skipped rope, yanked the pulley weights, punched the bag, etc., etc. and so forth—and believe me, they made me like it!

However, speaking of chocolate eclairs, keeping me away from Barbara come under the head of cruel and unusual punishment, so I pulled a Houdini on my trainers. Dressed to thrill, Barbara greeted me with a kiss which made me wonder if I was cheating on Butch Ford, which warned me against partaking of anything intoxicating.

"Was there much tea poured in Ye Tiffin Shoppe today?" I asked her, after we'd talked about this and that.

"We had a splendid day!" she tells me. "Bill, you're going to make a lot of money out of that place. I have the figures on today's receipts—I'll get them for you."

"Don't bother," I says, pulling her back as she

started to rise, "alongside of *your* figure, Barbara, the ones from my cash register wouldn't get a tumble from me! Anyways, when we're married I'm going to let you handle the loot, so you might as well get used to it now."

"You look to be in splendid condition," remarks Barbara, blushing and anxious to change the subject.

"I could step in the ring with the champ tonight and take him!" I assured her. "But, listen, I got to get back to the camp all of a sudden or Butch will have every copper in the world searching for me. I got some news for you—Pansy and Herne's going to marry each other!"

"Why isn't that simply wonderful!" she exclaims. "Oh, I'm *so* glad for Pansy—for both of them. I know they'll be happy! When——"

At that minute the bell rings and Barbara excuses herself. When she come back I got a little surprise. She had Pansy with her.

"Hello, Bill!" says Pansy, which looked like she'd been doing a piece of weeping. "Don't get up. I want you both to sit down and listen to me for a couple of minutes. I'll have to make it snappy, because Carl is to meet me here very soon. You know, of course, how his family has taken our en-

gagement. Well, I don't intend to ruin Carl's life and I want to ask you *this*—do you think I should give him up, now that I know he has so much to lose for me?"

"Act your age!" I busts out with impatience. "You ain't marrying Herne's relatives, let 'em squawk. Where do they get off to high hat *you*? Suppose they *are* one of the oldest families in New York? *You're* descended from the oldest family in the world—Adam and Eve!"

"Bill, this is no laughing matter!" Barbara shakes her head at me and puts her arm around Pansy, which is dabbing at her eyes with a inch of lace. "Do you really love him, dear?" Barbara asks her.

Pansy's answer is a bob of her bobbed head in the anti-negative.

"Then by all means marry him!" is Barbara's verdict. "Carlton Herne is not a child and I'm confident he'll find you enough incentive to win success without the aid of his father's money!"

"Hey, hey!" I approved. "Herne's nobody's clown. He knows his turnips and with *you* to make good for, Pansy, the boy can't miss!"

"Oh, you're both so darned nice!" cries Pansy, and jumps up to grab our hands.

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The bell buzzes once again and in a minute we got Mr. Carlton Herne, Esq. in our midst.

"Howdy!" I grins. "We just got done panning you!"

He smiles back kind of mournfully and bends over to kiss Pansy.

"I wouldn't blame you if you had been," he sighs, sitting beside her. "This was the day I was going to invest two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in your proposed chain of tea shops, Bill. Well, I couldn't put two hundred and fifty dollars in it now!"

"Nevertheless, we'll *get* that quarter of a million," announces Barbara calmly. "Let me tell you of a plan I've been concocting for days. I really think it's the solution of all our problems—at least, the immediate ones."

It was! Barbara's smart idea was to incorporate Ye Tiffin Shoppe as a company, with shares to be sold and nobby tea parlors to be opened in all the big towns. I was to be president—hurrah!—and Herne, with his mammoth acquaintance among the wealthy rich, was to be in charge of promotion and stock sales. The more we talked about it, the more we all got hopped up over the thing. As Barbara

said, it looked like the answer to everything! I'd be set with something to play with when I stepped out of the ring and Herne would be making enough pennies to support Pansy in the style she's decided to become accustomed to. We made Barbara vice-president and general manager. Herne said his friends would all come in with plenty dough. So that's how the big scheme was launched.

Well, to make a short story longer, early on the very day I was to fight the heavyweight champion, Pansy and Herne come to the conclusions that they couldn't stay apart another second so they decided to elope. Me and Barbara autoed with 'em to Greenwich, Conn., as witnesses to the praiseworthy deed. We was commencing to be expert wedding assistants, having stood up for Left Hook O'Brien, when he suddenly become the husband of my tea-room cashier.



In some way, Jack Fairfax got wind of the elopement, but he didn't know just where these daredevils had fled to. So through a sport writer friend of his, he managed to get past the guards at my training quarters and soon picked up enough hints from my free-talking handlers to put him on the trail. He leaped in his costly auto and traced us to Greenwich, but Herne and Pansy was man and

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wife and we'd all left before Fairfax arrived on the scene.

We're rolling back to New York, with Herne stepping on the gas heavy to get me there in time for my argument with the champ, when—clunk!—the bus quits like a dog on us! Herne lifted up the hood, fooled around with this, that and even the other, burnt his hands on the exhaust pipe, got himself full of oil and grease and finally announced he'd broke a connecting rod bearing. Not so good! There wasn't a garage for miles and it certainly seemed like we was up against it. I got so nervous fumbling with my watch and seeing time fugit, that I busted the crystal on it! I could picture Butch Ford and the promoter running around like maniacs, with a arena jammed to the bulging point and me exceedingly conspicuous by my absence. Cold kitty!

All at once a familiar looking car hums around a turn in the road and comes to a jerky stop beside us with a screeching of brakes. There was only the driver in it. The girls gasped in surprise and Herne grunted, setting his jaw. I made no movement what so ever, but simply buttoned my coat so's it wouldn't be in the way, as Mr. Jack Fairfax stepped out of the other car.

"Greetings" he says, with a half-drunk smirk. "This is indeed what one would call a happy meeting. May I congratulate the newlyweds?"

"Your ears is out a mile!" I snapped at him, "What newlyweds?"

"Oh, don't try to kid me, Grimm!" he answers, pleasantly. "I obtained a copy of the marriage record. Look here, all of you, let's bury the hatchet, eh? I've been beaten all around—each one of you has defeated me. Well, I'm a good loser! How about a little libation in honor of the wedding?"

With that he yanked out a flask, which he'd evidently been giving lots of attention, but we went prohibition by a unanimous majority. However, we did take him up on his offer of a lift into town. We *had* to do that. Herne's car was out of commission and I'd less than two hours to get to the city, reach the abbatoir and climb through the ropes with the heavyweight champion of the world. It was no time for splitting hairs!

Fairfax was at the helm and within a mile his maniacal driving had us all something more than nervous. With the speedometer needle quivering around sixty we missed other vehicles by a eyebrow and dumb luck, shot past traffic stop signals, zig-zagged from one side of the road to the other and

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took curves on a single tire. Believe me, people, the midnight ride of Paul Revere was a canter in the park alongside of the voyage *we* was taking!

I was staring wildly behind us, expecting to see a bevy of enraged speed coppers charging down at any minute, when Barbara whispered excitedly in my ear.

“Bill—you must do something! I believe Fairfax’s conduct is deliberate. I—I just feel that his apparent intoxication is assumed and he has a purpose in making us think him drunk. Try to stop the car—quickly!”

“Yes—try and stop it!” shouted Fairfax, who heard every word, or guessed at it. “She’s right, I know what I’m doing!” We skidded dizzily around another curve barely missing a telegraph pole. Fairfax’s face was a movie of fury. “You won’t live to be Pansy’s husband, Herne!” he yells. “And as for you Mr. Prize Fighter, you’ll never be *able* to get into the ring with the champion!”

“For Gossakes!” cries Pansy in a terrified voice. “You’re not going to wreck us, are you?”

“Watch me!” cackles Fairfax, like a lunatic.

I was afraid to wrestle the wheel away from him, for the speed at which we was travelling would have made the slightest slip-up a case of “Good

Morning, St. Peter!" all around. I tried to reason with this crazy fiend, but I got absolutely nowhere. The only one which kept their head in what looked like the "death car" was my Barbara. Reaching forward from the back, she switched off the ignition with a sudden, unlooked for turn of her hand. Fairfax swore savagely and moved his head—in time for his jaw to connect with my pay-off left hook!

He slumped down in the seat a total loss and I grabbed the wheel, bringing the car to a stop on the edge of a ditch. Married and nearly bumped off in the same hour, Pansy was two inches from a swoon but Barbara and Herne talked her out of it. While they was engaged in that pastime, I dragged Fairfax out of the car, propped him up against a tree at the side of the road and left him there. I knew he'd be picked up soon—the reports of our wild dash through these little towns would take care of that! Then I jumped in, stepped on the starter and we continued our delightful journey to New York.

All I had to do after that little nerve-testing thriller was to try and punch my way into the world's heavyweight title!

I nearly had to box Butch Ford first. My strange

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absence had him fit to be chained by the time I reached the dressing room, after seeing that Barbara, Pansy and Herne got their ringside seats. However, lack of time shut off Butch's bawling out and in a few minutes I was in the ring with my handlers, staring out at a surging ocean of excited faces. I got what is known as a ovation—the papers said the crowd stood up and cheered me for more than three minutes. The champ and his caretakers shoved their way down a aisle shortly afterward to a scattering volley of handclaps, with plenty razzberries mixed in. He hadn't fought for a long, long, time and the ring worm likes his champions to work at their trade regular!

For a championship battle the usual stalling, introductions and posing for the news cameras was very brief. Within twenty-five minutes after I'd eased through the ropes, the bell clanged and we was off. Butch's instructions to me was to tie into the title-holder from the start and keep him moving around, as his extended lay-off with the Good Time Charleys couldn't have helped his wind any. So I rushed across the ring and met him in his own corner with a wicked left hook to the heart. He changed color and tried to clinch, but I kept him off with another hard left to the body, the trigger

all set on my right, just in case. The champ charged in desperately and I saw my chance. I whipped a right to his chin and he staggered, with the place in a uproar. He was short with a left to the head and I put everything I had in stock into another right which landed smack on his mouth. The sock of the glove was still in the air when the champion toppled over with a crash!

He stayed down for seven seconds and rose bleeding and on Queer Street. The mob howled and shrieked for me to knock him off—bedlam was in charge outside the ropes! Once more I set myself and shot a left and right to the head. The champ countered with a wild left swing which nearly hit the referee. I stepped in quickly, feinted with my left and dropped the heavyweight boss for the second time with a right to the heart. With the prospect of seeing the title change hands in less than a round the customers was delirious—and so was I for that matter! This time the champion reached his feet at the count of four, fell into a clinch which I couldn't prevent and just hung there, out on his feet. The referee tugged and pulled at us both, hoarsely panting "Break!" and at last I wriggled away and punched the champ off. A straight left to his eye closed it to a slit and then I spun him

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around with a torrid left and right to the mid-section. He made a dying effort and clipped me on the right ear with a stiff punch, but I come back with a right to the button which floored him for the third knockdown!

The referee had reached eight and the champ had reached one knee when the gong ended the round. So far the fight was as one-sided as a postage stamp and I looked like a ten to one shot to cop. I was making a chump out of the world's champion and the crowd give me a mighty cheer as I run to my corner.

Well, all Mr. Champion had showed me was that he had freckles and at the bell for the second round I stepped out ready to end it. The champ was slow to leave his corner and I begin chasing him all around the ring, sparring for a opening for my right. He suddenly let go a left for my jaw, missed and tried a overhand right which caught me on the head. The crowd bood him—I don't know what for, it was a fair and square punch and it shook me up, to boot. My first wallop in this frame was a swinging left to the body which made the champion back up. I left-handed him out of a clinch and he jabbed me twice on the mouth with his own left. He seemed to be regaining both his strength and his

confidence. Again he jabbed his left into my now bloody lips and I got peeved. Pumping both gloves I walked right into him and then come the tough one!

A short, sizzling right hook landed fair on my chin. I bet that wallop lifted me a couple of inches from the floor and this sudden turn of affairs put the house in a frenzy. The punch didn't flatten me, but it scrambled my brains! I didn't know what it was all about and there was a auto race going on in my head. Even the roars of the crowd seemed faint and many miles away. I suppose it was habit which enabled me to go into a shell and cover up, while the champion flailed away at me with both gloves in a furious attempt to slap me for a trip.

I finished that round and the third in a dream, my mind a complete blank! By instinct alone I defended myself, for I hadn't the faintest idea of what was going on around me. Butch and my handlers realized I wasn't right and during the rest they worked over me frantically—dousing me with ice water, kneading the back of my neck and my temples and shoving the ammonia bottle half ways up my nose. None of this had the slightest effect and with a world's title and the million which goes with it at stake, Butch decided on stern measures.

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Between the fourth and fifth rounds, my manager and seconds *held lit matches against my bare back*, hoping the pain would shock me enough to clear the cobwebs from my head! A nice, clean sport, prize fighting—what?

Well, burning my flesh did the trick! With the gong for the fifth round I was out of my trance, my scorched back was punishing me plenty and I was rarin' to go. The champion tried a overhead left, which I blocked. He ducked a right to the jaw and drove me into a neutral corner with a storm of rights and lefts to the head. The ropes scraped against my raw back and stung me into a crazy rage. I hooked both gloves hard to the body and the champ bent over like a tree in a cyclone. "*Bring it up, Bill!*" chanted the mob in a booming chorus. I brought it up—a uppercut which put this mock-orange on his shoulder blades! He took seven and when he got up he dived into a clinch, a sorry looking sight. The excited referee kept slapping *me* on the back and yelling for me to break, but he never said a word to the champ which had both my gloves pinned to my sides with his arms. The crowd begin giving the referee the bird, screaming for him to pull the champion off me and to make him fight. They seemed to be with me now to a man.

I finally wrestled myself free and took a solid drive to the stomach on the break. It was the hardest punch the champion had landed on me during the fight and it buckled my knees. As he rushed in to take advantage of my distress, I stabbed him twice with a left to his bum eye. These two blows unbalanced him, but he charged desperately, knowing full well that nothing but a knockout could save his title now. I missed a left hook, but connected with a right to the side of the head and again the champ fell to the mat, a beaten man if there ever was one! Eighty thousand maniacs gathered around the ring was splitting the air with their roars. The heavyweight title was in my right glove—at last I'd reached the top of the heap!

Remember I said something at the beginning of this about misfortune? Well, add *this* up! The champion staggered to his feet at nine, barely beating the count—in fact, many swore afterwards he'd actually been counted out on that fifth knockdown. Be that as it may, I fairly ran at him and let fly a right hand punch, just as the bell rung. I tried to pull the blow, but it landed on his jaw a split second after the gong. That's a thing which often happens in a bout where both boys are trying—you've seen it yourself. It's a technical foul, but never

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claimed or penalized even in a preliminary fight, as its delivery is purely a accident.

But the champ's handlers was smart! They knew I was going to kayo their man and they'd been watching eagerly for any chance to save his title. So the instant my punch landed after the bell they jumped into the ring, bellowing "Foul!" Dazed and sick from the shellacking he'd just took, the champion then pulled one of the funniest gags in the history of boxing. I guess me and my camp was the only ones which didn't see the giggle in it! What does this jazzbo do when he hears his seconds claim a foul, but clap both gloves over his stomach and sink to the floor, twisting his face like he's in great agony. He holds his *stomach* and I'd clipped him on the *jaw!* Even the hard-boiled ringsiders was panicked by this one, but after a minute's hesitation, the referee waves me to my corner, reaches down and holds up the champion's glove, giving him the fight on a foul!

Then with a weird howl, Left Hook O'Brien took a punch at the referee, Butch Ford swooned and the crowd went amuck. When the last swearing fan had gone home, the arena looked like a earthquake hit it. All which was left of the ring itself was a little strip of bloody canvas. I'd played my hand

out and been gypped out of a world's title. When Shifty Jones unlaced my gloves, I stood at the ropes and hurled 'em as far from me as I could throw!

CHAPTER XII

AND SO THEY GOT MARRIED!

THE day after that sensational ending to my fracas with the champion, the sport pages called me the "Uncrowned King of the Heavyweights" and squawked for a immediate and searching investigation of the bout. They barked and meowed at the boxing commission till these master minds got frightened and started what is known as a probe. For a week everybody connected with the scrap from the promoter to the time-keeper's step-father was called on the carpet and gave the third-degree. The results was the permanent cancelling of the referee's license, the suspension of the champ's handlers and the ruling that the title-holder couldn't box nobody else, not even if they insulted him, till he stepped into a ring with *me* again. Speaking of eggplant, that was a trifle satisfaction, but none of it got me the

crown which had been my goal since I first laced on a boxing glove.

The newspapers promptly begin smoking up a return bout, but the "champion" didn't crave no part of me. He hauled hips to Europe to recover from that proper pasting I'd handed him and to escape the razzing which greeted him every time he showed his pan in a public place.

Well, lads and lassies, I'll state I was plenty low and disgusted. I'd had my big shot and somebody moved the target just as I pulled the trigger! After mulling matters over in my head I decided to hang up my gloves till a couple weeks after forever. So having reached the decision to turn in my trunks I called on Barbara.

We had a keen suite of offices in a big downtown skyscraper and I want to say to you this afternoon that I got a pulse-quickenning kick every time I read the gold letters on the frosted glass door of my own private trap: *Ye Tiffin Shoppe, Inc. W. Reginald Grimm, President.*

That had been my life-long ambition, to be at the head of some big racket, whether it was a nation or a street cleaning company, and now, by the Smith Brothers' whiskers, I'd done it!

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It was in my office that me and Barbara was in conference, as usual, and don't get the silly idea, gentle reader, that tea parlors was all we ever talked about.

"Barbara," I says, "there's two things I can do. One of 'em is to chase the champ to the old country and *make* him box me again and the other one is to call it a day and check out of the industry."

"I don't want to influence you, Bill," returns Barbara, "but if *you* don't give up the prize ring, *I'll* give up my engagement ring!"

Which was certainly the coldest of cold turkey, what?

"Well, don't throw that ring away yet, Barbara," I says. "For I'm through busting noses! I'm all washed up, as far as fistiana is concerned. From now on, I'm going to devote all my valuable time to getting rid of more tea than Lipton ever seen!"

"Oh, I'm so glad, Bill!" she exclaims, laying her little lily white hand on the Westphalian ham which passes for mine. "That's the most sensible decision you ever made in your life and the most pleasing to *me*. I'm sure you'll never regret leaving that beastly profession of prize fighting, for you're not a cave man at heart, Bill."

"No—I guess not," I agrees. "Every time I break somebody's jaw it's all I can do to keep from busting out crying and, by a odd coincidence, it's the same when somebody breaks mine! By the way, I caught another class at Columbia last night—we had examinations."

"Splendid!" she says. "How did you come out?"

"I finished in the money and would have win, only I got zero for trying to fake it on cheap politics," I told her.

"Cheap politics?" she repeats, kind of puzzled.

"Political economy," I explained. "But I got two hundred in spelling. I wouldn't fool you, Barbara, I spell a cruel word. Try me on a couple or three and I'll dumfound you!"

"All right," she smiles. "How do you spell parasite?"

"The same way Webster does," I says. "P-a-r-a-s-i-t-e."

"Correct!" she admits. "Do you know what the word means?"

"Absolutely!" I says promptly. "A parasite is somebody which lives in Paris."

"I love that!" laughs Barbara. "And no doubt as many reside there as anywhere else. No, Bill, you've given the definition of *Parisian*. A parasite

is—well, one who lives on another, repaying him with flattery, for instance.”

“Oh, I get you,” I says. “A guy’s wife, hey?”

That started something and like to finished my chances of being a bridegroom! I’ll have you know it took me the best part of a hour to square matters and the best part of another one before Barbara would kiss me. I got a great habit of speaking out of turn and lockjaw would save me plenty grief!

Well, to make a long story tasty, our horde of tea parlors clicked so fluently that within a short time my take down would have made the movie stars raise their eyebrows. So’s not to have all my eggs in one basket and then step on a banana peel, I got smart and looked around for other places to make my excess pennies work. With Butch Ford, Left Hook O’Brien—which was now using his real name Izzy Rabinowitz—and Shifty Jones, I took over ten acres in Fairfax Falls and begin to build a health farm there. My buddies knew their oil and I figured on making one half of it a training camp for top-notch scrappers and the other half a place where broken down business men, Charleston dancers and the like could get overhauled and rebuilt into red-blooded Nordics.

Not content with that praiseworthy act, I hauled

off and bought the Commercial House, the drum where Pansy Pilkington worked as a waitress when I operated the only taxi in the burg.

So although I'd been robbed of the world's heavy-weight championship, I had no moan coming. I owned the costliest property in the slab where I was created, where I was once looked on as a total loss and lived from hand to mouth, I was commander-in-chief of a big corporation and I was going to face a minister with beautiful Barbara Baxter within a couple months. As the fellow says about the confectioner's daughter, what could be sweeter?

Well, after we got our tea parlors running smoothly, Herne and Pansy copped a sneak and ripped off a honeymoon in Europe, in spite of the fact that everybody's mail in those days was full of folders on Miami, a town in a place called Florida. By the time they come back Herne's folks had weakened. Me and Barbara seen 'em at the pier when we went to meet the ship and they forgive their son and raised the ban on Pansy, which wouldn't have cared either way. Then the Hernes got ready to throw a big reception and ball, with the objects of giving high society a treat by introducing Pansy to it.

Young Herne come in the office a few days after

his return and called a conference. This go-getter was all business and after going over our profits for the past six months, he says we ought to make "Ye Tiffin Shoppe" a closed corporation and grab all this gravy for ourselves instead of paying it out in dividends. Barbara agrees with him and it was kosher with me, too. So we begin quietly buying up the stock we'd sold on the open market.

By paying a slight bonus here and there we didn't have much trouble at first and then all at once there's no more stock to be had for love or money. Even advertising for it failed to excavate anybody which had a single share and as there was a flock of it still to be accounted for we was puzzled. Then one morning Herne blows in, all excited.

"Bill, I've solved the mystery of the missing stock!" he pants.

I immediately sent a stenographer scurrying for Barbara, like I always do when anything important is in the wind. As soon as she come in I give Herne the office to throw his tongue into high.

"Jack Fairfax has bought up practically all the stock we've been unable to locate!" he tells us. "Of course, his idea is to hold us up for an exorbitant figure for the shares."

"Gracious!" exclaims Barbara. "He's like a vil-

lain in the movies, isn't he? Are we going to have to contend with him *all* our lives?"

"I could bump him off," I suggests, thoughtfully. Barbara frowned at me and then smiled.

"That wouldn't help matters, Bill," she says, "but there must be *some* way we can circumvent whatever evil plans he has, without——"

"There *is* a way!" interrupts Herne. "At least, I believe I have a plan that will catch Fairfax in his own trap! Suppose we sort of circulate rumors that our business is falling off to a serious degree. We might even close a shop or two temporarily and then begin dumping our stock back on the market. Fairfax will continue buying until he finds out he's buying from us. Then, unless I miss my guess by a mile, he'll get scared. He'll deduce that we're broke and he'll throw his own stock back for sale. We'll buy all he sells until he sells short. Then we'll demand the delivery of the stock, he won't have it and we can make him pay what we choose!"

Barbara looks at Herne with admiration.

"Did you dope this out all by yourself?" I asked him.

"Yes," he smiles. "Why?"

"Nothing at all," I answers. "I was just wondering what made your old man get the idea you'd

starve, when he cut off your bankroll for marrying Pansy!"

Well, we sprung our gag, as advertised. Did it work? I hope to tell you it did! Monsieur Fairfax fell for Herne's trick like the umpchay he was and when the smoke of his crazy buying and selling died away we had all our stock back again and Fairfax paid off till he was maniacal!

"You'll pay me back in blood, Grimm!" he howled at me over the phone, when he'd had things figured out for him by his brokers.

"So's your old gentleman!" I laughed back, never thinking he'd try to make good his promise. But this time he fooled me!

Me and Barbara killed a lot of time with Pansy and Herne at their marvelous home on Long Island, where Fairfax also had a swell summer retreat. For no reason at all, Herne tried his best to have me learn about golfing from him, but I found this cross-country pool a bit too intricate. I had the idea that the Caddie was where you kept the tee, a mashie was a male flirt and a bad lie meant your own story on how many whacks you took at the pill. It seems the right definitions is somewhat different!

Jack Fairfax belonged to the high-hat country club where I was attempting to commit golf with

Herne and one afternoon we bumped into him on the diamond, or court, or links, or whatever the niblick they call it. He gives us a glare to divide up.

"Since when have pugilists been permitted to golf here?" he sneers at Herne.

"Don't cry!" I says, setting myself over the ball. "All the golf *I'll* tear off won't upset the regular routine. Look out, Dizzy, I'm going to put this one in the side pocket!"

"I think this is a case for the house committee!" snarls Fairfax. "When an exclusive club allows ——"

"Oh, be still, Fairfax!" Herne cuts him off shortly. "Mr. Grimm is my guest. If you were not so thoroughly vicious, you'd remind me of a whining child! Since you choose to be so insulting, I shall make it my business to acquaint the board of governors, of which my father is chairman, with a little of your unsavory past. Your resignation from the club may save you embarrassment!"

"Add *that* up!" I grinned at the snarling Fairfax and drove the ball over his head for a triple.

Personally, I didn't get particularly steamed by Fairfax's sneers at me that day, being used to him and looking on him like you look on a centipede. But Herne was something more than sore! He

talked about nothing else all the rest of the afternoon and a couple of days later Mr. Fairfax was gave the gate by the country club.

Naturally, Fairfax blamed *me* for that. Every time he got a headache even, he charged it up to *me!* Outfoxed in his attempt to corner our tea parlor stock and now thrown out of his club, he credited both these body blows to me and he wanted my heart!

One morning, Barbara, Pansy, Herne and me is indulging in the pleasures of horseback riding at the witching hour of six o'clock when a thunder storm comes up. Our fiery steeds begins prancing and rearing and generally clowning around and all of a sudden the beagle Pansy's astride lays back his ears and starts for Siberia, evidently thinking he was late for a appointment there. Not so good! We all set sail after this running idiot, but Pansy done a Prince of Wales within a few yards, landing on her shoulders in a hedge. By the greatest of luck, she was more shook up than hurt and gamely grinned at a nasty cut where her arm had scraped on a rock.

Seeking some first aid treatment for her and a hide-out from the pelting rain, we rang the bell of a nearby house and the hired help let us in. The butler scurried off for bandages and iodine and Herne is making Pansy comfortable by the fire place,

when lo and behold, in saunters no less than Jack Fairfax in a dressing gown containing two more colors than a painter ever seen. When our charming boy friend lumps us, he liked to swallowed his cigarette! The others looked kind of embarrassed and Pansy rose hastily, but I merely grinned at my personal villain.

"Quite a cave you got here," I says, pleasantly. "What did it set you back?"

"What the devil does this intrusion mean?" he demands, his beady eyes flickering over us.

"Don't get common!" I cautioned him, enjoying his rage. "We just dropped in to wish you a merry Fourth of July. That bathrobe you got on is certainly the ant-eater's cravat!"

He looked like he was going to explode.

"Mrs. Herne was thrown from her horse," began Herne, very flushed. "And——"

"Well, this isn't a hospital!" Fairfax cut him off harshly. "All of you get out of here at once!"

A high, moaning wind was blowing the driving rain against the windows and it was four or five miles back to Herne's. Can you imagine that mug Fairfax chasing Barbara and the injured Pansy out into a cloudburst like that? Even the butler looked sorry, as he held open the door where the girls was

already waiting with their chins scornfully in the air. Herne muttered savagely and gritted his teeth. I wheeled around on Fairfax with a glance which sent him back against a table.

"You big stiff!" I barked at him. "Keep away from me hereafter or I'll break your arms for you, get me? This is fair warning—when you bump into me again you better have a gun!"

He snatched out a drawer in the table and his hand come up holding a automatic.

"I *have* one!" he snarls, murder in each eye. "Now—get out!"

Well, you can't box bullets. Of course we got soaked to the skin on that ride back in the rain, but the girls made light of the matter, saying Fairfax reminded them of the angry father in "Way Down East," driving us out in the storm.

"Between you and me and the lightning," I says, "I think Fairfax has actually gone cuckoo at last! Did you notice that goofy look in his eyes?"

"Yes," says Barbara, very serious. "That's cocaine! I agree with you, Bill, that the vicious life Fairfax has led has affected his brain. He's a public menace and you were foolish to threaten him. One never can tell what a drug addict will do!"

She said a thorax full!

The big reception and ball Herne's family tossed for Pansy was a grand success, but it wound up in a near-murder. I was the murderee! You may think I was in strange waters at a high society affair, but you want to remember, friends of radioland, that I was Carlton Herne's buddy and Pansy's life-long friend. They wouldn't let me and Barbara stay away and that's all there was to it! Barbara was a college graduate and looked like a billion in a evening gown, while I filled a tuxedo without offending the naked eye. Likewise, I'd mixed in very uptown circles since I got over and having the uncrowned heavyweight champion which all the papers was full of in their midst give a extra tang to the party. When the flappers and highbrows tricked me into conversation—well, Barbara had tipped me how to fake it and get past.

At the height of the merrymaking, in fact while I was dancing with Pansy, along come the big thrill. A masked gun mob suddenly busted into the huge ball room with rods in their hands and bawled, "*Reach for the roof and make it snappy!*"

Hot dog!

There was a instant's gasping panic and then the guests seemed to figure this was all part of the evening's fun—a added attraction to give 'em a kick.

Here and there somebody laughed and the orchestra started to do its stuff again.

Bang! bang! bang!

Sounds like a dime novel here, but it didn't *there*, believe me! One of the gunmen shot out a chandelier. Another slammed one of the musicians into a corner. Then we all knew we was up against the bonded article and the dropping of a pin would have sounded like thunder!

I thought there was something I remembered about the leader. I got a queer feeling. Like a flash, I shot out my arm and tore off his mask to look into a twisting, familiar face.

"Oh!" gasps Barbara and Pansy together, "*Fairfax!*"

"Well, I'll be a son of a cannon!" I exclaimed, stepping up to him. "Where do you get this rough stuff, you maniac?"

"As you see, I've taken your advice and armed myself, Grimm!" he grates at me. "Now it's *your* move!"

I knew full well I was in a tough spot. Herne's dignified old man moves over, red-headed at this sensational interruption of his reception, but too much of a gent to say just what he must have felt.

"Fairfax, you shall answer for this buffoonery!" he says, quietly. "Leave my house at once, sir!"

"How have the mighty fallen!" sneers Fairfax, curling his lip at him. "Our proud social arbiters now have a notorious chorus girl for a daughter-in-law and an uncouth prize fighter for a guest!"

Raising his fist angrily, young Herne made a quick step towards him and Fairfax promptly levelled his gun at him.

"Try it!" he hissed. "I dare you! I wish any one of you would attack me, particularly you, Grimm, you ignorant lout. All I want is an excuse to kill you! What is it you were going to do when we met again?"

"*This!*" I snapped, losing my head completely and crashing him to the polished floor with a right hook to the button.

I slipped in delivering the punch and it only dazed him, instead of knocking him cold. That was *my* hard luck! The shrill screams of the frantic ladies was still in the air when Fairfax rolled over on the floor, took deliberate aim at me and fired point-blank twice. I got it in the arm and shoulder. He was a bust as a sharpshooter like he was at everything else!

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The banging of Fairfax's gun was the signal for bedlam to break loose and somebody put out the lights. When Herne throwed 'em on again, Fairfax and his merry men had vanished and I was sitting on the floor, covered with blood and looking kind of silly at the holes in my coat. Old man Herne phoned for a medico and the John Laws while I was being put to bed upstairs with the very pale but cool Barbara in charge of me. Pansy was weeping her head off and Carlton Herne was trying to help his distracted mother quiet the hysterical guests. When I tell you that my lovely Barbara sitting at the bedside and holding my hand never once said, "*I told you to be careful of Fairfax!*" maybe you'll get a light line on what a peach she was!

My wounds was serious enough, but by no means fatal and in a few days I was able to be up and around, being hard to kill. The district attorney's office had sent out a general alarm for Jack Fairfax and the Hernes hung up a twenty-five-thousand-dollar reward to make the chase more interesting, but Fairfax had too good a start and couldn't be found. Neither could none of the boys which was with him that night.

As I was still as weak as boarding house coffee, Barbara wouldn't let me go down to our office or

anything else, so I decided to get together at my health resort in Fairfax Falls and she come along with me as my nurse. Our wedding date was only a month away, and, no kidding, I counted those days like a miser counts his dimes. If Jack Fairfax had croaked me before I'd had a chance to be Barbara's husband, I'd of come back from the grave and haunted that gil off the face of the earth!

Only one of our buildings was finished, but it was enough to furnish a place for Barbara, a couple of women attendants, Butch Ford, Izzy Rabinowitz, Shifty Jones, the chef and myself to eat and sleep in. I wish you'd get a load of this joint sometime. The grounds is beautiful and there's a swell view of the famous falls. We had a gold mine there after we got everything set and turned down a dozen offers to sell it later for a appetizing profit. In fact, this place alone made me and my partners in it independent.

Well, one brow bright moonlicht nicht I couldn't seem to get any shut-eye—thinking too much, I guess—so I got up, throwed on a dressing gown and strolled around the grounds in the mild summer air. In spite of my bandaged and still throbbing arm and shoulder, I was the happiest guy in the wide

wide world. I'd made the grade! Without education, money or influence, I'd climbed to the top of the ash heap and won Barbara Baxter to boot. I'd more sugar than I knew what to do with, high class and wonderful pals, a great business career staring me in the pan and a home of my own at last. I *meant* something! I was on the sucker list of all the stock selling houses and charities and I'd took care of Butch and Izzy, which took care of me when I first hit New York as friendless as halitosis.

That's the way my pleasant thoughts was running as I walked around the lawn, picking my way carefully over the lumber and tools left laying around by the workmen. When my torn arm and shoulder would give me a twinge I'd think of Jack Fairfax—and then my thoughts wasn't so pleasant! It seemed funny to me that the coppers and the Hernes' private dicks couldn't locate him. Barbara and Pansy was both worried sick, because the girls figured none of us was safe while this maniac was roaming wild.

I was just going to go inside and try my luck at grabbing off some sleep, when the hedge parts suddenly and my heart almost done the same thing—for ten feet away from me was Mr. Jack Fairfax

himself, wild-eyed, unshaved, his clothes torn and ruffled and a gun in his hand!

Oo la la!

I didn't need to be a doctor to know at a glance that this baby was in shape to pass the entrance examinations for any insane asylum in the world. There was murder in his crazy glare and not only was I unarmed, but I was wounded! His roving eyes took in my bandages with great satisfaction, as I stood there facing him and putting my mind through hoops in a effort to think fast. Things had positively come to a pretty pass, but I kept quiet and I *tried* to keep cool.

"Well—say something, can't you?" sneers Fairfax in a cracked voice, after a minute. "Or are you frightened speechless?"

"What do you want?" I asked him slowly, wishing I was in the habit of packing a gat, which I wasn't.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he cackles. "What do I want? Your life, to begin with, and then I'll attend to your lady love, your friend Herne, and Pansy—the wild flower, eh?"

"Don't be silly, Fairfax!" I says, stalling for time. "You got brains enough to know that if you get me you'll go to the chair. What fun is there in that? The percentage ain't there for you!"

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I was frantically thinking, "*If I can only get that gun away from him!*"

"I didn't come here to argue with you, Grimm," he snarls. "I came to kill you! You've beaten me before, but here's *one* time I win!"

With that he whipped up the gun and pulled the trigger. I dove forward on the ground in the second that he took aim and the bullet missed me a mile. Before he could set again, I reached up with my one good arm, grabbed his ankle and threw him. The gun slithered out of his hand and skidded away along the dewy grass and then the excitement commenced!

My useless arm and shoulder made the muss pretty even and Fairfax had maniacal strength which soon give me all I could do to cope with. He fought me like a enraged wildcat—with teeth and nails and vicious kicks in places which done me no good at all. Neither of us done no yelling, we *needed* what breath we had! The bandages had long ago come off my bum shoulder, which Fairfax twisted at every chance and the gore from the open wound splattered us both. His thumbs dug at my eyes and I found trying to punch him and defend myself with one arm was a feat indeed!

Rolling over and over on the wet sod, first one

and then the other on top, I finally managed to hook him wickedly under the chin. He seemed to crumple up and fell away from me and I got dizzily to my feet, panting like a newly caught fish. I was a sight to behold and plenty weak. Leaning against a tree I was fighting for breath, when something made me wheel around. I was just in time, for Fairfax was creeping towards me with a axe in his hand! A workman had left it there—I'd noticed it before—and Fairfax had snatched it up.

He let out a baffled howl when I ducked away from his first lunge and dodging backwards I wildly searched the grass with my eyes for that gun. It was a case of try and find it! Again this lunatic swung the axe and it was very close. Then I heard a sudden cry behind me. Barbara was framed by the moonlight in the doorway of the house, where she'd run right from her bed when Fairfax's bellow had woke her up. In turning my head to look at her I tripped and fell over the stump of a tree and in the same glance I saw Fairfax's gun shining in the grass at her feet.

I scrambled madly to get up, but Fairfax was on top of me with one spring and a yell of crazy joy. I watched him raise the axe over me and his face looked like nothing human! The axe went up over

his head and I gritted my teeth, wondering what the angels really looked like. Then there was a short, sharp explosion and the axe dropped from Fairfax's hands, right in the midst of his murderous swing. It fell behind him and he fell on me, grabbing at his leg and screaming. The quick-thinking Barbara had snatched up the gun and fired and on top of everything else I owed her, I now owed her my life!

Butch, Izzy and the others come tumbling out half-dressed and dragged Fairfax off me. He was raving and babbling like a baby. I told 'em to fix up his leg—it was drilled clean through—and not to manhandle him, for the poor devil was out of his mind. Butch ran to rouse up a doctor and somebody to take Fairfax in charge. Very white and very beautiful with a bath robe throwed over her nightgown, Barbara turned to me.

"Bill," she says, in a kind of weak voice, "come inside and let me bandage your arm."

I put the good arm around her and held her close.

"Hey, listen!" I says. "Every time I'm away from you, I get in some kind of a jam. This one here nearly ruined me! I ain't going to wait no month for our wedding—why not make it next week?"

"Why not make it *tomorrow*, Bill?" she answers softly.

And, boys and girls, that's exactly what we did!
Curtain!

THE END



