

ANDY BLAKE'S COMET COASTER

BY LEO EDWARDS

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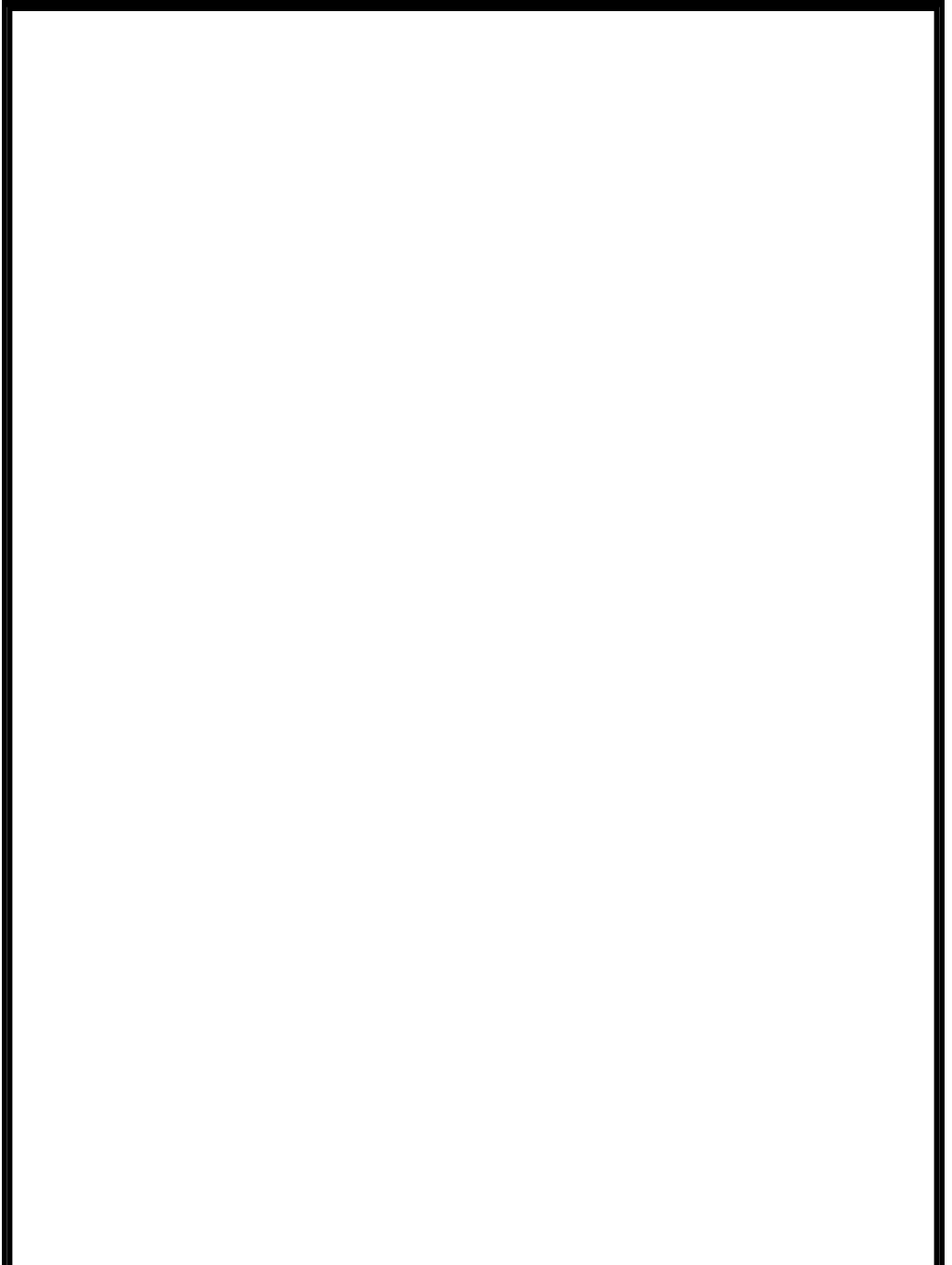
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BY LEO EDWARDS





ANDY BLAKE'S COMET COASTER

BY
LEO EDWARDS
AUTHOR OF
THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE POPPY OTT BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY
BERT SALG

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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Made in the United States of America

TO
JOE

our loyal, four-footed friend, who, upon discovery of the fourteen choice T-bone steaks on an open neighboring porch, promptly ate as many of them as he could, burying the rest, in characteristic dog style . . . and to the fourteen fishermen from Rockford, Illinois,

C. ARTHUR ROHLEN

ROBERT MALMBERG

RUPERT JOHNSON

FRANK SWANSON

EUGENE LAWSON

HENRY CARLSON

OSCAR MILBURN

AL ANDERSON

CHARLES PETERSON

V. R. LIND

C. EDW. LINDBERG

HARRY SPONGBERG

LEVI JOHNSON

GUNARD OLSON

who uncomplainingly went hungry, this book is reminiscently
dedicated.

THE AUTHOR

TRIGGER BERG SAYS:

Now, the Grosset & Dunlap people have got me mixed up in something else! It wasn't enough that I should let them print, in this second book of the "Andy Blake" series, a part of my diary. But they had to shove on me the further job of writing a preface.

The only thing I know about a preface is that "Peter Riley eats fish and catches eels." If you'll take the first letter of each word in that lingo you'll find that it spells "preface." Which is a lot for a fellow to know, I'll tell the world, who has the job on his hands of *writing* a preface!

Well, let's see what I can do.

In the first place, "Advertising Andy," as they still call him in his home town, is a real guy. I only wish that I was big enough to pal around with him and help him with his many clever advertising and selling schemes. To that point, they tell me that I *have* been a big help to him in this particular story, which possibly explains why the book company dished out to me the "prefacing" job.

I didn't get acquainted with Andy, as you might say, until after he had gotten in bad with his carriage campaign.

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That was old Hatch's crooked work. Gee, I sure don't like *him*. Nor will you, either, when you read what he did, getting Andy in a hole, and everything.

From carriages Andy got into the publication of a free coaster-

wagon magazine . . . and there is where yours truly (yah, I'm talking about myself!) comes in.

The COMET COASTER NEWS has been going a year now, and I'm still in it . . . and, to my own personal grief and misfortune, I'm still over-supplied with mouse traps! You don't know what I mean by that, do you? Well, I can't give you the whole story in a *preface* ("Eels catches aces, Fred eats raw potatoes," is the way you say it backwards) but the sad tale is, in brief, that I failed, with my chums, in the mouse-catching business, after doing a lot of clever advertising, ending up with a hunk of stale cheese and 700 mouse traps. We tried and *tried* and TRIED unloading those mouse traps, to get our money back, for seven dollars is seven dollars. But our successes were all fizzles. Hence the sad part of the story . . . for us!

Some day, in a separate book, I hope to be able to tell you the whole "mousy" tale, punctuated with cheese, as you might say. I've already given the book a title: TRIGGER BERG AND HIS 700 MOUSE TRAPS. If ever you see such a book you'll know it's about me. And if it's about me it'll also be about my pals—Skeets, who got up the crazy mouse-trap scheme, and Friday (we call him that because his name is Fish) and Tail Light, Skeets' kid brother.

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Well, this is *some* preface! Starting in to tell you about Andy Blake, I've nicely ended up by talking about myself. But if the book people don't like it they needn't publish it. Anyway, the author should have written the preface himself, instead of rushing off on a vacation trip. I suppose he's up in northern Wisconsin trapping "Waltzing Hens" or shooting "Whispering Mummies." If you've read his "Jerry Todd" and "Poppy Ott"

books, the titles of which are given in the back of this book, you'll catch on to what I mean.

Well, so long. Look for the coming third book of the “Andy Blake” series, the title of which, I am told, is **ANDY BLAKE’S SECRET SERVICE**. And maybe, as I say, you’ll soon see me in a book of my own—me and my 700 mouse traps!

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TRIGGER BERG.

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ANDY BLAKE'S COMET COASTER

CHAPTER I A FALLEN GIANT

Andy Blake had the somewhat scattered feeling of being jerked out of his thoughts as the brakeman thrust his head and shoulders into the coach door and intoned the name of the railroad station.

The young advertising man knew, of course, that he was getting close to Manton; but he had failed to observe the kaleidoscopic picture of dwellings and grimy factory chimneys that flitted past the car window. Everything had been excluded from his mind except the Warman Carriage Company inquiry. In shaping his plans for handling the inquiry it was his determination to acquit himself, and his company through him, in a creditable manner.

Very trim and businesslike he appeared as he passed briskly down the aisle. A year in the city had taught him many things that have a bearing on a young man's success in the industrial world. He had developed poise. There was a keenness in his movements, in his brisk, elastic steps, and in

the alert expression of his round, friendly face. His warm brown eyes seemed to snap with suppressed energy. Full of ambition and purpose; a worker; a wide-awake youth with big dreams—advertising dreams, selling dreams, merchandising dreams—Andy was the type of boy who finds a way to worthwhile victories in the great lanes of business.

About to inquire his way to the Warman Carriage Company office, he was arrested by a hand that fell lightly on his arm. Turning quickly, he found himself looking into a face that was young in its pleasing fullness and color but rather old in its expression of graveness and reserve.

“I imagine that you are Mr. Andrew Blake.”

Andy promptly acknowledged ownership of the name and held out a friendly hand.

“My name is Harry Harnden,” stated the serious-looking young man, returning the hearty handclasp. “George Warman asked me to meet you. If you will come this way, please.”

Exchanging snatches of conventional conversation as they walked away from the depot, the two young men passed a block of dingy houses fronting on the railroad track, after which they turned into a business thoroughfare.

3

Andy liked the appearance of the stores. They carried an air of prosperity. The wide street, busy under the ebb and flow of the early afternoon traffic, was a smooth stretch of asphalt. There was a small central park with scattered green benches. A number of children were playing in the park band stand, chasing each other, with shrill cries, up the steps and over the

wooden railing, from where they dropped to the ground.

“A typical Illinois manufacturing town,” mused the observing young visitor, in shaping his opinion of Manton. “Big enough to have desirable city ways and small enough to be neighborly.”

As he kept pace with his silent companion he found his thoughts returning to the letter, a copy of which was now contained within his inner coat pocket, that Rollins and Hatch had received from the Warman Carriage Company. In substance the letter read: “We are anxious to learn to what extent advertising may be used to widen the market for carriages. If you will send a man to talk the matter over with us we will gladly defray his expenses. Kindly let us know in advance what day he will be here.”

A member of the copy staff of the Rollins and Hatch advertising agency, where we had left him in the conclusion of the initial volume of this series, Andy had been spending a short spring vacation with his widowed mother in Cressfield, his home town, when the Chicago agency employing him had gotten in touch with him on long distance. Without difficulty he had recognized the cheery voice of his young office companion.

4

“Hello, little one,” had been Tom Dingley’s characteristic facetious greeting. “Listen. I’ve got a job for you. Mr. Hatch wants you to add a day or two to your vacation—”

“How lovely,” Andy had interjected, knowing Dingley well.

“—and go down to Manton—it’s a little town about fifty miles south of Cressfield—and call on George Warman, Jr., of the

Warman Carriage Company.”

“What for?” Andy had wanted to know.

“Business—maybe. It’s worth looking into. Rated at two hundred and fifty thousand, first-grade credit. Not so worse.”

“Have they been bit by the advertising bug?” Andy had inquired.

“Kinda looks that way. If there’s anything in it for us, sign ’em up temporarily and we’ll reward you with a box of cough drops when you get back to your desk next week.”

“I’ve got an awful cough,” Andy had barked into the mouthpiece.

“Which proves that you’ve been exposing yourself to the damp night air in some young lady’s porch swing. Now, pull out your nickel-plated Eversharp and take down this letter.”

5

This took two minutes.

“Well, so long,” Dingley had concluded the conversation. “I’ve talked two dollars’ worth. If I run the bill any higher Mr. Hatch will call a special directors’ meeting. You know how tight he is! When the inquiry came in I wanted to follow it up myself. No, sir, he saw a way of saving money by having you take care of it.”

“But had you not thought that I’m a bit young?”

“Oh, don’t let that worry you. We’ll write and tell them that you’re older than you look . . . and smarter, too! Good luck, old hunk. Give my regards to the village pump.”

The guide’s earnest voice cut in on Andy’s thoughts.

“This is our carriage factory, Mr. Blake.”

The two young men passed through a wooden gate, the weathered posts of which formed a sagging arch, while at each side a rusted wire fence stretched out, obviously enclosing the group of shabby, flat-roofed buildings that met Andy’s observing eyes. These buildings, some of which were two stories, some three stories, were cheaply constructed of wood. At some definite point the business had started, and expansion had been simply a process of building on.

From the factory there came no sounds of flapping belts; no whirl of revolving machinery. Possibly the guide read the question in Andy’s eyes.

6

“We are closed down for a week,” he explained. “An efficiency vacation, we call it. As a matter of fact, the factory’s idleness is no hardship for us. For we are over-stocked with carriages; the orders haven’t been coming in.”

There was a detached office, a square wooden building, and opening the door the grave-faced guide courteously stood to one side on the worn door stone.

Andy found himself in a small lobby, beyond the corral of which he could see vacated desks. There was a dusty, papery stuffiness in the atmosphere. The office walls were

depressingly time-stained; the furniture seemed ashamed of its creaky joints and marred surfaces. A tall iron vault door was set into one of the office walls, giving the room somewhat the aspect of a prison. Just without the vault entrance was a high, old-fashioned bookkeeping desk with its battery of pens and inkwells.

The guide reached out and touched the desk. There was a softer quality in his voice when he informed:

“I work at this desk. Bookkeeper. We haven’t much in that line to work with. For Mr. Warman is old-fashioned in his business ideas.”

7

“I imagine,” came politely, “that it is hard to do good work under such conditions.”

A flush mounted to the bookkeeper’s face.

“Maybe I shouldn’t have said that. Mr. Warman is a wonderfully kind old gentleman. It’s just his way, I suppose. He has done a lot for the men who work here. He keeps all the old hands, notwithstanding the fact that we’ve carried red balances for the past three years.”

“I take it that there are two Mr. Warmans,” said Andy, recalling that the letter had been signed George Warman, Jr.

“Yes, sir, Mr. Herman Warman is the owner of the factory and the old gentleman to whom I just referred. His son, George, is dead. George, Jr., is the young man who wrote to your company.”

“I understand. And is George, Jr., one of the managers?”

The bookkeeper laughed.

“Oh, no! Old Mr. Warman recognizes no authority but himself. He’s a bit stubborn and unreasonable in that respect. George helps out here and there. Mostly in the factory. He has a good business head. If he had his way we’d be more up-to-date in our equipment and methods. We talk over a lot of things—George and I and Tim Dine. Tim is a machine bug. You know his kind—always thinking up ways of producing things better and cheaper. But Mr. Warman wants the factory left unchanged. Talk new ideas to him and he goes up in the air. About twice a month he fires Tim, then hires him back. Tim would have left us long ago, for a steady job elsewhere, if it hadn’t been for George.”

8

Andy’s eyes sparkled. What a great game it would be, he told himself in boyish enthusiasm, to join forces with these ambitious young men and put this dying business—this fallen industrial giant—back onto its feet. He felt that advertising could do it.

“Our greatest weakness lies in our selling end,” Harnden proceeded, as though he read the other’s thoughts. “It’s no use for us to think up better manufacturing schemes if we can’t market what we build. The carriage industry, as you probably know, has met with severe reverses lately. A great many of the old carriage companies have gone out of business. But there still is a market for some carriages. George contends that advertising will enable us to reach that market and hold it. That’s why he sent for you to come here, advertising being your

business. He wants you to tell us, if you can, how we can make the name 'Warman' mean the same thing in the carriage field that 'Packard' means in the automobile field. Mr. Warman, of course, knows nothing of what is going on."

Andy smiled.

9

"With four of us working together we ought to be able to win the old gentleman over."

The bookkeeper's eyes glowed.

"You really think then, Mr. Blake, that we can put it across?"

Andy had supreme confidence in the power of advertising. If an article had merit, was his professional view, the right kind of advertising would sell it. He so expressed himself.

"As George says, things are coming to a show-down," the encouraged bookkeeper then went on. "We've let Mr. Warman have his way in everything. The result, as I say, shows in red balances and idle machines. Now he must listen to us, and consent to the application of modern methods, or we'll have to abandon the business. If you can show us that advertising will enable us to sell our carriages, George will try and induce his grandfather to O.K. the appropriation. Maybe I have told you more than I should. George will be here presently. He 'phoned to me at noon, stating that he had to drive over to Kingston on an errand for his grandfather."

"How old is George?" Andy inquired.

"Nineteen."

“The grandfather must be quite old.”

“He is in his seventies, I believe.”

“Old enough, I should say, to retire.”

“So George said a few weeks ago. You should have heard the old gentleman pound his desk! That’s a trick of his.”

“Maybe you and George should do some desk pounding,” Andy grinned.

“I’ve often thought that if we had the courage to talk up to Mr. Warman we’d make more progress. For he says he likes a fighter. There’s a framed quotation to that effect on his office wall.”

“That being the case,” laughed Andy, little realizing the ludicrous circumstances that were to follow the application of the scheme that he was recommending, “I surely would take him at his word.”

Harnden shrugged.

“It might work. I’ll mention it to George when he comes in. He may be willing to try it as a last resort in getting the desired advertising appropriation through.”

A purring automobile motor died into silence just without the office. A door slammed. Andy’s eyes were filled with warm, curious interest as a young man of forceful personality came into the room, hurriedly, almost heavily, with something of a clamor.

“It’s George,” the bookkeeper’s face lit up.

CHAPTER II

ANDY MEETS GEORGE WARMAN

Manton had a scattered population of less than three thousand people when Herman Warman built his first complete carriage.

The young blacksmith had learned his trade in England. Like the conscientious craftsmen of his day he was jealous of his reputation as a carriage builder. His heart was in his work. It is not strange, therefore, that a demand grew up for the vehicles born into usefulness within the wooden walls of his small shop.

The business thrived. A man of intense ambition and purpose, naturally keen in driving a bargain, thrifty and shrewd in the handling of his money, he became, in the span of years that marked the community's growth, a man of considerable wealth. At the peak of his success two hundred skilled carriage workers were employed in the rambling factory, the town's oldest industry, and now the least active.

The manufacturer had an only child. George Warman was twenty-three when he came to his father with the earnest recommendation that the carriage company take up the manufacture of automobiles. A number of vehicle concerns were doing that. The automotive industry was in its infancy; now was the time to get established in the new field, the son advised, with youthful enthusiasm. It would take considerable money, of course, but it was the thing to do in order to assure the future success of the Warman business. Automobiles were

coming in; carriages would naturally go out.

Strong-willed and set in his views to the point of stubbornness, Herman Warman refused to give any consideration whatsoever to his son's suggestion. Automobiles were a silly fad, he declared vehemently. Expensive; unreliable; foul-smelling mechanical contrivances. They would never supplant horses and carriages.

Hot words passed between the two men. The son, forgetting himself in his anger, accused his father of being old-fashioned, unprogressive, over-conservative. Then he left Manton, locating in Detroit, where the automotive industry was fast taking root.

During the weeks that followed, the talkative townspeople regarded the grim-faced manufacturer with curious, questioning eyes. In a gossiping way they speculated among themselves regarding the nature of the probable quarrel that had separated father and son, sending George Warman away to the city with his wife and baby. "The Old Man's shoulders are stooping," they whispered to one another, a note of sympathy entering their hushed voices. And so the days passed, one on top of another, and the weeks grew into months.

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With June came a telegram. Herman Warman betrayed no outward sign of emotion as he read that his only child had been killed in a racing car. Yet in that moment it is not to be doubted that a dynamic change took place in the stern old heart. Something hard and cold melted away under the warmth of restrained tears.

The following summer young Mrs. Warman passed away. Thereafter when the manufacturer's housekeeper appeared in the streets wheeling a gocart, curious people found their interest drawn to the round-faced, two-year-old boy who looked out into the world with a pair of eyes scarcely less daring and determined than the grandfather's.

And so in the passing of the years George Warman, Jr., grew up in his grandfather's home, his young life constantly touched by an atmosphere of romance, because always the small-town youth who is heir to a fortune and a position of local industrial power is talked about by those people who regard wealth as the magic talisman that opens the inner chamber doors to life's choicest sensations and experiences.

But George Warman, as he grew up, was not nearly the thorough "young gentleman" that a lot of people thought he should be. At the age of fifteen he was acknowledged to be the noisiest and most boisterous youngster in the whole town. His round, ruddy face and overgrown body suggested a life embracing clean, vigorous, healthful outdoor things. No Boy Scout had a bigger collection of medals. As a football player on the local high-school team his dogged determination to win filled the hearts of Manton's opponents with fear and trembling. Now in his young manhood his shoulders were broad; his voice was a bit gruff; he was brusque in his ways, almost rough.

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We have a mental picture of George as he comes into our story, through the office door, his big hand outstretched. "Glad to meet you, Blake," is his frank greeting; and there is sincere feeling in Andy's voice as he replies: "I'm glad to meet you,

too, Warman.”

It never occurred to either of them, young business men that they were, that they should have called each other “mister.”

“Sorry I had to keep you waiting. Had a blow-out coming back from Kingston. Never knew it to fail when I was in a hurry.”

The young man pushed back his hat and skimmed the sweat from his red face with a crooked finger. Turning to the bookkeeper he said:

15

“Just saw Tim Dine down the street. Asked him to come along and sit in on our little meeting. But he had to get a shave, he said. The Rainbow Tire Company has made him another offer. Experimental work. Right in his line. We’ve got to step on the gas, Harry, and show him that he has a future here, or we’re going to lose him. I figure he’ll stick if we once get squared away on this new scheme of ours. Have you told Blake about the pickle we’re in?”

The bookkeeper nodded.

George dropped into a desk chair and sprawled his big hands and arms on the desk top. Leaning forward he directed his gaze into Andy’s face.

“How about it, Blake? Do you think you’re old enough, and know enough about advertising, to put us on our feet?”

Andy was impulsive by nature. It was a boyish trait that he had not entirely outgrown. And having unlimited confidence in his ability he wanted to jump up and say: “Sure thing I can put you

on your feet.” But a certain business sense that he had acquired in his office work counseled restraint.

“I cannot answer ‘yes’ to your question,” was his creditable conservative reply, “because as yet I have only a vague idea of the possibilities and limitations of your proposition. So any promises that I might make would be guesswork. On the other hand,” he smiled, “I would be a poor business man and a poorer advertising man were I to say ‘no.’ Frankly, I think that advertising will solve your problem. But, as I say, I can’t promise it.”

16

The others waited for him to go on.

“An advertising campaign such as you have in mind is a thing to be arrived at through careful thought and analysis. Statistics must be dug up and studied carefully. For instance, in trying to determine the possible extent of the carriage market, I might ask you how many horses there are in the United States, assuming offhand that out of every thousand driving horses there is a logical market for a certain number of new carriages over a certain period of years. Have you any such figures?”

George Warman laughed in his noisy way.

“I can’t even tell you how many horses there are in Manton.”

“And I would like to know how many horses there were in the United States last year; and the year before that. Are there fewer horses to-day than a year or two ago? If so, what is the percentage of decrease? And what percentage of the horses in use are carriage horses?”

“You can see what I mean. Before going ahead with any detailed advertising plans we must familiarize ourselves with market conditions, so that we will be able to plan intelligently. When we have completed our analysis, that will be the proper time to launch an advertising campaign.”

Enthused, George Warman got to his feet.

“You fellows talk this over between yourselves while I drive down the street and round up Tim Dine. Shave or no shave, I’m going to bring him here to listen in on this dope. When he learns that we’re really starting something he’ll want to stick with us and see it through.”

The May sun was touching the shabby buildings with slanting shafts of white light when the four young men came from the silent factory. George was in the lead, scuffing his big feet like an overgrown boy, his tongue running with factory talk. Andy was at the leader’s side, his mind receptive to all that was being said about factory processes. The bookkeeper and thin-faced, dark-eyed factory mechanic brought up the rear.

Andy had the feeling that never before in his life had he put in a happier two hours. The young men had opened up their hearts and minds to him, picturing in words their hopes and ambitions. His whole desire was to work with them and help them.

At George’s invitation Andy and the bookkeeper got into the rear seat of the waiting automobile. Tim Dine shared the front seat with the driver.

“Blake, I don’t know what your plans are for the evening, but

here's what I've got framed up: There's a slick little roadhouse between here and Kingston, and I make the motion, and second it, that we all go out there and have a feed. A sort of pep meeting on the eve of the big game, as it were."

"Fine!" agreed Andy.

The grandson's mood changed.

"I don't know how you fellows feel about it," he earnestly addressed his two business associates, "but I want to tell you that I consider this one of the biggest days of my life. As I see it, with big hopes, it's the day that marks the 'coming back' of Granddad's business. I think we made a wise move when we wrote to Blake's company and got him down here to help us." He looked Andy squarely in the face. "Young as you are, Blake, we think you're a real guy when it comes to knowing what's what in advertising."

"I'm glad you feel that way toward me and my work," Andy returned feelingly.

"Of course, in putting this thing across, we're going to run up against a snag with Granddad. Oh, man! He'll fight like an old trooper when he learns that we're scheming to spend some of his money on advertising. But we're going to win him over. And more than that, Blake doing his part, we're going to pull together, the four of us, and put this old factory back on its feet."

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The throttle was thrown open. And to Andy it seemed that something in the roar of the powerful motor corresponded with the mood of the young giant at the wheel.

“He’s got a man’s head and a man’s grit,” mused Andy in admiration. “He’s just the kind of a fighter I like to work with. I’m glad he likes me. I like him a lot.”

CHAPTER III

TWO OLD CRONIES

It is quite probable that George Warman and his high-spirited followers would have experienced a worried moment had they known that throughout their extended conversation in the outer room an open-eared old gentleman sat hunched in his desk chair behind the closed door of his private office.

Herman Warman had not come here to spy on his grandson. As a matter of fact, he was decidedly uncomfortable in the knowledge that he was eavesdropping. During these late years, as business had fallen off, it was a custom of his to frequently seclude himself in his silent office and live over again, in retrospection, the more dramatic chapters in his industrial career. On this particular afternoon he was annoyed when the entrance of Andy Blake and the bookkeeper interrupted his daydreams.

About to cough and thus make his presence known, he was arrested by mention of his name. Listening, a flush mounted to the thin cheeks. Then his features grew grim. Old-fashioned, was he? A desk-pounder, eh? He'd show these young whippersnappers a trick or two! Just let them come to him to O.K. their nonsensical advertising scheme. He'd quickly tell them who was running the business.

21

But the business, he quickly remembered, wasn't running! It had stopped. There was no business.

He heard his grandson return with Tim Dine; then the four young men vacated the office and disappeared into the factory. When they were well out of sight he got stiffly to his feet. Shaking down the legs of his gray trousers, he gripped his black walking stick and passed from the factory yard into the street. The aged watchman at the gate touched his cap respectfully, but the preoccupied manufacturer failed to observe the courtesy. Thump! thump! went the walking stick on the concrete sidewalk.

It was two-thirty by the town-hall clock when the old manufacturer skirted the central park and turned in at the imposing entrance of the Manton State Bank. As he passed the cashier's cage he caught the eyes of that young official.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Warman," was the pleasant greeting of Thomas May, Jr.

"Good afternoon. Father in?"

"Yes, sir. You'll find him in his office."

Shuffling past various windowed cages, the old manufacturer opened a door on which was lettered, Thomas May, President.

The banker was a fat man, having a big red face, huge arms and hands, and a bulky, pursy body. A stranger would have imagined from the drooping expression of his mouth that here was a stern, hard man. As a matter of fact, any one of the bank's employees would have been quick to declare, if required, that Mr. Thomas May, Sr., was one of the kindest old gentlemen in the world.

Just now, as the door closed sharply behind the manufacturer, the fat face glowed with a welcome that was almost boyish.

“Hello, Herm. Glad to see you. Have a seat. What’s the matter?—you look kind of ruffled.”

“The young smart alecks! For two cents, Tom, I’d fire the whole outfit.”

Mr. May scratched his bald spot and made a queer face.

“What’s George been up to now?” he inquired shrewdly.

The irritated old manufacturer recounted the conversation of the four young men in the factory office.

“George is a smart boy for his age, and a worker,” said the wise banker in a placating tone. “With his up-to-date ideas he makes me think of my own son, only, of course, Tom is much the oldest—almost twenty-eight, in fact. You know what our old bank was like two years ago? Well, all these changes—the marble doo-dads and the new copper cages—is Tom’s work. He talked me into it. I’ll never admit it to him, but I was tickled pink, as the saying is, when he took over the responsibility of running the bank and generally switched things around to suit himself. He has a long head. We’re getting new accounts each week. Folks like him. I’m proud of the way he’s running things.”

23

“As I see it, Herm, you’re up against the same thing, which is the reason I’m confiding in you. And knowing how things worked out in my own case, even with me pulling back at first, I think you better take a tip from me and look on for a spell.

You can storm around and fool your grandson, but you can't fool me. We've been cronies and checker rivals too long for that. You're aren't half as much worked up over this scheme of George's as you try to let on. I know you've got George spotted for the livest boy in this town, and next to my own son I know of no young man I'd rather put my money on than George. He has a level head, and you know it, and, further, I have the feeling that ever since he was knee-high to a grasshopper you have been planning deep down in your heart against the day when he would be old enough to relieve you. Only now when the time has come you are just stubborn enough to hate to let go. We were high-flyers in our day, Herm, but our day was yesterday."

"As you say, Tom, I hate to give in."

24

"Sure thing. I did, too. But it was all for the best. You aren't going to live forever, Herm. So why not start now taking things easy and let George do the work? This advertising scheme of his may be the salvation of the business."

"I haven't told you the worst, Tom. They called me a desk-pounder. And George is scheming to desk-pound me into a corner and make me O.K. his advertising plan. I hardly know what to do. To carry out their plan will cost a lot of money."

"Poof!" and the banker snapped a fat finger and thumb. "You talk like you were just outside of the poorhouse."

"I don't like to see my money squandered. And for all I know to the contrary this advertising scheme is liable to fall as flat as a pancake. I haven't any faith in advertising. Looks like Tom-

fool business to me.”

“Herm, I’ve never said this to you before, not wanting to bring up unhappy memories, but to my notion the biggest mistake you ever made was when you turned down that scheme of your son’s to go into automobiles. If you’d acted on your son’s advice, instead of being so headstrong and so convinced in your own mind that no one in the Warman family had any good ideas but yourself, we’d probably have an automobile factory here as big as the town itself. I’m not trying to rub it in; I only mention this to point out to you that you made one mistake by taking a narrow view of things, and if you turn down this advertising scheme of your grandson’s you may be making mistake number two. Then, there’s another way of looking at it. You’ve got money, Herm. And all you’ve got will be George’s some day. Therefore, looking to the future, isn’t it a pretty good investment for you to put up the money for this advertising and thus find out what kind of stuff the boy has in him? He says advertising will save the business. Make him prove it. And if he gets in a hole, let’s see if he has gumption enough to pull himself out.”

25

Later in the afternoon the cashier was summoned to the president’s office.

“Tom, our customer, Mr. Warman, has asked us to investigate the standing of the Rollins and Hatch advertising agency of Chicago.”

“I’ll take care of the matter, Dad.”

The banker got to his feet and stretched his fat arms. Putting on

his hat he linked arms with his old friend and the two, leaving the bank, walked down the sunny street.

Suddenly Mr. Warman gripped his companion's bulky arm and pointed to a speeding motor car.

26

“There they go, Tom. The young scoundrels!”

27

CHAPTER IV

ANDY AT WORK

Twenty minutes late by the office clock, Tom Dingley walked briskly through the Rollins and Hatch lobby, calling a spirited greeting to the bright-eyed information girl. A moment later he turned into the small private office that he shared with Andy Blake.

“Well! Well! I see we have with us this morning the world-famous Advertising Andy. How lovely! Tell me quick, before I faint with joy over your triumphant return, how is Denny Landers, dear old Aunt Tilly of ‘Taffy Tart’ fame, and the various other Cressfield celebrities, including the mayor’s bull pup?”

Of all the young men in the big agency Andy liked Dingley best, though upon first association he had felt that the Chicago boy was somewhat rattle-headed. He had come to learn that this was merely Dingley’s way.

“Anything new around here?” the returned vacationist inquired.

“About the newest thing is Mr. Rollins’ trip to Europe. He left Chicago last Tuesday, the day before I called you up on long distance.”

28

Throughout the agency it was generally known that Mr. Milo Rollins, the managing executive, was planning a European trip in company with the sales director of a leading tractor concern,

but it had been Andy's understanding that the two executives were not to leave for England until late in August.

The conversation then turned to the inquiry that Andy had been delegated to handle.

"I had a bully good time in Manton. George Warman is a prince. I met two of his right-hand men—real fellows, both of them. The carriage industry, I was told, is at a standstill. Farmers who used to buy carriages at the county fairs are, for the most part, buying automobiles instead. Many of the old carriage companies have gone up the flue. The Warman company hasn't made a dollar in three years. Just now the plant is closed down."

"Not very promising," Dingley showed disappointment.

"George Warman insists that there is still a market for carriages, though obviously it is a scattered market. If he is right, we can easily shape an advertising campaign that will swing the bulk of the carriage business in their direction."

"How's finances?" inquired Dingley, in good business foresight. "We don't want to sink money and time in this proposition and get hung up on collections."

29

"Mr. Herman Warman, the owner of the business, is a man of considerable wealth. Here is a copy of their financial statement."

"Any idea how much they intend spending?"

"Thirty thousand dollars the first year. George, of course, will

have to sell his grandfather on the proposition. I didn't meet Mr. Warman, Sr. From what the bookkeeper told me I guess he's a queer old bird. In a rut, and too stubborn to admit it. He may kick the whole scheme sky high. Somehow, though, I have a lot of faith in George's ability to handle his grandfather. He's a fighter, that boy!"

During the business day Andy gave no further detailed thought to carriages, for considerable work had accumulated on his desk, which, of course, had to be taken care of before he could consider new problems. That evening, though, while abroad in one of Chicago's principal thoroughfares, his thoughts returned to the three young men in Manton. He was still eagerly hopeful that he would have the opportunity of working with them, to the sound building up of the tottering business. But he wished, as he continued his reflective evening stroll, that there were, around him, more general evidences of an existing carriage market. Thousands and thousands of automobiles passed him in the streets, but not a single carriage. Still, he reasoned, one wouldn't expect to find carriages in a big city.

The following morning he was summoned to the manager's office.

30

"Well, Blake," Mr. Charles Hatch inquired in his characteristic brusque way, "how about that carriage proposition? Did you bring back a contract?"

Always in the presence of this waspish, sallow-faced, furtive-eyed junior executive, Andy felt vaguely uneasy.

"Let's get action on this," the curt order followed the younger

man's somewhat faltering recital of his trip to Manton. "For we need the business."

Andy's face flushed. Mr. Rollins, he thought, wouldn't have spoken so sharply.

"I didn't think, sir, that we should urge a contract on the Warman company without first making sure that there *is* a market for carriages."

"Of course, there's a market for carriages," came impatiently. "Here are some figures that I gathered the other day," the agency's statistician went on. "The United States alone has approximately nineteen million farm horses, of which it is safe to conclude that not less than five per cent are used for carriage purposes. In the past two years, even with the wide acceptance of tractors, the number of horses on farms has decreased less than four per cent. Surely this points to an existing carriage market. Our job, as advertising men, will be to see that the Warman company gets the big bulk of the business."

31

Andy thought warmly of his three new friends in Manton.

"Then you feel, sir," his face brightened, "that we should accept the account?"

This question nettled the executive.

"One thing you must learn, Blake, if you expect to progress here, is to wisely decide things for yourself, and not wait on others to decide things for you."

“I would like to accept the account, sir.”

“Fine!” the cold voice showed more warmth. “If that is your recommendation, after spending an afternoon there, we *will* accept the account. Now, Blake, get your campaign in shape as quickly as possible. If necessary, turn your regular work over to Dingley. Mr. Rollins has spoken highly of your ability. I want to see what you can do on this carriage proposition. So do your best. And come to me the moment you have everything in shape.”

Andy’s mind was a bit confused as he returned to his desk. Mr. Hatch was a queer man, sharply critical one minute and flattering the next. But though appreciative of the praise given him the younger one wished that he hadn’t been made responsible for the new account without first having been permitted to complete a careful analysis. It seemed to him that Mr. Hatch, with his ready statistics, had acted hastily.

32

“Get a raise in pay?” joked Dingley, meeting Andy as the latter came out of the manager’s office.

“We were discussing the Warman proposition. He wants me to work out a campaign right away. Page ads for all of the reliable mid-western farm papers; mail order copy; clean-cut illustrations. *Warman carriages since 1875—the greatest buggy buy in the world.*”

“Why not make it the ‘buggiest buy?’” joked Dingley, always on the lookout for fun.

“In the copy,” Andy continued, “we’re to make a strong bid for inquiries, and I’m to dope out some form letters and follow-up

literature. We'll have to install a system at the factory for handling the direct-by-mail stuff. The bookkeeper can help out on that. It's going to be fun. Still, I wish that Mr. Hatch had acted less hastily."

Passing into their office, Dingley closed the door.

"Blake, tell me the truth, do you like Mr. Hatch?"

"In secret between us—no."

"Nor do I. Furthermore, I have no confidence in him."

33

Here the door opened and Mr. Bagley, the clerk in charge of the research and media files, came quietly into the room, handing Andy a list of the leading mid-western agricultural magazines, together with rates, circulation by states, and closing dates.

The Warman campaign was begun.

34

CHAPTER V

FLY PAPER

Andy was warmly praised for the quick, concise work that he did on the Warman campaign. It was extremely creditable work, Mr. Hatch commended, as he carefully checked over each individual piece. The layouts were nicely balanced; many of them were catchy and clever; the copy was sound and sensible.

“As a matter of fact, Blake,” the executive went farther with his compliments, “the caliber of your work, considering your age and experience, is a pleasing surprise to me. You show a great deal of originality, a splendid personal asset, I might say, in advertising work, yet you couple this with desirable good sense. I had planned on going to Manton with you, to help present the campaign to the carriage company, but from what I’ve seen of your work here I’m convinced that you won’t need me. So you’re on your own, my boy! And the sooner you come back from Manton with the contract the better pleased I’ll be.”

The junior partner’s praise of his work was a pleasing surprise to Andy. He had expected cynical criticism. For throughout the agency Mr. Hatch had the unpleasant reputation of being a chronic fault finder. A “comma hound” is what some of the scornful experienced copy writers called him, meaning that if he could find nothing of importance to pick to pieces in their copy he would question the use of commas in certain paragraphs. But not a single comma had been “killed” in Andy’s copy. Happy, the younger one was also a trifle dazed

over his unexpected good fortune.

What had greatly aided the young advertising man in his current work was his enthusiasm, the underlying force of which, of course, was his new friendship with the three Manton young men and his still earnest desire to become associated with them.

Friday morning at ten o'clock Andy left Chicago for Manton, arriving in the little manufacturing town shortly after the noon hour. George Warman was waiting at the depot, having been advised by telegraph of the advertising man's intended visit and its purpose. There was a warm light in both pairs of eyes as the young men again clasped hands.

"Well," laughed Andy, tossing his portfolio of advertising suggestions into the rear seat of the waiting automobile, "this is the day we start the big show."

36

Arriving at the factory, from which came the drone of woodworking machinery, thus telling of resumed operations, the visitor was taken directly into the manager's private office.

"Granddad," George introduced, "this is Mr. Andrew Blake, a member of the Rollins and Hatch advertising firm of Chicago. He's here at my request to show us how we can use advertising in our business."

Forewarned, as it were, Mr. Warman had come to certain reflective decisions. His crony, Mr. May, was right. He was getting too old to run the carriage business. It was a burden for younger shoulders. But it was characteristic of the stubborn old gentleman to now want to hold off. So there was nothing

friendly in his narrowed eyes as the campaign was presented to him piece by piece.

Andy talked briefly of the integrity of his company, then jumped into a recital of the very probable opportunities that lay within the scope of intensive advertising in the carriage manufacturing field. Quoting Mr. Hatch's figures, he gave the number of horses on farms in the United States, dwelling on the minor decrease in the past two years, his point being that where there were carriage horses there obviously was a carriage market. Intensive advertising in the leading midwestern agricultural magazines would enable the Warman company to get the lion's share of the carriage business. A mailing list could be built up of the names of the people who had sent in inquiries, and when the inquiries were not immediately turned into orders the prospects could be circularized regularly with business-pulling direct-by-mail pieces.

37

In discussing his marketing chart, Andy explained the helpful relation of the proposed advertising to the work of the local dealer. He submitted suggested page advertisements, reading the copy aloud. Further, he quoted magazine circulation figures, advertising rates, estimated the cost of engravings and composition, explained in detail how each part of the work would be handled. Knowing his subject, his earnest words came easily and carried an air of conviction.

"Blake has the right dope, Granddad," George spoke up when Andy had completed his presentation of the campaign. "His advertising scheme, as you can see, is common-sense stuff. It will enable us to get on our feet."

“Humph! Who’s going to pay for this advertising?”

“We will, of course.”

“‘We?’” the old man knit his shaggy eyebrows. “Who do you mean by ‘we?’”

“The company,” said George.

38

“There’s no ‘we’ in this company. I’m the company,” came dryly.

The grandson’s face flushed.

“I said ‘we’ because I work here and take an interest in the business. You know what I mean.”

“How much is this advertising going to cost?”

“Thirty thousand dollars.”

The old man’s voice changed to a sharper pitch.

“Thirty thousand dollars for a lot of advertising folderol? No, no!”

“Granddad, I won’t let you turn this thing down. You don’t understand what it means to me. It’s my chance. And there’s Harnden and Tim Dine. You know about our plans. If you kill the advertising scheme Tim will leave us and go to work for the Rainbow Tire Company. Harnden will leave, too, and get a job where he has a future. There’s no future for him here, the way things stand. There’s no future for any of us. What we are

trying to do is to make a future for ourselves.”

This sensible speech pleased the old gentleman, but he carefully concealed his inner feelings.

“I couldn’t sleep last night from thinking of what was liable to happen to the business if you turned down the coming advertising plan. It seemed to me that I could hear the factory machinery turning slower and slower. Then everything was still. The machinery had stopped. I could see in imagination the old workmen come out of the factory for the last time. The gate creaked as the watchman closed and locked it. The business was dead.”

39

“Thirty thousand dollars isn’t to be picked up on every street corner.”

“Thirty thousand dollars is a lot of money, I know. But think of the good it will do if we invest in advertising, as Blake so sensibly recommends. It will multiply our orders. Instead of having the business divided between ten or a dozen struggling carriage companies, as now, we’ll get practically all of it.”

“Yes, and the advertising expense will eat up the profits. So what have you gained?”

“We may not make a profit this year. But we’ll get started right. And next year—”

The old gentleman arose in interruption, reaching for his hat and cane.

“Granddad, I’m not going to let you cheat me out of my chance

of making good in this factory. You're going to sign Blake's contract."



“GRANDDAD, YOU’RE GOING TO SIGN BLAKE’S CONTRACT.”

“I won’t,” the manufacturer thumped his desk.

“Yes, you will,” the grim-faced grandson as vigorously thumped in turn.

The elder one’s cane reached out and craftily pushed forward a fresh sheet of fly paper. Straightway the thumping grandson found himself in a predicament.

40

“Excuse me for coming in without rapping, Herm,” the banker’s pursy voice came from the doorway, “but from the commotion in here I figured that you might be needing my help.” The visitor’s eyes twinkled. “What’s the matter with Sonny?—is he having a fit?”

“No,” George furiously tore at the sticky fly paper, resenting the intrusion, “I’m not having a fit.”

“He’s trying to get thirty thousand dollars out of me.”

It quickly occurred to the grandson to enlist the banker’s aid. “Blake is here with an advertising proposition, Mr. May. It will put our business back on its feet. But Granddad won’t listen to reason. Oh, blast it all! Plague take this blamed fly paper!”

Gripping his cane, the old manufacturer winked at his crony and the two men passed from the room, leaving the grandson the picture of despair.

“Blake, I guess it’s all off. I’m sorry. I thought that I could get

Granddad to see the light. I'm through arguing with him. From now on the business can go to pot for all I care."

While Andy was gathering up his rejected material the door flew open.

"Hurray!" cried the excited bookkeeper, dancing into the room. "Here's the contract. Mr. Warman signed it in the outer office."

41

"Let me see it," cried the amazed grandson.

"They say that all's well that ends well," Andy laughed nervously, recovering his spirits, "but if I may be privileged to speak my mind, I must say that your grandfather's way of doing business is hard on a fellow's heart."

George's face was aglow.

"There isn't another granddad like him in the whole world," he spoke in a voice that was warm with affection. "About the time he carries his bluff to the point where I want to hate him, he usually turns around in his queer way, as to-day, and does the thing I least expect, thus causing me to love him more than ever. He's been like that as far back as I can remember."

It was then suggested by Harnden that they look up Tim Dine and tell him the good news.

"While you're doing that," said Andy, "I'll get the agency on long distance. For everything is in shape for a quick get-away."

"Atta-boy!" cried George. "That's the way to talk. What we

want now is speed, and nothing else but.”

CHAPTER VI

THE BOY PRODUCTS COMPANY

One sunny morning in June a cablegram was received at the Rollins and Hatch offices advising that Mr. Rollins was hurrying home. Thereafter Andy eagerly anticipated the hour when the general manager would be back at his desk. The younger one carried in his appreciative heart a tremendous respect and boyish affection for his chief employer. Mr. Rollins had given him his “big chance.” A clerk in Denny Landers’ small-town general store, his youthful advertising work had attracted the attention of the Rollins and Hatch agency, as related in the preceding book of this series, *ANDY BLAKE*, and following an exchange of letters he had been offered a beginner’s position in the Chicago company. A big step it was from easy-going Cressfield to dynamic Chicago, a big step with bigger pay for the aspiring young advertising man, and vastly bigger opportunities. Small wonder that the boyish heart constantly swelled with gratitude.

Business took Andy to the south-side plant of the Ayer Planing Machine Company, one of the agency’s accounts, on the morning when Mr. Rollins returned to the city. The first intimation that the young man had that the general manager was back in his private office was when he found a note in his incoming desk basket:

43

Blake, please see me immediately. M. R.

The blood flowing more quickly through his veins, Andy started directly for the manager's office. Nor did he even momentarily delay his steps when Dingley beckoned to him from the door of the art department. His young friend could wait. Certainly, was the summoned one's decision, he wasn't going to keep his employer waiting. But why, he wondered, curious, was his office companion, and others in the room, so visibly excited?

"Blake, it's mighty pleasing to see you again."

Andy's face glowed as he took the outstretched hand.

"I'm glad to see you, too, Mr. Rollins. I trust you had a successful trip."

There was brief mention of tractors and probable European markets, following which the executive took up the business in hand.

"I have a memo here regarding this new carriage account that you are handling. Was the account booked on your recommendation, Blake?"

"I told Mr. Hatch that I would like to accept the account."

44

"Then you felt that the market for carriages was of sufficient importance to justify an extensive advertising campaign?"

"Mr. Hatch seemed to think so, sir. His figures showed that many millions of horses are in use on American farms."

"Oh! . . . He had figures?"

“Yes, sir.” It was now plain to Andy that something was amiss. “Is there anything wrong with the way I’ve handled the campaign?” he inquired, in growing anxiety.

“Not at all. But that isn’t the point. The acceptance of the account in the first place was a serious blunder. And I’m trying to find out whether you are in any way to blame, or whether, as I am more inclined to suspect, Mr. Hatch trickily played you for a greenhorn.”

Stunned and amazed, the younger one could only stare.

“Blake, the carriage business is a losing game. The fact that there are millions of horses in use on American farms doesn’t change the color of the carriage situation a particle. I can take you into any rural center and prove to you, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that there is *not* a consequential carriage market. The Warman people should have known this, being in the business. I’m surprised at their poor judgment in authorizing the campaign. If I were in the carriage business I’d do one of two things: Sell out to a concern in another line; or go into a new line myself.”

The executive opened an old mail-order catalog.

45

“This was issued in 1904. See the line of carriages! Ten full pages. And if we were to check up I dare say we’d find another ten pages devoted to carriage accessories. This means that in 1904 the farmers and small-town people were buying carriages. Recognizing this fact, the mail-order houses were pounding hard for the business.

“Now, let us see what they are doing to-day. Here is a current

catalog. Not more than one-sixth of a single page devoted to carriages! The mail-order people are not asleep at the switch. Their comparative sales records are unsurpassed by any commercial house on earth. Under normal conditions they know to within a few thousand dollars how much business to expect in December. They know how many pianos they'll sell in June. Also they know how many carriages they'll dispose of in a half year. It is a negligible item. The catalog proves it. Because if the business was there they would be going after it. It isn't there; they've found that out. You'll notice that they give less space to carriages than to tire patches. And look at the pages and pages of other automobile accessories! Mail-order catalogs such as this one may not be an absolutely faithful barometer of rural demand, yet I would hesitate, as a practical business man, to try and sell to farmers, through advertising, a line of goods that the mail-order houses regarded doubtfully.

“My point is, Blake, that we cannot, as I see it, make good on this carriage campaign. For the business isn't there. So the thing for us to do, without delay, is to admit frankly to the client that we made an error and call off the campaign. A loss of a few thousand dollars should be vastly more welcome to them than a probable loss, at the year's end, of thirty thousand dollars.”

46

Andy had listened with varying troubled emotions.

“But why is it, Mr. Rollins, that Mr. Hatch thought of none of these things? He even urged me to go ahead.”

The executive held the younger one's eyes for a moment.

“Did Mr. Hatch’s extravagant praise of your work never surprise you, Blake?”

“I wondered at it, at first.”

“Yet, you never suspected that he had a hidden iron in the fire?”

“No, sir.”

Andy then learned why the office force was so excited.

47

“Mr. Hatch and I have severed partnership, Blake. For many months I have been distrustful of him. Now I know that he’s a business crook. On the train out of New York I had a long talk with the president of the Rainbow Tire Company, whose immense plant, you may recall, is located in Manton. For years I have had an eye on that particular account. But the business is now lost to us, Blake, for our reputation in Manton is against us. Men like Mr. Chadwick of the Rainbow company know that advertising won’t sell carriages in this day and age. And in our eager acceptance of the Warman account they think we showed poor judgment; were even grasping in fact. You can see now why Mr. Hatch encouraged you to accept the Warman account. With secret plans of a separate business he wanted us to get a black eye in Manton. My secretary had her suspicions, clever girl that she is. And it was on her advice that I cut short my European business and hurried home. Not until I had talked with Mr. Chadwick, though, did I get an insight into Hatch’s real motive in booking the Warman account. He’ll talk prettily of his reason for leaving here, shaking his own skirts clean! That’s all, Blake. Dissolve the Warman campaign as quickly as

possible and pick up your other work. Whatever loss we have suffered through Hatch's trickery, you understand, of course, that no personal blame is attached to you. Yet there is a lesson in this for you. Keep your wits about you."

It was a relief to Andy when the five o'clock dismissal sounded. Following the evening meal, which he barely tasted, he roamed the city streets, his mind in a turmoil.

48

Again and again his thoughts returned to the tricky junior partner. And always his face burned as he recalled the extravagant praise that had been showered on him. Played for a greenhorn! That is the way Mr. Rollins had expressed it. "Fine work, Blake. Amazingly good work for one of your years and experience. You have, as I have mentioned before, originality and good sense. Keep it up, my boy, and you'll become a top-notch in the business." Day after day he had swallowed this glib flattery, like the "greenhorn" that he was. He had liked it, too—that was the most humiliating part of all.

"Some day," he told himself, white-lipped, "I'm going to get even with that man. He took advantage of me because I'm a boy. But I won't always be a boy. I'm going to go higher up in advertising than he is. And then, when I've had the experience, I'm going to get him."

Seeking a late bed, he lay thinking and planning. Mr. Rollins had said: "If I were in the carriage business I'd do one of two things: Sell out to a concern in another line; or go into a new line myself." Yes, the thing for the Warman company to do was to get into a new line—a line that could be manufactured advantageously with the factory equipment at

49

hand. The balance of the advertising appropriation could be spent in directing the manufacturing processes into new and profitable channels.

But what would the new line be? Woodenware, of course. But what kind of woodenware? He thought of furniture. This line didn't enthuse him. He had the feeling that the manufacture of furniture was somewhat overdone. A new concern in the field would be handicapped by the stiff competition.

"No," he told himself, "it won't be furniture. It must be some wooden novelty that we can manufacture easily and sell readily—something that people will want. The right idea will come to me if I just keep thinking."

His head was dull from loss of sleep when he appeared at the office the following morning. There was still considerable excitement in the organization over the broken partnership. Dingley was talkative. He had heard, he said, that Mr. Hatch had landed a big tire account.

Two days later Andy went to Manton. When he returned to the office he seemed more like the Andy Blake of old. The warm, confident expression had returned to his eyes. He seemed to walk with winged feet, so buoyant were his steps. Dingley observed the change and marveled.

50

"Say, what's this I hear about young Blake going to quit?" the art director inquired.

"He's going to locate in Manton as sales and advertising manager of the Boy Products Company," Dingley informed. "It's a new concern—a branch of the old Warman Carriage

Company. George Warman is president and general manager. The bookkeeper—I think his name is Harnden—is secretary and treasurer. A fellow by the name of Tim Dine is engineer of inventions and production. A room has been fixed up on the top floor of the factory, so I hear, and the thing that Dine and old Mr. Warman are secretly working on is the thing they're going to manufacture. Andy, of course, is all enthused."

"I hadn't expected him to quit so soon."

"He's a queer fellow, Evans. As conscientious as the deuce. You know how he bubbled over and got the carriage people into a hole. The advertising, I hear, hasn't pulled a dozen inquiries. Well, he feels that it's his duty to help get them on their feet. That's why he's going down there. He tells me that he's coming back. I hope so. For he's a good kid."

CHAPTER VII

THE COASTER-WAGON RODEO

Andy Blake was coming to town to put on a coaster-wagon rodeo! The Cressfield *Gazette* said so. Small wonder that the younger boys were happily excited. Nor is it to be wondered at, either, that the fathers and mothers were a good bit curious over the coming affair. Cressfield, it will be remembered, was the scene of Andy's early advertising activities. The people in the friendly small town had not forgotten his unique campaigns. It was like him, they said, smiling reminiscently, to come out with a new idea in coaster wagons.

Earlier in the month the *Gazette* had carried an account of the new Comet Coaster that the former enterprising Cressfield boy was now helping to put on the market. He had temporarily given up his agency work, the newspaper stated. Of course, not many in the small town knew the whole story of the ill-advised and hence unsuccessful carriage campaign, and the few who did know the story were discreetly and loyally silent. If Andy had made a blunder it was to his credit, was the general friendly feeling at home, that he was now doing everything in his power to correct that blunder. Certainly, a new line of coaster wagons was vastly more interesting than an old line of carriages. And with his abundance of original marketing ideas, it was hardly to be doubted that he would make an outstanding success of the new product.

In the window of the Landers general store were three symmetrical silver cups, gold-frosted within the bowls and

beautifully burnished without, mounted for display on velvet-adorned pedestals. These trophies, a neat window card explained, were to be awarded by qualified judges to the three young winners in the coming coaster-wagon rodeo. Free coasters, of new design, were to be furnished for the occasion by the Boy Products Company. And all a Cressfield boy had to do, to enter the coming races, was to register in the Landers store.

Those wonderful cups! The youngsters couldn't see enough of them. To think of a ten-year-old boy winning such a cup in a coaster-wagon race!—a real silver cup with his name engraved on it!

The rodeo was scheduled for Thursday afternoon. Early that morning, as advertised, Andy Blake drove into town with a truck load of brand new Comet Coasters. It seemed that Denny Landers' big store was jammed full of coaster wagons. They overflowed into the street. And for every coaster wagon there appeared to be a dozen excited boys. Smiling customers could hardly wedge their way into the store. But to Landers it was a pleasing experience. For he dearly loved children.

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The races came off in the central park under a cloudless July sky, and that night, of the town's many tired boys, three no doubt dreamt, with just pride, of the marvelous silver cups that they had won that afternoon. And so the Comet Coaster was established in Cressfield for all times. Trim in general appearance, sturdy but not needlessly heavy, mounted on double-disk wheels equipped with roller bearings and big rubber tires, with a patented front axle that assured safe, easy steering, and, as a whole, beautifully painted and varnished, it

was the *one* coaster wagon of all coaster wagons that the Cressfield youngsters wanted.

Denny Landers had eagerly taken on the local agency. And to keep up the interest of coaster-wagon users, and thus make the proposition all the more attractive to the dealer, Andy that afternoon organized a permanent Comet Coaster Club. His company, he told the interested boys, was going to publish a free monthly magazine containing the latest coaster-wagon news, and any boy who felt capable of the task could write a story or article, built around Comet Coasters, that would be published in the magazine, together with the picture of the young author. Further, a section of the magazine would be devoted to club news, so, to get publicity in the magazine, a club, such as the one just organized, had only to write to the editor, at Manton, Illinois, supplying the necessary club news. It was, Andy concluded, to be a magazine for Comet Coaster boys, about Comet Coaster boys in various parts of the country, and, for the most part, written by Comet Coaster boys.

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His day's work done, the young business man went in search of his old chum, Bud York, who, it will be remembered, had helped the Landers clerk with his initial advertising campaigns.

"Well, Bud old hunk, how are the drawings coming along?"

"Pretty fair," the aspiring young artist returned in characteristic modesty.

"Good stuff," Andy complimented, when some of the other boy's most recent work was shown to him. "You ought to go to the city, Bud. There's no field for commercial art in this town."

“Dad wants me to stay here,” Bud dropped his voice. “He says the newspaper business is big enough for both of us. So my art work may turn out to be an avocation, after all. Every fellow, you know, can’t jump up and leave his home town as you did.”

The conversation then turned to coaster wagons.

“You sure had a busy day,” laughed Bud, remembering the lively scenes in the town park.

“To-morrow I do it all over again in Ashton,” Andy informed. “This rodeo scheme strikes the fancy of the kids; and it’s a corking good way of getting established. I’ve been on the road two weeks. What do you think of our coaster, anyway?”

“It’s a darb.”

“Mr. Warman did the most of the work on it. The wheels, you may have noticed, are built automobile style. That’s a big selling point. Then we’ve got the only self-steering front axle on the market. More of Mr. Warman’s clever work.”

“Don’t forget to send me a copy of your new magazine when it comes out.”

Andy regarded his friend with added interest.

“How would you like to draw pictures for the new magazine, Bud? I won’t be able to pay you a big price for your work. But I’ll use you fair.”

“You can hire better artists than me. I’m just a beginner.”

“Your work, with its boyish touch, is the kind I want. Edward Edson Lee is writing a serial for us. And if it’s all right when he turns it in I’m going to have you illustrate it.”

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“Who’s Edward Edson Lee?”

“One of the writers for *The American Boy*. The kids are crazy over his books. So I’ve arranged with him, through correspondence, to write a serial for us, as I feel we need something like that to link together the separate issues of the magazine.”

Bud’s warm eyes showed the affection that he had for the other one.

“Who gave the new coaster wagon its ‘speedy’ name?”

Andy laughed.

“I’ll have to admit that I did. Here’s the way it came about: Starting an advertising campaign a month or two ago for the Warman Carriage Company, we had to abandon the campaign last month, for there’s absolutely no market for carriages. Either the company had to sell out, or go into a new line. When I suggested Comet Coasters Mr. Warman quickly picked up the idea, saying that he would finance the proposed new company if I would consent to locate in Manton and take charge of the marketing. After the way I had bungled the carriage campaign—thanks to Mr. Hatch!—it had never occurred to me for a single instant that anybody down there would offer me a job, least of all the old gentleman, himself. But the unsuccessful carriage campaign didn’t seem to fuss

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him. I was surprised. And having thought the matter over since, I'm convinced that he knew all the time that the carriage industry was dead. But instead of arguing with his grandson he suffered a loss of several thousand dollars, and let us find out the truth of the matter for ourselves. Fortunately Mr. Rollins stepped in before the loss ran up very high. I was glad, of course, to learn that the old gentleman still had confidence in me. And when George Warman joined his grandfather in asking me to stay, I wasn't long making up my mind what I wanted to do. Besides, I figured that if I could help them it was my duty. The Boy Products Company is a stock concern, George holding one hundred and ninety shares, which gives him the controlling interest. Another block of sixty shares is to be divided equally between Harnden, Dine and myself at the year's end, if we make a success of the new product."

Bud didn't quite understand that.

"Well, let me explain it in another way. Mr. Warman is rich. Wanting George to go into business, he agrees to put up twenty-five thousand dollars in cash. But George needs help. So, to be fair, the old gentleman says: 'I'll give my grandson nineteen thousand dollars' worth of stock, and the other six thousand dollars' worth of stock will be divided among you three fellows'—meaning Harnden, Dine and myself—'if you do your part in helping George make the business a success.'"

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"I understand. Then your new company started out with twenty-five thousand dollars in the bank."

"Exactly. I'm on a salary, of course, like the others. And if

everything goes all right I'll get my stock 'bonus,' as you might call it, at the end of the year. As quickly as we can we're going to grow out of carriages into the new line, keeping the old hands at work. It's fun to hear some of the old codgers scoff at our new line. They think it's a big joke. But we tell them they won't scoff if we can build up a business employing hundreds of men. We have ideas for other articles, too, such as sleds, hence our name—the *Boy Products* Company. As the name implies, we are manufacturers of merchandise for boys."

"I bet you'll never go back to Chicago."

"Mr. Rollins says I have a job there whenever I want to accept it."

"Whatever became of Mr. Hatch?"

Andy's face darkened.

"He's in the advertising business for himself. Has the Rainbow tire account as a leader. I frequently see him in Manton. He circulated the report down there that he broke up partnership because Mr. Rollins was a business grafter, concerned only in getting the client's money. Many believe the story, knowing about the carriage campaign. And that's another reason why I went to Manton: It will help Mr. Rollins' reputation if I can make a success of the coaster-wagon business."

CHAPTER VIII

TIM SEEKS A CONFIDANT

In organizing the Boy Products Company, and starting operations, a new set of books had been opened, as it was deemed advisable by George Warman and his associates not to combine the bookkeeping of the two businesses.

Eventually the carriage books would be closed for all times, the new company assuming complete control of the factory. Whether or not Mr. Warman would then demand an added capitalization of the new company, so that he would own stock equivalent in value to the appraisal of his factory, remained to be seen. For the present, his interest aroused, and possessed of a new enthusiasm, he was content to let the young industry use his factory and its machinery without charge.

So the new company was temporarily relieved of such burdens as power, lighting, plant investment and overhead. Its expenses represented investments in materials, labor and manufacturing costs, selling costs, and the salaries of those in charge.

With the closing of the books for July, the four young executives met in Mr. Warman's office to review the month's work. Harnden's statement of operations, as taken from the books, showed that the new company had lost money during the first month.

A thoughtful silence followed the reading of this report.

“I wonder,” Andy spoke up, “if we haven’t overlooked an asset in not including our front-axle patent in the financial statement. It has taken time and money to perfect the invention. It’s one of our biggest talking points. So it would seem to me that we would be justified in putting it down in the books at a valuation of five thousand dollars.”

“But could we sell it for five thousand dollars?” George wanted to know.

“Ten thousand dollars wouldn’t buy it,” declared Andy, “if a competitor wanted it.”

Which was true.

“All right, Harry,” the president consented. “Put it down at five thousand dollars.”

“The patent asset doesn’t change the color of our surplus deficit,” the bookkeeper spoke technically. “But it represents development, which is quite as important.”

Known for his natural quietness, for which trait he frequently was joked by his more talkative associates, Tim Dine drew the others’ quick attention when he inquired:

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“But have we really got a patent on the front-axle assembly?”

“We’ve made application for a patent through our attorney,” informed Harnden.

“But the patent hasn’t been granted?”

“Not yet. You see, Tim, it was only a week or so ago that we filed our application. And the issuing of a patent, as I understand it, takes considerable time.”

“What if we aren’t able to get a patent?”

George gave one of his boisterous laughs.

“Listen to the old crape hanger! Of course, we’ll get a patent,” he added confidently. “For we’re the first people in the coaster-wagon business to employ a self-steering front axle.”

“Just the same,” Tim hung on, though visibly embarrassed by the attention that he was attracting to himself, “there’s a lot of queer patents taken out. And it wouldn’t surprise me a bit to learn that some inventor had covered the proposition ahead of us. In that case, if we infringe, we’ll have to buy the other fellow’s patent, or get out a model of different design.”

“Old man,” George slapped the other on the thin shoulder, “you’re borrowing trouble. Forget it. Our big problem right now isn’t patents, but profits. We’ve lost money this month, which was to be expected, For, as the old saying is, Rome wasn’t built in a single day. But next month we want to make money. How about it, Blake? I think we ought to hear from you.”

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Andy was prepared. Having been in the field getting first-hand impressions, he was more convinced than ever, he gave his opinion, that the Comet Coaster was going to be a big success. All that was needed to stiffen the sales curve was wide recognition. To that point, he had gained considerable headway with his rodeo scheme. Twenty-four dealers had been signed

up; as many separate Comet Coaster Clubs had been organized; and the outlook was that over five hundred coaster wagons would be sold in the worked territory in the next six months.

“Can’t we put on rodeos all over the country?” George laughed ambitiously.

“One man couldn’t do it; nor could two or three or a dozen, without taking years of time. The more practical plan, for quick action, will be to interest prospective dealers in the scheme. I’m getting out a piece of advertising for that purpose, built around my own experiences, and expect to have it in the mail within a week.”

“I like the Comet Coaster Club idea,” George nodded his approval. “It makes boosters of our young users. I’ll be glad, Blake, when your new magazine is ready for distribution. For if we can keep the boys on our side—keep them interested in us, I mean, and boosting for our product—we’ll surely get the business.”

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Having come into the room, Mr. Warman stood listening. Andy and George were smart boys, he told himself. For that matter all four were smart boys. He got a lot of satisfaction in knowing that he was helping them. And how much happier he felt in having been relieved of the burden of running the carriage factory. Carriages *had* worried him. But he had no such worries now.

“For years,” he spoke up, “the Baldwin-Jones mail-order house of Chicago made a catalog feature of our carriages. So it may pay us to talk coaster wagons to them.”

Andy made a note of the suggestion.

“You’ll find,” Mr. Warman added from experience, “that they buy close. But we can stand a short profit if they give us a quantity order.”

The bookkeeper’s report dealing with the carriage end of the business brought little comment. The orders were straggling in, one or two a week. Collections were fair. The carriages on hand and in process of manufacture could be disposed of in time. The work was being handled so that when the last vehicle was built the stock bins would be empty.

Following the acceptance of this final report, the meeting adjourned. Returning to his desk in the outer office, Andy was a bit surprised to find Tim Dine at his elbow.

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“Blake, if you aren’t too busy I’d like to talk with you.”

Andy got quickly to his feet, realizing that Tim never would have come to him this way if he hadn’t something important in mind. Crossing the cindered court the two disappeared into the factory, where, amid the rumble of machinery, they could converse in natural tones without being overheard.

“Blake,” Tim began gravely, “what do you think of Mr. Warman’s front-axle assembly?”

“It’s a big selling point.”

“Yes, but what do you think of it mechanically?”

“I’m not a mechanical man, Tim. It’s all right, isn’t it?”

“It works,” the mechanic conceded.

Andy waited, wondering what was coming.

“In a way it’ll be a good thing for us if we do get hung up on our patent,” was Tim’s surprising statement. “For the axle that we’re using isn’t up to standard.”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“It’s bunglesome; hard to manufacture; costs too much; takes too long to assemble.”

Andy experienced a growing uneasiness.

“But, Tim, why haven’t you spoken of this before?”

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The mechanic’s thin face flushed.

“Oh, I didn’t like to, and thus hurt the old gentleman’s feelings. For the axle, you know, is his pet invention. There’s talk, though, of quantity production. And I hate to go ahead with permanent jigs, feeling, as I do, that sooner or later we’ll be adopting an axle of better design. It seems like a waste of money to me.”

“Tim,” Andy said gravely, “you certainly have made a big mistake by keeping silent. If our front axle assembly isn’t mechanically sound, you should have spoken up.”

“I did tell Mr. Warman one day that I thought his axle could be improved upon. He didn’t like it at all. So I kept still and went ahead on my own hook.”

The salesman's spirits lifted.

"Then you have an axle of your own?"

"Yes. It's upstairs in the experimental room. But I can't show it to you now," as the other made a quick movement toward the stairs, "for Mr. Warman and Swaggerton are up there. Suppose you cut short your dinner hour and meet me here at twelve-thirty."

The office boy came into sight.

"Telegram for you, Mr. Blake."

"Mailing complete serial to-day," the message read.

"Will appreciate early report to thus learn if my ideas, as I have developed them, coincide with yours."

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"More orders?" Tim referred to the telegram.

The message, Andy explained, was from a professional author who had been engaged to write a serial for the proposed Comet Coaster magazine.

Separating, the two young men returned to their work, Andy having promised the mechanic to be on hand at the appointed time. Curious to see the new axle, the advertising man was a bit puzzled, too. It was odd, he reflected, studying the situation, that Tim Dine should have made a confidant of *him*.

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CHAPTER IX

A MYSTERY

That noon Andy ran across the banker in the Y.M.C.A. dining room, and the two, at the older one's suggestion, had lunch together.

"Well," Mr. May inquired in his genial way, "how's the coaster-wagon business coming along?"

"Fine and dandy," Andy responded with his usual boyish enthusiasm.

"You think you can make a go of it, huh?"

"I see no reason why we shouldn't. For we're gaining wider recognition every day. And that's the one big goal. Once we are widely recognized by coaster-wagon dealers, proportionate success will follow."

"Like the work?"

"Advertising and selling is a great game, Mr. May. It keeps a fellow constantly on his toes. And having made progress in the chosen work, I'd be a queer boy if I didn't like it."

Open admiration showed in the experienced business man's eyes.

"Like the town?" he further questioned, in his characteristic short way.

“Yes, indeed. Manton is more like home to me than Chicago. For I was raised in a small town.”

“Where are you rooming?”

“Here at the Y.M.C.A.”

“Know how to play checkers?”

“I used to be a fairly good player.”

“Come up to my house some evening soon and we’ll have a game.”

“Thank you, Mr. May,” the younger one spoke feelingly. “I’ll be glad to come. It’s mighty fine of you to invite me.”

“Maybe I should warn you, young man, that checkers is my hobby. So prepare yourself for a good trimming.”

Anxious to keep the noon-hour appointment, Andy hurried with his light lunch, properly excusing himself when he arose from the table.

“The checkerboard will be ready whenever it’s convenient for you to drop in,” the banker reminded.

“I’ll take advantage of your invitation as soon as possible, Mr. May.”

“Any one who’s a friend of the Warman family is welcome at my house. I’m interested in anything and everything that Herm Warman’s interested in, and that means

that I've got the interests of your new coaster-wagon company at heart. Always keep that in mind, young man, no matter what turns up."

Andy acknowledged to a queer feeling of perplexity as he left the dining room. Could it be possible, he asked himself, puzzled, that the banker's concluding remark, so gravely spoken, held a veiled meaning? Was it intended as a friendly warning?

He was still vaguely uneasy when he turned in at the factory gate a few minutes later. Entering the office with quick steps, he surprised the factory superintendent at the high bookkeeping desk where the orders were kept on file.

"Back early, aren't you?" the superintendent inquired of the newcomer, regarding the latter with sharp, beetle-browed eyes.

"Yes. I have a noon-hour appointment with Tim Dine."

During the brief time that the young agency man had been associated with the new coaster-wagon company he had seen very little of William Swaggerton. The swarthy superintendent, familiarly spoken of throughout the factory as "Bill" Swaggerton, rarely came into the general office, and only occasionally did the young advertising man go into the factory. Their duties were widely dissociated.

Now, at the mention of the mechanic's name, the factory executive's face darkened. Andy wondered at this, not knowing that the older man was jealous of the younger one's advancement.

“Mr. Swaggerton,” came the natural inquiry, “what do you think of our new Comet Coaster?”

“It’s a Jim-dandy,” was the superintendent’s prompt response.

“Then it has no weak points that you have been able to detect?”

“No, sir.”

“Not even the front axle?”

“Mr. Warman did a first-class job of that axle. Clever invention that it is, it’s a big credit to him. And while I helped with it to some extent, as you probably know, I’m not the man to try and take any of the credit away from him.”

Andy was puzzled.

“Then you earnestly feel that the axle, as it stands, is a thoroughly satisfactory job?”

“Absolutely.”

“Suppose you were asked to see what you could do toward further improving it.”

“I’d say it was impossible.”

The young sales executive told himself that here was a peculiarly contradictory situation. Obviously the factory superintendent knew machinery for what it was, or else he wouldn’t be holding his job. On the other hand, Tim Dine’s mechanical genius was not to be questioned. Yet, in expressing

a technical opinion of the front-axle assembly, one mechanic condemned it while the other praised it. Which man was right?

There was more conversation bearing on the new end of the business; its current problems; its probable future. At one o'clock Andy followed the superintendent into the factory. But his search of the various departments brought no result. Not only had Tim Dine strangely broken his noon-hour appointment, but, to even greater mystery, he seemed to have vanished.

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Could it be, Andy then asked himself, that the mechanic, in misunderstanding, had been waiting all this time in the experimental room? Quickly climbing the wooden stairs to the third floor, the searcher knocked briskly on the locked door of the secret room. But there was no sound from within.

Mr. Warman came into sight. And invited into the private workroom, Andy found himself taking in his surroundings with more than ordinary interest. Tim had mentioned that the new axle model was in this room. Obviously the invention was hidden. But where? Certainly not in any of the unlocked drawers of the work bench, the advertising man sensibly decided.

A black tool chest, placed convenient to one of the bench vises, drew his attention. Tim's chest! The owner's name was printed on the cover. Mr. Warman opened the chest to borrow a small screwdriver, and Andy thus saw that the chest contained several scales of various lengths, calipers, dividers, and, beneath a removable tray, a hacksaw, two hammers and a surface gage. Each tool neatly put away in its proper place. So like Tim! But there was nothing here in the way of an axle

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model. Yet the tool chest, the disturbed advertising man reasoned, would seem to be the room's most logical hiding place for the invention.

Then came the thought that possibly Tim had removed the invention from its hiding place in the experimental room. If so, what had been his motive, considering that he had arranged to bring the sales executive here to inspect the device? It was as difficult to explain this possible action as it was to understand why the mechanic had failed to keep the noon-hour appointment.

Then, too, as has been recorded, it had puzzled Andy to understand why Tim had come to him in the first place. Why, indeed, hadn't the mechanic made a confidant of either of his older friends? Why had the head of the sales department been chosen? Certainly, either George Warman or Harry Harnden was better qualified to judge the relative merits of the new front axle than one whose interest lay, not in manufacturing, but in marketing. Moreover, to that point, the mechanic should have gone to the president with his problem rather than to the sales and advertising manager.

"Where is Tim Dine?" Andy inquired of Harnden, upon his return to the office. The bookkeeper didn't know. The same question was put to George Warman. "I've been looking for him myself," George declared.

Approaching the girl in charge of the time records, and thus learning the number of Tim's clock card, Andy went to the time clock just within the main factory entrance. Tim's card was in the "out" rack, strangely conspicuous, as all the other cards

were pocketed separately in the “in” rack, the men being at work. Inspecting the lone card’s stamped time record, Andy thus learned that the missing mechanic had left the factory at seven minutes past eleven.

More mystery!

That evening, having hurried with his supper, Andy followed a winding course through unfamiliar streets until he came to a neat two-story dwelling. A large woman in a plain house dress answered the door. There was something about her that instinctively brought to the visitor’s boyish mind a picture of spick-and-span living rooms and a kitchen tenanted by the inviting odors of well-cooked food.

The elderly woman’s eyes brightened at mention of the visitor’s name. She was pleased to meet the young business man from Chicago, she said, who had so many clever and original advertising ideas.

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Andy was now trying to puzzle out where he had seen the woman before. Something about her was vaguely familiar. Nor was it that the son resembled his mother. . . . No, the visitor was told, it wasn’t illness that had kept the missing partner away from the factory that afternoon—he was on his way to Washington. A business trip, the mother explained—something about a patent.

Andy could scarcely credit his ears. Tim headed for Washington! On patent business! What could it mean? Or, to other words, why had the mechanic said nothing to his associates regarding his intended trip? Maybe, though,

something had come up unexpectedly. Yes, that probably was the case. Between ten-fifty, when the advertising man and the mechanic had separated, and eleven-seven, something had come up—something unexpected. And whatever that “something” was it had sent the young inventor away to Washington on a moment’s notice.

More disturbed than ever, Andy would have given a great deal just then to have known what strange and unusual experiences Tim had stumbled into during the ten or fifteen minutes immediately following the morning’s conversation.

With so much peculiar mystery surrounding the mechanic’s actions, it is not surprising that dark suspicions began to creep into Andy’s mind. Could it be, he asked himself, that the mechanic, in secretly rushing through a patent on his own invention, was planning to start up a rival company? If so, who was backing him? Was it his father?

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“A letter for you, Mr. Blake,” the desk clerk signaled to Andy, as the latter crossed the Y.M.C.A. lobby.

Recognizing Tim Dine’s handwriting, the disturbed advertising man lost no time getting at the letter’s contents, hopeful, of course, that now the mystery would be cleared.

“Forget about my wild talk, Blake,” the letter read. “Mr. Warman’s front-axle assembly is O.K. We should go ahead with quantity production. Please don’t tell the other fellows what a monkey I made of myself by knocking the old gentleman’s invention. I’ll see you again in a few days.”

That was all. No explanation of the hasty business trip. No

mention of a patent. No reference to the broken noon-hour appointment.

Andy put his wits to work.

“Is Manton your home town, Mr. Bigelow?” he inquired of the young desk clerk.

“Yes, sir.”

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“Then you probably know the Dine family on Water Street?”

The other nodded.

“Tim and I went to school together. A good kid.”

“Is Mr. Dine wealthy?”

“No, sir. But Tim has a wealthy uncle. Mr. Thomas May, the banker, and Tim’s mother are twins. We frequently see Tim and his uncle together.”

Impulsive by nature, and fully convinced now of the mechanic’s treachery, Andy felt a growing hatred in his heart toward the dishonest young man and his equally unworthy uncle.

“Mr. May’s fine talk about his friendly interest in our company was a crafty lie. Scheming to back Tom in a separate company, he sought to quiet my possible suspicions. Still,” as a picture of the genial banker arose in the disturbed young mind, “it’s hard to think of a man in Mr. May’s position double-crossing an old friend as he has done.”

Coming to a quick decision, Andy went to the hall telephone where he gave the operator a number.

“This is Andy Blake speaking. I’m calling from the Y.M.C.A. It isn’t very exciting down here, Mr. May. And I’m wondering if you’re in a mood to stage that checker game that you mentioned this noon.”

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“I’ve had the checkerboard ready for you for the past half hour,” was the banker’s unexpected statement. “So move lively.”

Passing quickly into his room, Andy changed his shirt and collar. Brushing his clothes, so as to present as neat an appearance as possible at the banker’s house, he then passed from the room, locking the door behind him.

“I wonder,” he reflected, peculiarly uneasy, “if, like the fly, I am walking into the spider’s trap.” A fighting expression came to his young face. “Well,” he added grimly, “trap or no trap, I’m going to get at the bottom of this matter. For my whole future is at stake.”

Then he set forth.

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CHAPTER X

THREE GAMES OF CHECKERS

The obscuring gloom of early evening hung low on the world when Andy stepped into the street. In this hour of relaxation all nature seemed to nod drowsily. Zephyrs that romped amid the colorful blossoms and lush foliage of adjacent gardens came fragrant across the pavements, dripping with the dew of nightfall. The rumble of the town's industrial traffic had died to rhythmic echoes—the synchronism of scraping footfalls, the swish of rubber-covered wheels, the throbbing beat of motor-car engines.

Walking briskly, while above him the watchman of the sky hung out his brightest lanterns, twinkling, shimmering bits of cold silver, Andy turned west at the first corner, shortly arriving in the town's foremost residential section. Here the homes for the most part were large and showy. From windows came fingers of light, dancing shafts that lost themselves, like wandering children, in the shadowy ledges and caverns of the surrounding shrubbery. From open porches, cool and restful under the touch of the moist evening air, came the murmur of low voices. It was a scene that spoke of restful contentment and neighborly peace. Under its magic Andy felt the fires dying down in his heart.

Some day he, too, he told himself, would be the proud owner of a dwelling as pretentious and stately as any of these. Yes, at the end of his business career, a wealthy man, he would settle for life in a small town. The city was a good place to gain experience. He had found it so. But now that he had

passed into and out of the city's training school, he preferred to live the remainder of his life away from the dynamic rumble and arduous strife of metropolitan centers. Big dreams, truly, for a boy! At the moment, though, Andy felt quite grown up.

The banker and his wife were seated in the spacious sun parlor of their imposing home, which room, Andy was to learn, was something of a conservatory. Potted plants on ledges and stands vied with one another in the profusion of their blossoms. A trailing vine with waxlike foliage was trained on an inside trellis that almost wholly covered the wall panels between the windows, now swung outward on their hinges to invite the fragrant evening air.

The smoky maw of a huge fireplace was softened by floor urns filled with rugged field flowers. Of a pleasing design was the masonry, rustic in appearance and fashioned of knobby stones of various sizes and colors. The hearth was gray-tiled, while the balance of the sun-parlor floor was tiled in red, not unlike an old-fashioned Dutch kitchen. There was a profusion of comfortable wicker chairs. From its wicker floor cage in one corner of the cozy room a canary took advantage of each slight disturbance to paint itself in warbling tone tints.

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The floor surrounding the banker's big chair was strewn with newspapers. But these were deftly whisked out of sight by the sprightly housewife between the visitor's knock and his welcome into the cheery room.

Mrs. May, upon introduction, shook hands with the evening caller in a spirited, quaintly-vivacious way. And Andy, as he momentarily held the small thin hand with its fluttering pulse,

was peculiarly sober. Somehow in this moment he found himself thinking of his mother.

In coming here, into the camp of the enemy, as it were, it had been his hope to somehow trap the crooked banker into making unguarded disclosures. What were the capitalist's thoughts bearing on a rival coaster-wagon company? What were his intentions? The sales manager wanted to know in order to protect his own company.

Not all people can play checkers well, because some lack the ability to successfully plan their moves well in advance. Andy could do this. It was months since he had engaged in a checker game. Yet, as with swimming, he doubted not that the old skill was at his fingers' ends. 82

The game began. It had not progressed far when the banker stiffened in his chair, showing a keener respect for his young opponent. And when Andy made a spectacular move, landing his man in the king row, the blank-faced old gentleman raised in his chair with an involuntary "Humph!" after which he plumped back into the cushions.

"Oh, how splendid!" cried Mrs. May in a fluttering voice. "Keep it up, Mr. Blake. *Do* beat him. Please. For when he beats me he tells me that checkers is a man's game, anyway—so conceited is he over his personal skill!"

Andy laughed.

"If you really want me to win, Mrs. May, keep close to me. For I'm sure you'll bring me good luck."

The contest carried on. Never had Andy played a more reflective game. And victory rewarded him in the end.

“What did I tell you?” he laughingly caught his mascot’s eye.

“Now, Pa,” the pleased wife joked her red-faced husband, “I guess you won’t have so much to say hereafter about your wonderful checker skill.”

83

“Luck,” grunted the banker, getting the board ready for another game. “Nothing but pure luck.”

In the second game Andy met with defeat. An early clever move of his opponent’s outwitted him, the game thereafter quickly swinging into the older one’s hands.

“That’s the time I showed you a trick or two,” the winner chuckled.

There was talk of a third game.

“Suppose we put up a wager,” Andy suggested.

“Fine! If I win you buy me a new hat, and if you win I buy.”

“No,” the younger one shook his head.

“Don’t like the hat idea, huh? Well, then, what’s your counter suggestion?”

Here, thought Andy, making quick use of his wits, was the chance he had been hoping for.

“Let’s agree,” he suggested, “that the winner earns the right to ask one business question, to be answered by the loser without evasion.”

The banker showed surprise.

“A business question, huh?” he deliberated, measuring the other with keen eyes.

Andy nodded.

“Relative to banking?”

“No, to coaster wagons.”

84

“That’s your game.”

“I may want to learn if it is your game, too.”

“Has it occurred to you, young man,” came quietly, “that you might not win?”

“I intend to win. For I have an object in winning.”

“Oh! . . . But suppose the wager that you have named isn’t satisfactory to me?”

“In that event the third game, if we play it, will be a mere formality. I probably won’t even try to win.”

Coming to a quick decision, the banker bent grimly over the board.

“Which do you want,” he asked brusquely, “blacks or whites?”

“Whites,” Andy chose.

The game was played with scarcely a word between the intent contestants. Andy made his moves carefully, guardedly, painstakingly. “I must win! I must take no chance of losing!” he told himself, over and over again.

Starting the game at nine-thirty, the younger one had his opponent hopelessly cornered before the clock struck ten. The banker pushed back his chair. And now his eyes were peculiarly affectionate as he regarded the boy’s flushed face.

“Blake, I know the question that you are going to ask. It’s about my nephew. And now that you’ve won, I’ll give you all the information I can. Tim told me this morning about his talk with you. He came to me for advice. What he’s trying to do, with my help and approval, is to lift the new company over a tight place. And if he has to maintain secrecy, as I advised, all you need to do, as his partner, is to sit tight and keep your nerve. Everything is fair and square. I can’t tell you what took him to Washington without breaking a promise. You’ll know in a few weeks. Now, if your question has to do with Tim’s loyalty to the new company, as I suspect, I hope I’ve put your mind at rest.”

85

The boy held out a trembling hand.

“It’s good to hear you say these things, Mr. May. I believe you.”

The banker’s returning handclasp was warm and strong.

“Yes,” he said whimsically, “and in the case of an old checker bug like me, it’s good to have a friend who can put up a real game. So come again, my boy. The oftener you come the better I’ll like it.”

“Good night, Mr. May.”

“Good night, Blake.”

Mrs. May came from an inner room.

“Good night, Andy. Remember that I, too, want to see more of you. For I love boys.”

Andy’s feet were winged that night as he returned to his room. What a wonderful thing friendships were, he told himself.

CHAPTER XI

ANDY SENDS FOR BUD YORK

The following morning George Warman received a brief letter from the absent mechanic. And scarcely had the letter been put aside on the president's desk when the door of the private room was jerked open by the angry factory superintendent.

Always blunt, Swaggerton now seemed wholly disregardful of the fact that he was addressing his superior.

"What's this I hear about you sending Tim Dine to Washington on patent business?"

"Tim is on his way to Washington," George set the other the example of quiet speech. "But we didn't send him."

"The men in the factory say you did."

"Then the men in the factory are misinformed."

The angry executive was slightly mollified.

"I thought it was queer that you'd make a move like that without first consulting me. For if special action was needed on a patent grant I certainly ought to know about it."

"Absolutely," the president agreed.

This should have completely placated the ruffled superintendent. But, for the most part, he was a man of sullen,

jealous moods, as was evidenced by his further conversation.

“I don’t like Tim Dine’s attitude since you took him into the company.”

“What seems to be the chief misunderstanding between you and Tim?”

“He ignores my authority.”

“In what way?”

“Well. . . . He should have asked me about getting off.”

George was anxious to bring about harmony between the two factory executives.

“Suppose in this case,” he said quietly, “that Tim was given special leave of absence from the main office.”

“Humph! When’s he coming back?”

“I can’t tell you exactly. But I think it will be some time next week.”

“We’re having trouble with his automatic wheel machine. Complicated mess that it is, he should be here to take care of it. And we’re waiting on him for jigs, too.”

A “jig,” George knew, was a device used in manufacturing, to assure the accuracy of machined duplicate parts.

“We haven’t any jigs at all for the front-axle assembly,”

the superintendent went into detail. “Everything is being laid out by hand.”

“I’ll see if I can’t get another man to finish the needed jigs for you.”

“*Finish* ’em?” blurted the factory official, seemingly glad of the opportunity to further injure the reputation of the hated mechanic. “They aren’t even started.”

“Well, in that case, Bill, do the best you can until Tim gets home.”

“He’s had plenty of time to make the front-axle jigs,” the superintendent further grumbled. “I took it for granted that *you* knew why they hadn’t been started.”

George didn’t like the inference behind the emphasized pronoun. But he held his patience. It was true that he hadn’t closely checked up on the jig-maker’s work. But, to that point, he had unlimited confidence in the ability and judgment of his mechanically-minded partner. He was sure that Tim was doing his best.

Later the president reflectively sought the bookkeeper.

“Harry, unless I miss my guess we’re going to have trouble with Bill Swaggerton.”

Harnden knew the moody superintendent well.

“What’s the matter now?” came the anxious inquiry.

“He and Tim Dine don’t get along for two cents. Bill’s sore, I think, because we took Tim into the company. If they come to an open break, which I anticipate, it’ll be up to us to decide which of the two we need the most.”

“You know my choice,” the bookkeeper expressed himself loyally.

“Bill has been here for many years, Harry. Don’t overlook that. He’s a good man, too, outside of his temper. It would be a blow to Granddad, I imagine, if we were to let him go. Besides, who would we put in his place?”

“Our partner, of course.”

“Tim isn’t very aggressive.”

“Possibly not. But he knows his stuff.”

“I’d hate to spoil a good inventor,” George gave an uneasy laugh, “to make a poor superintendent.”

“What seems to be Bill’s chief grievance this morning?”

“Oh, he’s sore because Tim didn’t ask him to get off. I made it appear that the traveler had been granted official leave of absence. So don’t contradict me. I’ll caution Blake, too.”

“It’s queer,” reflected the bookkeeper, “that Tim should start on a trip like this without first saying something to us about it. Being an inventor, and headed for Washington, all I can think of is patents. Yet, in a way, that’s a silly notion. For if Tim had something to patent he certainly would have told us all about it.

He never was secretive.”

“By the way, Harry,” came thoughtfully, “in talking with him about the new jigs, did he ever say anything that would give you an insight into his reason for omitting jigs from the front-axle assembly?”

90

“No.”

“Swaggerton hinted that the work was being held up for secret reasons.”

“Oh, Swaggerton is full of hints!” Harnden spoke hotly. “You know him. You know his game, as well as I do. He wants to get Tim out of here.”

Later the bookkeeper was shown the letter that the mechanic had written to the president, in which the absent one explained briefly that he had been hurriedly called to Washington on personal business. Andy, too, was shown the letter. But whatever the latter’s thoughts were, bearing chiefly on his previous night’s experiences, he made no comment. Trusting Tim, he was content to let matters take their own course.

At ten o’clock a registered package was placed on the advertising manager’s desk. And shortly after that the enthusiastic sales executive burst into the president’s office.

“Boy, oh, boy, have we ever got a corking good serial for our coming magazine! *Funny?* Say, the kids, when they read it, will yip their heads off.”

91

George Warman first read the author’s letter:

“After careful analysis of your proposition, as presented to me in your recent comprehensive letter, and after further close study of the coaster-wagon situation here in my own neighborhood, I have come to the conclusion that the readers of your new magazine, for the most part, will be boys around ten and eleven years of age.

“It would be a mistake, I think, drawing on my writing experiences, to give to such small boys, through the pages of your proposed magazine, a serial of the usual type in which one had to follow the story quite closely from beginning to end in order to get the good of it. Rather, I think each installment should be complete in itself. That makes it easy for new readers to pick up the story. And it makes it easier for all readers to follow the story. The old idea of a serial, as you probably know, was to leave the doughty hero being crushed to death in the hairy embrace of a huge starving bear, or some such exciting thing. And the publisher’s theory was that the young reader would live in suspense until he could grab the succeeding issue of the desired magazine . . . to learn, of course, that just as the beloved and imperiled hero was breathing his last, brave, of course, to the very end, a convenient hunter appeared with his trusty rifle, thus saving the hero for further exciting adventures.

“No such cheap chapter-end tricks have been employed in the serial that I am submitting. Here, instead, we have humorous climaxes. Will the next installment be as lively and as exciting as the one just read? Our young reader hopes so. And so we lead him on and on, not through theatrical suspense, a mood associated with fear, but through joyful anticipation. Further, you state that the big bulk of the magazine’s space will

be given over to amateur contributions, camping news, club news, and so on. It is your theory that if you let the boys run the magazine to a certain extent they'll take more of an interest in it—it will be *their* magazine, in fact. I fully agree with you. And to make my contribution seem as boyish (or should I say as amateurish!) as the rest of the published material, I have written the serial in the form of a diary. A conscientious critic might point out the fact that the spelling and punctuation are too well done for a boy of eleven. And were I writing this story for adults I probably would handle it differently. But we're writing here for small boys. So let us set them the good example of good spelling and punctuation.

“I am hoping, of course, after my work on the story, that THE DIARY OF A COMET COASTER BOY will meet with your approval, and, further, that the use of the material will be commercially beneficial to you. If I can be of further service, you know where to reach me. And be sure to put my name on the new magazine's mailing list whether this story of mine is accepted or not, as I'm keenly interested in your proposition.”

93

George studied the signature.

“Edward Edson Lee. Haven't I seen his stories in *The American Boy*?”

“Sure thing. That's how I got in touch with him. He writes about kids mostly. So I figured that he was exactly the writer we needed.”

It was George's impression that accepted authors enjoyed

heavy earnings.

“He isn’t liable to hold us up, is he?” the president spoke anxiously.

“I told him right off the bat that we couldn’t pay him *American Boy* prices. We were just getting started, I said, and hence had to look at every dollar twice. More than that, the magazine was somewhat of an experiment. So it would be poor judgment on our part to pay several thousand dollars for a serial that might have to be dropped after a month or two.

“So it was arranged between us,” Andy concluded, “that he was to write the serial for a cent a word, his lowest rate. I have his invoice for three hundred and fifty dollars. It came with the manuscript. You can see from his letter that he has given our proposition a lot of close study, which is really more than I expected. So I think we ought to pay him within the next few days.”

94

“You’re the doctor, Blake,” George Warman thus showed his confidence in the young department head. “You know what you want. And if the serial has been worked out to your complete satisfaction, I see no reason why the bill shouldn’t go through.”

Andy, however, didn’t O.K. the author’s invoice until he had read the complete manuscript, which kept him pleasantly occupied until the noon hour. Later he enthusiastically got in touch with his Cressfield chum on long distance.

“Hello, Bud. This is Andy Blake calling from Manton. I’ve got a job for you, old timer.”

“What doing?—putting holes in doughnuts?”

“You remember what I told you about our new magazine. Well, the serial came in this morning. And now we’re in need of a first-class illustrator. The thing for you to do, old paint pot, as I see it, is to pack up your junk and come down here and daub. Then I’ll have you handy when I need you. There’s plenty of room for you near my desk. And if you don’t kick too hard in your sleep I’ll let you bunk with me at the Y.M.C.A.”

Bud hurriedly sought his father.

95

“Say, Dad,” the younger one’s eyes were eager, “I just had a long-distance call from Andy Blake. He wants me to come down to Manton for a week or two. Is it all right with you?”

A business man of sound, practical ideas, Mr. York had sensibly encouraged the growing friendship between the advertising specialist and his own studious son, rightly feeling that when the two boys were together Bud was in the best of company. If the somewhat quiet one absorbed a portion of the other’s bubbling business enthusiasm, so much the better, was the father’s thought.

“What new scheme is Andy working on now?” smiled the editor, realizing, of course, that the young advertising man hadn’t sent for his chum without an important reason.

Bud gave an enthusiastic account of the proposed magazine.

“If you can spare me, Dad,” he spoke eagerly, “I’d like to go. For it will be fun.”

“I guess if Andy Blake needs you,” Mr. York smiled whimsically, “I’ve got to say yes. But you better talk it over with your mother. And in case you get to go, remember, son, that you’re a little gentleman. So behave yourself accordingly. Further, don’t let a single day go by without writing to your mother. For when boys of your age are away from home mothers frequently worry.”

Happy beyond words, Bud made quick work of gathering up his paraphernalia. At two o’clock he was aboard the south-bound train, as trim a young man, in dress and general appearance, as one could expect to find anywhere.

Having been advised by telegram that the Cressfield boy was on his way, Andy intended to go to the depot. But last-minute business kept him at the office. So it was in the lobby of the Y.M.C.A. that the two warm-eyed chums greeted each other.

“Go ahead and sock me,” grinned Andy, pumping the other’s arm up and down.

“What for?” Bud grinned in turn, showing in his manner that he was a trifle nervous amid his unfamiliar surroundings.

“For not meeting you at the depot.”

“Shucks! I wasn’t afraid of getting lost.”

The newcomer was then asked to step over to the registration desk.

“Mr. Bigelow,” came the spirited introduction, “I want you to meet the mayor of Cressfield, Mr. Bud York. He’s going to

room with me for a week or two. So whatever his wants are while he's here, ranging from petrified chewing gum to celluloid stove poker, please see that he is properly supplied."

The clerk laughed.

97

"We'll take care of him, Mr. Blake. Any political friend of yours will get the best in the house."

Later Bud was shown the way to his chum's cozy room on the second floor, where a lively tussle ensued as each young rough-neck tried his best to muss up the other's hair and necktie. Boy pals show their mutual affection in that way. And just now Andy was unusually hilarious, so glad was he over his chum's visit.

"Man alive, what do you call this masterpiece of the haberdasher's art?" Pausing in his work of putting the visitor's clothing into the middle dresser drawer, the room owner held up a gaudy garment. "Is it a shirt or some kind of a Hindu prayer rug?"

"Denny Landers' styles are strictly up-to-date," grinned Bud.

Andy held the shirt off at arm's length.

"White silk with pumpkin-colored stripes! Quiet, I'll tell the world. Like a Fourth-of-July celebration. What kind of entertainment did you think we were going to put on down here for you?—a bull-fight?"

"Some evening," Bud bragged in fun, tucking his thumbs under

his arms, "I'm going stepping."

"And look at the striped *socks*!" Andy carried on the fun.
"Purple and green."

98

"Yah," Bud dug deeper into his traveling bag, throwing the stuff right and left, like a scratching hen, "and I've got another pair that's blue and yellow with red tops. Lamp my lavender pajamas, too."

"Oh, oh, oh!" suffered Andy. "When the chambermaid gives this gob of rainbow rickrack the once over I'll be disgraced for life."

Bud's thoughts turned.

"Say, Andy, do you know anybody in Manton by the name of Hemstreet?"

"Oh! . . . So that's her name, eh?" A natural-born mimic, the fun maker now held out a drooping hand. "Oh," he simpered, "so this is little Buddy York of Cressfield. I'm so-o glad to meet you. Yes, I'm Miss Pansy Blossom Rose Water Hemstreet. Stick around till the moon comes up and I'll let you kiss our sick cat."

Bud enjoyed the entertainment.

"It so happens," he explained, "that the 'she' is a 'he.' I met him on the train."

"Well, what of it?" Andy dropped his nonsense.

“Learning who I was, and where I was headed for, he inquired, with a queer laugh, how the carriage campaign was coming along. I told him it wasn’t coming—it was going, going, *gone*! He seemed surprised to learn that you had dropped carriages to take up the manufacture of coaster wagons.”

“Which proves,” Andy put in, “that he wasn’t a Manton man. For everybody around here knows about the new Comet Coaster.”

“But he got off the train with me.”

“Did he give you his card?”

“No, he didn’t, but I overheard him talking with another man about the manufacture of automobile tires.”

“Then he must be one of the officials of the Rainbow Tire Company. Their plant, on the north side, is the biggest thing in town. Still, it puzzles me to understand how a man could live around here, especially a business man, without knowing that we were in the coaster-wagon business.”

Bud had a good memory.

“Wasn’t it the Rainbow account that Hatch stole from Mr. Rollins?”

“Sure thing.”

A moment later the visitor excitedly beckoned his chum to the front window.

“There goes Hemstreet now. That tall man in the gray felt hat.”

A peculiar cry escaped Andy’s lips.

“*Him?* Why, Bud, that’s Mr. Hatch.”

“The old liar!” cried the tricked boy, his eyes blazing.
“If I had known who he was I surely would have given him an earful.”

100

“I’m wondering,” Andy said slowly, vaguely disturbed, “if you haven’t already given him an earful.”

Bud looked sheepish.

“I guess he pumped me, all right. I can see that now.”

Andy was at sea.

“But what did he gain?”

“He knows that we’re getting out a new magazine.”

“Yes, but that’s no secret.”

The boys then went below where Andy was reminded to look in his mail box, thus discovering a personal letter from Dingley.

“Everything is lovely in the agency business,” the Chicago boy wrote in his characteristic flippant style. “We picked off a new account the other day. Appleton Motors. New in the automobile game, but nicely organized. It’s reported, too, that the gone-but-

not-forgotten junior partner is prospering likewise, having recently booked the American Juvenile Vehicle Company, which makes him a coaster-wagon competitor of yours. So look out for him, Andy, if you have any special marketing schemes. He'd steal the pennies off his dead brother's eyes if given the chance."

Andy's face was strangely grim as he put the letter away in his coat pocket.

101

"So that's why Hatch was so deeply interested in the new coaster-wagon magazine! The dirty crook! Even lied about his name." The boy was speaking to himself in tense tones. "Now, I suppose, he'll get out a magazine of his own. Well, let him. We'll be the first in the field. And once started we'll keep the lead."

102

CHAPTER XII

INTRODUCING TRIGGER BERG

The coaster-wagon factory took on noticeable increased activity during the week-end as orders for the new product materially increased. The outlook, the happy partners agreed, was decidedly promising. New accounts were being opened. New names were being added to the Comet Coaster Club roster. Dealers, in writing to the main office, spoke of the impatience of their young coaster-wagon customers over the delayed magazine. Throughout the field the interest in the promised magazine seemed to be increasing.

These were intensely busy days for Andy and Bud, the latter of whom had been warmly welcomed into the friendly organization. The first members of the office force to start the day's work, they were also the last ones to leave when the final whistle blew. Nor did their workday always end at six o'clock, as the night watchman could have attested. When one is particularly interested in a chosen piece of work it is as much fun to put in overtime on that work as it is to go to a picture show—which isn't saying, though, that Andy and Bud missed any of the best picture shows.

On Thursday morning the completed folder that the advertising manager had mentioned in conference was released into the mail, addressed to hardware dealers throughout the state. Later on, of course, it was the intention of the new company to reach out into the surrounding states for business. But the home campaign came first.

It was a big relief to Andy to get the dealer folder out of the way. Now he could give the major portion of his time to the new magazine. Mr. Rollins had generously offered a number of valuable suggestions, gleaned from his years of experience, so, in going ahead with the interesting work, the young advertising manager felt quite sure of his ground. Often, though, as can be imagined, he speculated on what Hatch was doing to similar ends. But he did not let such thoughts disturb him. He had expected to wage a battle with competition. And to have his old enemy appear in the rôle of competitor only served to whet the younger one's determination to win.

The six-page magazine, appropriately called the COMET COASTER NEWS, was first made up in “dummy” form, the copy having been set up in galleys by the local printer. Starting with a blank sheet of paper, twelve inches by twenty-seven inches, double-folded to the desired page size of nine inches by twelve inches, the printer's galley proofs were broken up at the advertising manager's desk and pasted in the dummy in columns. Engravings had been made from retouched pictures of the new Comet Coaster, as it was the manager's scheme, of course, to attractively display the product throughout the magazine, and proofs of these engravings were also pasted in the dummy in the desired locations. The completed dummy was then turned over to the skilled printer, who broke up the type galleys into columns, as specified by the customer, after which the whole was made up into pages, proofs of which were sent to the manager's desk. Following the usual run of corrections and alterations, characteristic of all printing work, the job went to press.

In its completed form the magazine contained on the front

page, under Bud's art heading, an introductory announcement, in which it was explained to boys how they could secure the magazine free and further enjoy the fun of contributing to its columns. At the bottom of the page was a clean-cut illustration of the new Comet Coaster, in the accompanying description of which the self-steering front axle and other exclusive features were specially mentioned. Three of these brand new coaster wagons were to be given each month as major prizes to the boys who sent in the best and most comprehensive contributions. This matter was to be divided into three classes: club news, general coaster-wagon news, and miscellaneous items ranging from four-line ditties to short stories. To write on the subject of club news, of course, a contributor had to belong to a club. In case he held no such membership, nor could locate a congenial club near home, he could qualify by organizing a club of his own, for which purpose club membership blanks would be furnished free, either by the local coaster-wagon dealer or by the company. There were to be less expensive monthly prizes for the second and third best published contributions in each department, a catching glove for the second prize and a baseball bat for the third prize. Further, any printed contribution, not earning a prize, would carry the young author's name, and if a photograph or snapshot accompanied the contribution, the author's picture also would be printed. On the whole it was a fine opportunity, the magazine pointed out, for boys to develop skill in writing.

At the upper left-hand corner of page two was given, in regular magazine style, the name and address of the publication, together with the names of those in charge, such as the managing editor, the art director, and so on. Andy planned

to write an editorial each month, nothing of a heavy nature, but something with a worthy purpose behind it, such as the value to a boy of camping and thus learning to take care of himself in the open, or the importance, in character building, of playing fair in all youthful games.

In the initial issue, of necessity, the bulk of the magazine was given over to the serial, as no other contributions were available for publication. It was explained to the young readers, however, that in the succeeding issues ample space would be allowed for their contributions, so the thing for them to do, to secure representation in the coming second issue, was to get their contributions in without delay.

“If you go camping, and use your Comet Coaster in any small way, write and tell us about it,” the magazine invited. “Or if you are doing a neighborhood delivery business with your Comet Coaster, thus earning money, tell us about that, too. Remember, outside of the satisfaction of seeing your contribution in print, to be read by hundreds of boys, you may win a valuable prize. If you put on a ‘Rodeo’ of your own, tell us about that. Tell us about anything and everything relating to your use of your Comet Coaster. Living up to the name of our magazine, we want to print all the latest and livest coaster-wagon news.

“Then, too, write and tell us how you like Mr. Lee’s story of Trigger Berg. You may not happen to know that this author has many published books, written about boys for boys, so we ought to feel proud to have his monthly contribution in our little magazine. Trigger’s exciting diary will continue for several months, each installment telling a complete

story, though, of course, the separate stories will be closely linked together. If you like Trigger, write and tell us about it. If you don't like him, tell us what's wrong with him, according to your notion. This is *your* magazine. We want it to be wholly pleasing to you. And through the pleasure that it gives you, and through the fun that you get out of your sturdy Comet Coaster and your club, we'd like to feel that now and then you'll speak a good word for the Comet Coaster to other boys. That will help us grow. And through such growth we'll be able to give you a bigger and better magazine."

It was Andy's intention to get out a second issue of the magazine as soon as he had sufficient material on hand. After that, according to his plan, the magazine was to appear at monthly intervals. So, hardly had the first issue been released into the mail than a second issue was begun.

Trigger Berg made an instantaneous hit. And what helped, no doubt, in winning success for the story, was Bud's clever illustrations. Each of these, of which four appeared in the first issue, had been carefully and painstakingly worked out. And while a trained artist might have found much in them to criticise, none of these technicalities disturbed the enthusiastic young readers. The printed pictures of Trigger were, to the pleased boys, the young coaster-wagon hero, himself. Bud glowed with pleasure over the warm reception given to his work. But the finest praise of all came from the author.

"Who is Bud York?" Mr. Lee wrote from his home in Wisconsin. "Never has an artist more fully caught the boyish spirit of my work. Please express to him my hearty

appreciation. May he live long and prosper proportionately.”

“It’s a letter,” Bud feelingly told Andy, “that I’ll treasure all my life.”

But let us see who Trigger Berg is, so that we can better understand why the new magazine’s readers so quickly took the story character to their hearts. Then, too, we should get better acquainted with Trigger and his pals if we are to comprehensively follow the later development of the new coaster-wagon company, as it cannot be overlooked that as Trigger rose in popularity so also, after difficulties, did the fortunes of the coaster-wagon company rise.

Here is the diary’s beginning:

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THE DIARY OF A COMET COASTER BOY

BY

EDWARD EDSON LEE

May 15. Whoope! Today is my birthday. Besides fifty cents, my ma gave me a diary. I guess you know what a diary is. It’s a book with no printing in it. All it has is covers and blank pages. You fill up the blank pages by writing down on them what you do each day. If you go to a fire, or see a dog fight, you put that down. And if it rains or snows, you put that down, too, only, of course, it won’t be snowing very soon around here, for it’s summer.

I've already started my new diary, as you can see. I'm telling what happened to-day. My pa is in Chicago. When he comes home I hope he buys me a swell birthday present. I always get something when he comes home from his business trips. That's the kind of a pa he is.

I've got a good ma, too, I want you to know. She's the best ma in Crockettville. I wouldn't trade her for Skeets' ma, or anybody else's ma. Skeets is one of my best pals. We live close together and go to the same school. His real name is John Beale. His pa owns a cement-block factory. There are four of us in our gang. After me comes Ronald Fish, whose nickname is Friday, because on Friday you always get fish, then Skeets, whom I have mentioned, and last, Robert Beale, Skeet's kid brother, who goes by the name of Tail Light, because, being the youngest and smallest, he always tags behind.

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May 16. My fifty cents is nearly gone. I bought one root beer for five cents. Then I bought twenty sticks of licorice for ten cents, which was two sticks for a penny. Then I bought a dish of ice cream for ten cents. And then I treated Friday and Skeets to gumdrops, which was ten cents. So all I've got left is fifteen cents and a full stomach.

May 17. I was sick last night. I had an awful twisted-up feeling in my stomach. My ma got scared and sent for Doc Fosse. Doc Says it was the licorice. He asked me how much I ate. I told him twenty sticks. He looked at me kind of disgusted-like. I guess he thinks I ate too much. Twenty sticks, though, isn't such an awful lot. I remember one time when Friday ate thirty sticks. You can see what a big pig *he* is. I wouldn't eat thirty sticks

and be a big pig. I don't think I could eat thirty sticks, anyway. I wish my pa would come home. If he stays away much longer he may forget all about my birthday.

May 18. I am all well again. It rained to-day. It rained day before yesterday, too, which was Saturday, only I forgot to write it down. Also I forgot to write down that I didn't go to Sunday school yesterday because I was sick. This morning I tracked mud in the kitchen and my ma scolded me. That is what a fellow gets in this world. One day he is sick and everybody honeys him, and the next day he gets yelled at.

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May 19. I bought more licorice to-day with my fifteen cents. I had ten sticks and Friday had ten sticks and Skeets had ten sticks.

May 20. Whoope! I guess I'm pretty lucky. For a long time I've been wanting a new coaster wagon, and to-day when my pa came home from Chicago he took me down town to Mr. Hans Olson's hardware store where they sell Comet Coasters. I picked out the coaster I wanted, which, of course, is the birthday present I've been looking forward to. Scooting down the street, I almost bumped into a fat lady. Gee! I bet if I had bumped into her from behind, upsetting her, that would have been the end of me, all right. My new Comet Coaster would have been squashed flat. Mr. Olson says it is guaranteed to hold up a thousand pounds. But I don't know, maybe that fat lady weighed a ton, which is two thousand pounds. I guess, though, people don't weigh that much. Just elephants and hippopotamuses. Gee, that's a long word. I never wrote it down before. I had to look it up in the dictionary. I promised my ma that I would look up all the big words and not just

scribble in any old style. In two months she is going to look through my diary to see if I have done a good job with my spelling and punctuating, and if everything is all right she is going to take me up in Wisconsin to visit my Aunt Nellie, who lives on a farm.

Well, to go back to the fat lady, just as I swung around her, making her jump, along comes Skeets in his tacky old coaster. He looked kind of envious when he saw my shiny new Comet Coaster.

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“It looks pretty,” says he, kind of turning up his nose as though it wasn’t much. “But, for that matter, a pignut looks like a hickory nut. So you can’t always judge things by their looks.”

I knew why he said that. He was jealous because the new coaster wasn’t his. A lot of kids are that way. Anything you’ve got that they haven’t got is junk.

“See how peachy it runs,” says I, showing it off. “Notice the self-steering front axle. It’s something special, Mr. Olson says. It’s the best coaster on the market.”

“I bet I can beat you down Clarks Hill,” says Skeets, not wanting to admit that my new coaster was any better than his.

“Any old time you can,” says I, and off we started for the big hill on the north side of town. On the way we picked up Friday, who told us, when we got to the top of the hill, that he would start us off. So we got ready, Skeets in his old coaster and me in my new one, and Friday said “Go!”

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Geeminy crickets calico cats! I never went so fast in all my

life. I thought it would take a minute to get started, but I didn't know very much about roller bearings. Just as quick as scat I was going a hundred miles a minute. Anyway, it seemed that fast to me. The bushes beside the road scooted by me like a green streak. Grabbing the brake, I gave it a yank. Then I didn't go so fast.

“Want me to give you a shove?” yelled Skeets, thinking he could go faster than me.

Well, I wasn't going to have him beat me. So I let go of the brake, just to show him how fast I really could go, and away I went down the hill, passing the other coaster as though it wasn't moving at all. That's what a *Comet Coaster* can do, with its roller bearings and rubber-tired wheels. Then I came to a sharp turn. And right there in the middle of the road was a team of horses hitched to a loaded hay cart. I put on the brake and stopped. But Skeets didn't stop. He couldn't. To save himself he rolled into the roadside ditch, his coaster smashing into a hundred pieces.



The farmer was mad because we had scared his horses.

“It serves you right,” he told Skeets. Getting down from the load of hay he gave the broken coaster a kick. I felt like giving him a kick. “You haven’t any business coasting on this hill. It’s a wonder my horses didn’t run away. If they had, your father would have paid the damages.”

I was getting madder every minute.

“Oh, go lay an egg, you old hay-shaker,” I spit out at him, taking Skeets’ side. Then I had to jump into my coaster and scoot, for he took after me.

Skeets went home and told his pa.

“But why didn’t you stop like Trigger?” says Mr. Beale.

“I couldn’t,” says Skeets.

“Why not?”

“My brake slipped. It never was any good, anyway.”

“Trigger seems to have a good brake.”

“Sure thing,” says Skeets. “Everything on *his* coaster is good. For he’s got a Comet Coaster.”

“That being the case,” says Mr. Beale, smiling “we’ll have to see if we can’t get you one just like it.”

Well, to make a long story short, as the saying is, Mr. Beale took Skeets down town to Mr. Olson's store and bought him a Comet Coaster just like mine. And now Friday is going to get one and so is Tail Light. We're going to organize a Comet Coaster Club. I'm going to be captain, because I suggested it, and Skeets is going to be assistant captain.

May 21. Mr. Olson has sent to the Boy Products Company for club membership blanks. We get them free. And later on, when we get our club organized, the company is going to send us a free magazine. That's something you don't get with any other coaster wagon that *I* ever heard of.

May 22. It rained to-day. I helped Friday clean out his hen house.

May 23. About all I've done to-day is scratch. It's chicken mites, Friday's ma says. We got them on us in the hen house, and they seem to hate to leave us. Maybe they're blind and don't know that we aren't roosters. When my ma saw me scratching, and found out what was the matter with me, she almost had a fit, fearing that the mites would get loose in the house. But, as I say, if any have left me I haven't missed them. I wish about seventeen millions would leave me.

May 24. I went to Sunday school to-day. Nothing happened except that Noah built an ark and I got all the kids to scratching from watching me. The teacher thought I was trying to be smart, which shows you how easily a good boy can be misjudged.

May 25. Oh, boy! Our club membership blanks are here. We're

all organized. And on Wednesday night, which is day after tomorrow, we're going to have our first meeting. I can hardly wait.

May 26. I saw a rooster fight this morning. That's all I know of that happened to-day except that Friday got hooked by the seat of his pants on a picket fence.

May 27. We had the first meeting of our Comet Coaster Club to-night in Friday's barn, which is all fixed up swell with four soap boxes for seats, only one of them is a cheese box, and a cow's skull over the door. During the meeting Skeets got up and said that we ought to put our minds on something bigger than just coasting down Clarks Hill. Every club, he said, had a noble purpose and an uplifting thought, so, as a club, we, too, should have a noble purpose and an uplifting thought. I wondered where he got all that truck. I didn't even know what he was talking about.

"What do you mean?" says I.

"Suppose," says he, "that our uplifting thought is to help the poor and needy."

"That's me," says Friday. "I need an ice-cream cone. So get busy and help me."

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"Shut up," says Skeets, "we're talking business."

"There's two kinds of business I like," says Friday. "Eating, and lots of it."

"Tell us next," says Skeets, "that there's two kinds of things in

your head.”

“What are they?” says Friday, grinning.

“Nothing, and lots of it.”

They started chewing the rag then. So, as captain, I rapped for order.

“Brother Skeets has the floor,” says I. “Let him talk till he runs down. Maybe if he has the floor long enough we’ll understand what he’s talking about.”

That led Skeets back to his “uplifting thought.”

“We can use our Comet Coasters,” says he, “and pick up coal along the railroad track.”

“And then what?” says I.

“We’ll put the coal in somebody’s coal house.”

“And who gets the money?” says I.

“What money?” says he.

“The money for the coal,” says I.

“There isn’t going to be any money,” says he.

“We’d be crazy,” says I, “to pick up coal and give it away.”

“As I told you,” says Friday, sticking his bazzoo in again, “if you want to help the poor and needy, start in on

me. I don't want coal, though, I want ice cream."

"We'll fill Mrs. Camel's coal house first," says Skeets. "For she's as poor and needy as anybody I know of."

Mrs. Camel is a nice old Irish lady. I like her, only I can't say that I like her geese. One time when I was sick she brought some red jam and I got it all over the bedspread. I kind of liked the idea of picking up coal for her. I saw now, all right, what Skeets meant by an uplifting thought.

We ended our meeting with apples and a fist fight between Skeets and Tail Light over their caps. I'm glad I haven't got a brother with a head the same size as mine.

May 28. I haven't much pep to-night. I suppose a fellow ought to be happy who is the captain of a Comet Coaster Club and has a slick Comet Coaster like me. I don't feel happy, though. I guess not. My ma is all out of patience with me. So is my pa. They say I'm a problem. I don't know what they mean by that. I always thought that a problem was something in an arithmetic book.

We got together this morning, the four of us, with Tail Light, of course, tagging behind, and went to the railroad track to look for coal. But we didn't find much. When we came to the old cement mill, which isn't used any more except as a storehouse for old iron such as Mr. Charley Dornick uses in his blacksmith shop, what should we see, in the middle of the floor, but a big pile of coal! The doors were unlocked, which showed plainly enough that the coal wasn't of any use to anybody.

So we filled our wagons and went down the street to where Mrs. Camel lives by herself in a little low-roofed house near the creek. No one in town claims to be any poorer than she is. Almost every day you see a big washing in her back yard. That's the way she earns a living, which is a pretty hard way, I've heard my ma say. Sometimes I drop in at Mrs. Camel's house and help her crank the washing machine. It doesn't hurt a fellow to do a good turn like that. You feel happy afterwards. And right now I felt happy in bringing her free coal. She didn't need it now, but she would make good use of it when winter came. I guess we surprised her with our free coal. She said we were angels, only she hoped our mothers wouldn't trounce us for getting dirty. We unloaded the coal in her coal house and she gave us three cookies apiece. Then we went back to the old cement mill for more coal. We hauled coal all the afternoon. It was hard work. But we kept thinking that it was a good deed. And then it didn't seem quite so tiresome.

Going home to supper, my ma took one horrified look at me and threw up her hands.

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"What in the name of common sense has happened to you?" says she. "Did you fall down somebody's chimney?"

"I've been doing a good deed," says I proudly, "and hauling coal for the poor and needy."

"Hauling coal! Your clothes look it. I have a notion to warm you up with a stick. The idea of a boy of your age coming home looking like the inside of a furnace."

"Gee whizz," says I, "don't you want me to grow up and do

good deeds and have uplifting thoughts?”

“Of course,” says she, looking kind of dizzy. “But the next time you get an uplifting thought for mercy’s sake don’t get chummy with a coal pile. Try and remember that I have to do the family washing and ironing.”

She helped me clean up. Then my pa came home.

“Charley Dornick is on the warpath,” says he. “He had some special forge coal stored in the old cement mill. And to-day four kids lugged it off. There’s liable to be trouble.”

Geeminy crickets! Gosh! I got sick all over.

My ma gave me a queer look.

“Ask your young son about the coal,” says she. “I think he can tell you all about it.”

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Getting my story of Skeets’ uplifting thought, and how we took the coal for Mrs. Camel because she was poor and needy, my pa put his own talker to work, saying, among other things, that I could have another uplifting thought and haul the coal back where I got it. Then I was sent to bed without any supper. It’s tough not to have supper, especially when a fellow has been hauling coal. I never was so hungry in all my life. I guess if I were going to die I wouldn’t want to starve to death. I’d rather be hung or shot. I wonder if Skeets’ pa sent him and Tail Light to bed. I wonder if Friday’s pa sent him to bed, too. I hope so.

(An hour later.) I’m not so unlucky after all. When ma came upstairs to bed she stopped in my room, where I was dying of

starvation. Sitting down on the edge of the bed she kissed me. I was a worry to her, she said, but, after all, she guessed God made me just the way He wanted me to be and it wasn't for her to find fault with the job He did, after which she gave me a cheese sandwich and an apple. Hearing voices below I asked her who was down there talking to my pa. It was Friday's pa and Skeets' pa, I was told.

May 29. Whoope! We don't have to haul the coal back. When Skeets' pa and Friday's pa came to our house last night, to sort of check up on us and compare notes, Skeets' pa said we had good intentions but our judgment was bad. And having had our lesson, wouldn't it be a proper neighborly act, he suggested, to pay for the coal, and make Mrs. Camel a present of it? Friday's pa said that was a fine suggestion, and the three men passed around the hat, each putting in his part of the pay for the coal.

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June 3. Nothing happened yesterday or for several days, so I didn't have anything to write down in my diary. To-night we're going to have another meeting of our Comet Coaster Club. Skeets has a new idea. He told us about it this afternoon when we were catching flies for his pet toad. It isn't an uplifting thought this time. I guess if he has any more uplifting thoughts we'll throw him out of our club. He's got a scheme to make money. Maybe we'll soon be rich like the Ringling Brothers, who own a big circus. For Skeets' idea is to put cages on our Comet Coasters, for a street parade, to be followed by a circus in Friday's barn. Friday is the homeliest, so we're going to let him be the Wild Man of Borneo. We're going to make a cage for him and have him in the parade. It's a swell scheme, I think. To-morrow night I'll write down the rest of our plans.

CHAPTER XIII

THE NEW FIELD CAPTAIN

Though given state-wide distribution, as mentioned, the returns from the dealer folder that Andy had prepared were disappointing. A few scattered inquiries came in. A few names were thus added to the growing list of dealers. But the big flow of interested inquiries that the advertising manager had enthusiastically anticipated didn't materialize.

George Warman and Harnden showed their disappointment. But, even so, they lost none of their warm faith in the firm's earnest young advertising executive, who, in the poor showing of the current campaign, was noticeably disturbed.

The Rodeo scheme, when given personal supervision, had been a marked success. And through the distribution of the comprehensive advertising piece Andy had hoped to interest live hardware dealers in the business-building scheme. But, as stated, the dealers for the most part didn't respond. They seemed not to be interested.

So the daily gains of the factory were small. August, seemingly, was to join July as a red-balance month. And yet so much had been expected!

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When advised of the disappointing situation, Mr. Rollins wrote, in his kindly, capable way, pointing out to Andy that, seemingly, not enough consideration had been given to the fact that hardware dealers, for the most part, were extremely busy

men.

“The average small-town hardware store handles thousands of separate articles,” the agency head wrote. “A great many of these articles, of course, are staples, such as nails and hinges, and hence need no special presentation to the trade. But hardly a day passes that the hardware dealer isn’t urged, through personal selling and through advertising broadsides, to take on some new specialty, or to do something or other, through the use of special window displays and special local advertising campaigns, to push a line that he already carries. A concern perfects a new oil can. It *is* a noticeable improvement over the old product. So, buoyed up by bubbling enthusiasm, they bombard the dealer with advertising. ‘Throw out the old out-of-date line; put in the new!’ Such, in substance, is their strenuous cry. And at the same time dozens of other specialty concerns are doing the same thing, each fighting to gain preferred attention. ‘Push our line! Push our line!’ The cry comes from all sides. If a hardware dealer attempted to do all of the things, in sales promotion work, that he is asked to do, he would be on his way to the madhouse within a week.

“No, first of all the dealer must run his store and take care of the trade. If he is a good business man he isn’t going to let his store run itself while he goes out, with fanciful sales-promotion schemes, to sell coaster wagons or other specialties. As a matter of fact, your average dealer won’t sell more than ten or twenty coaster wagons a year. So his profits, in that direction, are nothing to excite him. ‘But if he applies the Rodeo scheme,’ you argue, ‘he’ll get a corner on the local coaster-wagon business and then sell, during the summer, not twenty coaster-wagons, but thirty or forty.’ Possibly. But

remember, while you are clamoring for his attention, that the new oil-can company and a hundred other specialty companies are doing likewise. Nor is it at all improbable that many of the other presented propositions outweigh yours in importance in the dealer's eyes. So, instead of getting preferred attention, as you anticipate, you may get no attention at all!

“Your Rodeo scheme is fine. But pushing it is your job, not the dealer's. By speaking thus I do not mean, Blake, that, to my notion, you yourself should continue the work. If you decide to put representatives in the field, a few here and a few there, you certainly ought to be able to find suitable inexpensive talent. Any bright boy of fifteen could handle the work successfully if he would apply himself. And, to that point, why not round up a dozen promising Manton boys and try them out? You can take them in a group and show them how the work should be done. Then put them on their own.

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“Another thing: Why not advertise your new magazine in *The American Boy*? You have an author contributing to your magazine who is well known to *American Boy* readers. Therefore, if you tell these readers, through the magazine's advertising columns, that Mr. Lee also writes for the COMET COASTER NEWS, aren't you likely to pull a nice bunch of inquiries from 'Lee' fans? I should think so.

“A dealer may discount your statement that the Comet Coaster will sell more readily than other coasters, because of its enumerated improved mechanical features, but that same dealer, let me tell you, will sit up and take notice if local boys come to him *wanting* to buy Comet Coasters. So, build up the circulation of your magazine as quickly as possible, urging the

young readers to supply you with dealers' names. Even the busiest dealer will read your personal letter if it contains the names of very probable coaster-wagon customers.

“A long letter, Blake! But you understand, of course, that it is prompted by my personal interest in you. If you approve of the idea of advertising your magazine and product in *The American Boy*, I'll have Mr. Dingley work up a couple of suitable advertisements for you, and will, upon your approval of them, attend to placing them for you. Or if there are other ways in which we can be of service to you, as an organization or individually, please tell us about it.”

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“Well,” said George Warman, when he and Andy discussed the interesting letter, “Mr. Rollins certainly has given us plenty to think about.”

“He's one of the keenest and most competent men in the agency business,” Andy spoke warmly of his former employer. “More than an advertising man, he is what I call a merchandiser. The advertising that he creates isn't just advertising, a piece here and a piece there, but important links, or steps, in a definite merchandising scheme. His goal is sales. And each piece of advertising is shaped to that particular end.”

George further studied the letter.

“We can hire plenty of local boys,” he reflected.

“Suppose we do put ten young fellows in the field,” Andy recommended. “We'll pick live wires, of course. As Mr. Rollins says, I can take them in a bunch and get them started.”

“What had we ought to pay them?”

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“Fifteen dollars a week and expenses.”

“That’s one hundred and fifty dollars a week in salaries alone.”

“And in a week’s time we should book a hundred new dealers, for in most cases a boy can work one town in the morning and another in the afternoon. He ought to sign up a dealer in every town. I did, though I’m not saying that to brag. As a matter of fact it was easy work. The cost to us of getting a dealer’s name on our books may be five dollars. But if he buys three Comet Coasters we’ll break even. And the chances are he’ll buy six or eight, and keep on buying for years to come.”

“All right, Blake. I’ll endorse the plan if you recommend it. And if you need my help in lining up ten boys of the right sort, just call on me. For I know every kid in town.”

“Bud,” Andy hurriedly sought his chum, “I’ve got another job for you.”

The young artist looked up from his drawing board.

“I thought I was going home to-morrow.”

“This is a brand new job,” Andy grinned, following the other boy’s eyes to the neat pile of completed drawings.

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“I’m going to make you Field Captain of a gang of boys. First, you and I will work with the boys in a group. Then it will be your job to work with them individually, helping those who are slower than others in getting results.”

“I’ll have to write home and ask Dad,” said Bud, when the pleasing new work was more thoroughly explained to him.

“Let’s telephone,” suggested Andy. “It’s quicker.”

CHAPTER XIV

TRIGGER BERG'S FURTHER MISADVENTURES

It was now the middle of August. School would be starting in about three weeks, thus taking the children away from their hitherto uninterrupted play. Thereafter, in the natural order of things, fewer coaster wagons would be sold, for parents, instead of buying coaster wagons and similar toys, would be buying school books.

This was to be expected. So Andy was in no way discouraged. Yet it was a constant regret of his that the new line hadn't been taken on sooner.

"We'd be in clover," he told George Warman, "if this were the middle of June instead of the tail-end of summer."

There had been a recent rush of work in the advertising manager's office. And now the second issue of the COMET COASTER NEWS was on the press, having been whipped into shape between flying trips into the field where Bud York was enthusiastically and successfully directing the work of a crew of "Rodeo Rangers." In addition to the serial, and the company's advertising, the current issue contained many columns of amateur contributions. One boy had supplied an especially appropriate article telling how he and his parents had camped throughout one of the western national parks, hauling their tent and other camping paraphernalia on three Comet Coasters. Other boys told of the uses to which they were

putting their beloved coasters. There was a whole page of club news, and each and every page contained brilliant touches of Bud's unmistakable genius.

"We ought to do a big business during the holidays," Andy spoke of the sales outlook to the young president, "for thousands of little chaps are given coaster wagons for Christmas presents. After that, though, unless we can work south, out of the snow belt, it's going to be pretty quiet around here until spring."

"Why can't we break into the South, Blake?" George spoke ambitiously. "Take Florida, for instance. It's my understanding that thousands of children of well-to-do parents are taken down there for the winter. In a place like that, with its distinctly vacation atmosphere, the Rodeo scheme ought to go over big."

"It will cost a lot more money to work Florida than Illinois."

"Probably. But I don't mind spending the money, Blake, if I'm convinced that we're doing it wisely."

"I've often wondered," Andy spoke somewhat reflectively, "if your grandfather is satisfied with the progress we are making."

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George's face brightened.

"Granddad is a brick! I used to think he was an old crab. But I realize now that it was business worries that made him that way. You can't appreciate the great change in him, Blake. In the morning I hear him humming to himself in his room. He didn't used to do that. And breakfast, for the most part, used to be an

ordeal. But now it's fun. He isn't worrying over the money that we're spending, though, of course, we'd hear from him in a jiffy if he thought we were wasteful. His big ambition, as you know, is to get the factory on its feet. By the way, Blake, we were talking this morning about the second issue of our magazine. Is it out yet?"

"It's on the press now. I'll see that you get a copy right after lunch."

George gave one of his boyish grins.

"More Trigger Berg stuff, I suppose."

"Trigger and his pals stage a circus parade in the second installment that I think is rather funny. And Bud York's illustrations certainly are killing. That boy sure has talent."

"I like him," George said earnestly. "I think he does surprisingly good work for an amateur. He's a good Field Captain, too."

"Yes," said Andy, with equal seriousness, "and, of even greater satisfaction to me, personally, he's a good friend."

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There was more talk about the current magazine.

"Mr. Rollins has suggested that we mail copies of the second issue to our state prospect list. He wants the hardware dealers to see what we're doing to keep boys interested in our product. All of our regular customers, of course, will be supplied."

“Has our advertisement appeared yet in *The American Boy*?”

“No. But I’m reserving a supply of the magazines to take care of possible inquiries.”

“By the way, Blake, you will be interested to know that I had a telegram this morning from Tim Dine. He informs me that he is on his way home at last.”

So many important marketing problems had come up since the mechanic’s mysterious departure for Washington that Andy had quite dismissed the absentee from his mind. But now his thoughts dwelt peculiarly on the likable thin-faced inventor and his genial uncle. It would be pleasing, the advertising man reflected, when he had more time to himself, so that he could take advantage of the kindly hospitality of his new friends. Certainly he looked forward to many more friendly battles with the banker across the latter’s checkerboard.

There was a brief cessation of office activities that afternoon when the new magazine was delivered. And even in the factory considerable interest was shown in the company publication. Trigger Berg, it would seem, was fast making friends in unlooked-for circles! That evening the factory men’s wives and children laughed over the coaster-wagon hero’s further nonsensical exploits. Copies of the magazine were passed from neighbor to neighbor. There was favorable mention of the current issue in the local newspaper.

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Let us see for ourselves what there was in the serial’s continuation to interest so many people of such widely varying ages.

THE DIARY OF A COMET COASTER BOY

BY

EDWARD EDSON LEE

June 4. I haven't told my ma about our circus. I haven't told my pa, either. It's going to be a pretty slick circus, all right. We talked it over last night at our club meeting. Just as we decided yesterday, Friday is going to be the Wild Man of Borneo. He is going to eat raw meat, growling and gnashing his teeth and grabbing the bars of his cage. My ma says raw meat is what makes cats have fits. But one time at our house what she thought was cat fits wasn't that at all. It was Indian pain killer. I got it in the cat's milk by mistake. Then, when the cat began to act up, my ma thought it was having fits. It hunched up its back, like a hairy rainbow, and opened its mouth, as though it was anxious to turn inside out to get the inside part cool. Then it gave an awful yowl and jumped into my pa's lap as he sat reading the newspaper. From his lap it jumped to the top of his head where there isn't much hair, after which it scooted in the parlor, knocking my ma's and my pa's wedding picture off the center table and breaking a vase that my ma won at a card party before she joined the church. My pa tried to grab the cat, and it clawed him on the hands. Then my ma swiped at the cat with a broom, hitting my pa plunk in the face. That made him mad. The cat got away through the screen door, leaving a big hole. My ma said it was fits that made the cat act that way. I didn't say anything. With my pa all banged up, and the card-party vase in pieces, I thought I better keep still about the Indian pain killer.

The point is, as you can see, that what looks like fits isn't always fits. Sometimes it's pain killer, or something. If Friday has fits I don't know what we'll do. I guess I'll ask my pa what to do for people when they have fits. Maybe we ought to be prepared for the worst.

We're planning to meet at Friday's house to make the cage because it is in his barn that we're going to have the circus. There's a big box in the barn. It will make a dandy cage. I hope Friday gets to be a raw meat eater pretty quick. For as soon as he can eat raw meat we're going to have the circus.

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June 5. We've got the cage all made. It's pretty slick, I want to tell you. It's like a big box with slats for sides. One side is bolted to my Comet Coaster and the other side is bolted to Skeets' Comet Coaster. We have a rope in front to pull it by, and I'm going to do the pulling while Skeets does the yelling. Here is a sign we painted:

DODO

THE WILD MAN OF BORNEO

This afternoon while we were at work in the barn Friday's ma came out to see what the racket was all about. Told that we were going to have a circus, she began worrying right away for fear that Ronald, as she called him, would skid off a trapeze, or something, and crack his neck.

"Oh," says Skeets, laughing, "there's nothing dangerous about his job. Don't you worry about *him*."

"Well," says she, suddenly remembering about supper,

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“he can let his job rest, whatever it is, and scoot down to the butcher shop with this quarter and get his pa some beefsteak.”

We were tickled. Everything was working out our way. Now Friday would have a chance to practice eating raw meat, for, of course, his ma wouldn't miss a few bites. So we went with him to the butcher shop and got the meat, after which we stopped in an alley where Friday unwrapped the meat and took a squint at it. He didn't look very pleased.

“I guess,” says he, “I'll let Skeets be the Wild Man of Borneo, and I'll take his part.”

“*Me?*” said Skeets, letting out his neck.

“Sure thing. I don't want to be selfish.”

“Go lay an egg,” says Skeets. “You're the homeliest. So why spoil a good thing?”

“I don't know as I'm any homelier than you are,” says Friday, getting huffy. “If you ever won any beauty prizes, it's news to me, I never heard about it.”

“Anyway,” says Skeets, “you've got the biggest front teeth.” Then, in his nice way, he told Friday to buck up and be brave, because everybody cheered brave men and gave them medals.

So Friday got real brave and bit into one corner of his pa's beefsteak. Skeets got hold of the beefsteak and pulled, with me helping Friday, who hung on like a bulldog, and we pulled so hard we almost pulled the meat eater's teeth

out. The beefsteak was stretched out a yard long. Friday got mad. He'd be darned if he was going to be Dodo the Wild Man, he spit, if he had to eat leather. The old circus could go to pot, he spit some more. We told him then, not wanting to lose him, that we would get him some hot dogs to eat.

When we heard that his ma was going to be away from home to-morrow afternoon we kind of rushed things to have the circus then, so as not to bother her with our yelling. We've got a bill posted on the barn telling about the six big acts that we're going to put on for five cents. I got some of my pa's shoe blacking to put spots on Friday to make him look like a wild man. He is going to wear my swimming trunks. The trunks and the shoe blacking spots is all he's going to have on except some hair twisters to make his hair stand up, and a ring tied to each of his ears. Skeets is going to perform in tights, on a trapeze, and I'm going to be a clown and sing a song. Here's the song I'm going to sing:

I woke up in the morning and looked upon the wall,
The cooties and the bedbugs were having a game of ball,
The score was six to nothing, the cooties were ahead,
The bedbugs knocked a home-run and I fell clean out of bed.

If I don't get killed before I come to the end of the first song, I may sing this one, too:

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I went to the animal fair,
The birds and the beasts were there,
By the light of the moon the old baboon
Was combing his auburn hair.
The monk fell out of his bunk

Right onto the elephant's trunk,
The elephant sneezed, and fell on his knees,
And what became of the monk, monk, monk?

Tail Light is going to speak a piece. It takes him about an hour
to say it. I'll see if I can remember it:

There was a boy in our town
And he was wond'rous wise,
He could unscramble scrambled eggs
And uncuss custard pies.

There was a man in our town
Whose mantelpiece was bare.
His head looked just like heaven
For there was no parting there.

On a mountain tall and lofty
In a distant foreign land,
An Arab chief in crimson robes
Did keep a peanut stand.

The Captain was real fond of froth,
So when the storm was near,
He watched the foam with happy thought—
'Twas brewing Hires root beer.

The sea was rough, 'twas very rough,
The waves were very wild.
A mermaid cried, staccato voice:
"Oh, fireman, save my chi-ild!"

"We're lost!" the Captain shouted

As he staggered down the stair.
“If that’s the case,” the mermaid said,
“Please hand me back my fare.”

A parrot green in a gilded cage
Was hanging ’neath a tree.
He gave three healthy, happy cheers,
But never a word quoth he.

A dog, a cat, a cow and a goat
Got into an awful fight.
They tried to chew each other up—
They were an awful sight.

The farmer picked them up
And made them into hash,
He sold them in the city then
For fifty dollars cash.

Upon a winter’s evening,
Toward the close of last July,
I went to gather roses,
As the day was hot and dry.

It had rained that very morning
And the wind did howl and blow,
But I couldn’t find my snowshoes
So I let the roses grow.

June 6. We didn’t have our circus to-day. I guess we are all out of luck. Friday is, anyway. He has a big bump on his head, where he landed in the ditch, and the shoe blacking won’t come off. He’s a sight. I’m glad it isn’t me.

When his ma drove away in her automobile this afternoon we helped him into his trunks and put the shoe blacking on him. We didn't put it on him solid, just spots here and there, about an inch apart, all over his body. By twisting our thumbs in the blacking, and then twisting them on Friday's skin, we could rub the blacking in dandy. When we got through with him he was the spottiest wild man you ever set eyes on. Skeets led the parade, ringing a cowbell to attract attention. I followed, pulling the cage, then came the Wild Man in the cage, and last, of course, came Tail Light, hauling a cageful of borrowed cats.

"Look this way, ladies and gents," yelled Skeets, just like a real showman, "and feast your amazed eyes on the greatest natural curiosity of the age—Dodo, the Wild Man, who was captured by elephant hunters in the jungles of Borneo, and who eats nothing but raw meat."

The kids came running. And when they were close to the big cage Friday gave a screech, like his throat was cut, and jumped at them, hissing and snarling. We went all over town. At the top of Clarks Hill I told Skeets to hold the rope while I took a rest. But he misunderstood me, I guess, or was careless. Anyway, the Wild Man let out a yell for help. There was a rumble of wheels, too. And when I looked around Dodo was halfway down the steep hill. We took after him, only I couldn't run very fast on account of my clown suit, which was baggy around the legs. I thought of the day Skeets and I raced down the hill. And then, just as Skeets had done, Friday came to grief in the roadside ditch, with everything piled on top of him.

An automobile stopped to view the wreck. It was Mrs. Fish

and my ma and Skeets' ma. They were headed for a party at one of the homes on the hill.

My ma almost stared her eyes out.

“Good heavens!” says she. “It’s my Henry.”

“Yes,” says Skeets’ ma, “and it’s my John and my Bobbie.”

“If your boys are in it,” says Friday’s ma, “my Ronald’s in it, too. I remember now they did say something about a circus. This must be it. Where’s Ronald?” she says to us. “What have you done with him?”

Just then Friday crawled out of the ditch. He sure looked hard. His earrings were bent and he had a big hole in his trunks where he might better not have had a hole. Gee! I was glad it wasn’t me. Ordering him to get into the automobile, so people couldn’t see him, his ma angrily drove home, where she shoved a bar of soap and a scrubbing brush at him, telling him if he wasn’t clean when she got back from the party she’d clean him with a stick. When we got there Friday was scared. We told him not to be scared. We’d help him wash off the shoe-blackening spots, we said. But the spots wouldn’t wash off. Nor did scouring powder do any good. I remembered then that it was a special kind of shoe blacking made abroad, that some man had sent to my pa from Italy.

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My ma isn’t home yet. I suppose she is having a good time at the party. And when she comes home she will tell my pa on me. I suppose my pa will be all out of patience with me when he finds out that it is his special shoe blacking that Friday has on him. I feel sorry for poor Friday. It’s bad enough to be scolded,

but it's a whole lot worse to be covered with shoe-blackening spots. Maybe we ought to change his nickname and call him Spotty. I guess, though, Friday is the best nickname. He sure looks funny. I suppose after a while the spots will sort of wear off, like walnut stains on a fellow's hands. I'm glad it isn't me.

(Same day). Whoope! I'm pretty lucky. My pa didn't scold me very much. When he heard about Friday being spotted up with shoe blacking he just laughed. My ma says she can't help but feel sorry for Mrs. Fish, but it certainly was a lucky day for the Berg family when the Wild Man job was wished onto Friday and not onto me. I'm kind of anxious for morning to come so I can see Friday. I asked my pa how long it would take the shoe-blackening spots to wear off and he said Friday ought to be his normal color again by Christmas time, at least.

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Gee!

June 7. Sunday afternoon. Nothing much happened to-day. It was raining when I got up. Right after breakfast I wanted to go over to Friday's house and see how he was coming along with his spots. But my ma told me sharply to stay at home and mind my own business. Mr. and Mrs. Fish, she said, were mad enough as it was over the way we had put shoe-blackening spots all over Friday, without me going over there to remind them of their family disgrace. Before Sunday school I cleaned my Comet Coaster. First I cleaned the body, polishing it with some of my pa's automobile polish. I polished the wheel hubs, too. I tell you the coaster looked slick when I got through with it. Just like new. Then, to finish, I took off the wheels and cleaned the roller bearings with gasoline, putting in new grease.

We had fried chicken for dinner. Um-yum! I wish we had fried chicken every day. My pa says if I behave myself the rest of the day, and don't get into any scrapes, he'll buy ice cream for supper.

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June 8. I was good all day Sunday and we had ice cream for supper. My ma said it was a happy day for her. She was scared to have anyone touch her, she said, for fear she would wake up and find it was all a wonderful dream. My pa said it hardly seemed like home, with none of the neighbors running in to tell him that I had snitched their coal pile or had put on a shoe-polishing stunt with one of their offspring. But he grinned at me when he said it. I guess when he was a boy he was a high-stepper, and hence understands boys pretty well. I like my pa a lot. He likes me a lot. He doesn't need to tell me about it. I can just feel it when he's near me.

Friday couldn't leave his front yard to-day. His ma wouldn't let him. She gave me an awful sour look when I went over there. I guess Friday told her that it was my pa's Italian shoe blacking that we used on him. Skeets and Tail Light were there with their Comet Coasters. We had fun. Friday still has the most of his spots. He looks funny. We had to laugh at him. But he didn't laugh. We decided not to have a club meeting to-night. We're going to wait until Friday's ma gets over being mad and lets him leave the yard. Maybe then we'll be pirates. Skeets has been reading a pirate book. He told us about it to-day when we were playing "Monkey" in Friday's cherry tree, only we didn't hear his whole story in the tree because our weight was too much for the limb and suddenly we landed kerplunk! on the ground. The pirate was called Captain Kidd. Skeets says it's fun to be pirates. We can dig a cave and

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live in it, holding up people and burying our gold and jewels in the cave floor. Maybe we can have a club meeting Wednesday night. Pinky thinks his ma will be all right by then.

June 10. I skipped yesterday. I almost skipped to-day, too, as nothing happened worth writing down. Friday is still a prisoner in his yard. But his ma doesn't glare at us now when we go over there. So I guess he'll be free to-morrow.

June 11. Whoope! We're going to be pirates. I'm tickled. 147
Of course, I haven't told either my pa or my ma, as we're going to keep it a secret. And maybe we'll be pirates for years and years, a terror to the country, and nobody will ever suspect that it is Friday and me and Skeets and Tail Light. We're going to wear black masks and live in a cave, just as Skeets told us about. We took a vote at our club meeting last night and everybody voted yes. Tail Light didn't want to vote yes, but we told him if he didn't we'd shove him out of the club. As Skeets says, the members of a club certainly ought to stand together. We are going to dig our cave in Crooked Hollow where Mr. Dawson, the old miser, keeps his cows fenced in. Nobody ever goes there much. We are going to make swords of wood, and wooden guns and bows and arrows. I guess we are going to be awful busy getting ready to be pirates. I wonder how much gold we'll get. Maybe tons and tons. We can haul it into our cave in our coasters. Being pirates is Skeets' scheme, as I have written down, so I suppose he knows where we are going to get the gold. To-morrow night I'll write down how we come out with our cave. And when we begin burying our gold I'll write that down, too, only I'll have to make up some kind of a secret code, so that no one will be able to read what I write down unless he has the proper key. That

will be fun. I wish it was morning. I want to hurry up and dig the cave so that we can begin burying our gold.

CHAPTER XV

ANDY MAKES A BUSINESS CALL

Through the continued successful field work of the Rodeo Rangers, more and more dealers' names were entered in the books. But the orders, while satisfactory in numbers, were disappointing in volume, many dealers limiting their initial placement to one or two coaster wagons.

Bud readily explained the situation.

“The trade for the most part takes the stand that the coaster-wagon season is over,” the Field Captain wrote to his insistent manager. “So, just because our orders are light, don’t get the idea that we are not putting the new coaster wagon across as successfully as you did earlier in the summer. In two or three weeks you’ll find a still greater decrease in orders, for dealers aren’t going to order coaster wagons out of season, any more than they would think of stocking up with sleds in March. The coaster-wagon business, of course, will pick up in November and December. That promise is given to me wherever I go. In a few recent cases I tried to argue the dealer into putting in his holiday stock now. But he objects to tying up his money ahead of time, realizing, of course, that his November orders will be given prompt attention.”

This letter was made the subject of a special sales conference in the president’s office.

“If you can get the dealers to buy now, for the holiday trade,

with the understanding that the billing will be dated December first, sign them up.” Such was the sales manager’s later instructions to the head of the field force, following a decision of the partners.

But even if this plan was successful, the orders doubling or even quadrupling, it was doubtful if the month’s operations could be made to show a profit. For, as the calendar on the advertising manager’s desk disclosed, the best part of the month was gone.

“What we need,” the young executive reflectively studied the situation, “is a truly *big* order—one running into the thousands of dollars. And we need it *quick*.”

Seeking Mr. Warman, Andy got the particulars of the old carriage company’s business dealings with the Baldwin-Jones mail-order house.

“I’m going up to Chicago to call on them,” the young salesman outlined his plans, “and see if I can’t argue them into featuring our Comet Coaster in the toy section of their fall and winter catalog. For I have a hunch that they sell thousands of coasters at Christmas time. And how lovely for us if we can get a standing order for several hundred coasters a month throughout the balance of the year.”

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Mr. Warman nodded attentively.

“There’s no reason in the world why they shouldn’t feature our new coaster,” he gave his opinion. “For we’re doing the same high-grade work on the new product that we did on the old. Every day I tell Bill Swaggerton: ‘Bill, it isn’t how *cheap* we

build our coasters, but how *good*.' Our carriages always were a source of great personal pride to me. I put into them the best that I had. And now that we're selling to boys, instead of men, I want the same high standard of factory processes to prevail. But it's hard to make Bill see it that way. He thinks anything is good enough for a boy. To-day I stopped a shipment because of poor body striping. Bill says I'm too finicky. He and I had quite an argument about it. But no one can talk me down on this notion of mine of doing good work."

"To be successful," Andy took sides with the conscientious manufacturer, "our product has got to be right."

"That's it!" the old man nodded spiritedly, gesturing with a stiff finger. "That's it exactly!"

"How would it be, Mr. Warman," Andy then went back to the subject of his proposed trip, "if you gave me a letter of introduction to the Baldwin-Jones company? They will remember you. And such a letter ought to gain for me a more favorable audience."

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"The man for you to call on," nodded the old gentleman reflectively, "is Ham Benton of the farm implement division. You'll find that he remembers me well, for not only have we done business together for years, but when I was younger we used to fish together in Wisconsin. Of course, Ham has no jurisdiction over the toys. Each department does its own buying and selling. But if I ask him to arrange an interview for you with the right department head, he'll do it. And he'll gladly boost our line, too."

Andy made no particular mention of the proposed trip to his associates. The wiser plan, he decided, would be not to build up his partners' eager hopes. If everything turned out well, the obtained order, of course, would be received with proper appreciation and enthusiasm. If he failed, in spite of all he could do, there then would be no serious disappointments.

Tim Dine was now back at work. But he was kept in the factory, where, according to reports, his complicated wheel machine was giving endless trouble. Andy was too busy to give the returned mechanic any great amount of thought. But he hadn't forgotten the mystery attending the inventor's trip to Washington. And in odd moments he wondered, with revived curiosity, what Tim would have to say when the two of them finally came together.

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Thursday was the day set by Andy for his important Chicago trip. In order to leave a clean desk he worked harder on Wednesday than ever. That evening, touched by a definite longing for congenial company, he strolled by the light of a gorgeous harvest moon to the scene of his earlier checker battles on West Main Street, where again he was warmly welcomed into the banker's home. Mrs. May was out riding with friends, the husband explained. Shortly after ten o'clock a huge enclosed car turned into the private drive. The checker players caught the lilt of laughing voices, after which, with the house owner and his young guest politely on their feet, the returned family head brought her friends merrily into the sun parlor for light refreshments.

"Oh!" came Mrs. May's delighted cry. "Here's Andy! Mrs. Chadwick, I want you to meet a young friend of ours, Mr.

Andrew Blake. Mr. Chadwick, Mr. Blake. And this is Rodney Chadwick, Andy. I imagine that you boys are about the same age. Probably I should explain that Mr. Blake, with all of his young years and boyish appearance, is the sales and advertising manager of the new coaster-wagon company.”

“I’ve heard about Mr. Blake,” Mr. Chadwick spoke quietly. Holding the young business man’s hand, he appraised the younger one with curious eyes. But whatever his thoughts were he kept them to himself.

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The son, though, was troubled by no such trained restraint.

“Glad to meet you, Blake. I’ve noticed you around the Y.M.C.A. And I’ve heard a lot about you and Bud York through my chum, Fred Baker.”

“He’s one of our field men,” Andy promptly remembered the name.

“Sure thing. I wanted to hire out to you, too. But Dad wouldn’t let me give up my summer job at the tire factory.”

Chadwick! Andy suddenly remembered that Mr. Charles Chadwick was the president and general manager of the big Rainbow Tire Company. Thereafter, in the exchange of polite conversation, the young business man regarded the older one with added interest. And the son, too, came in for closer and more curious attention. A family of millionaires! Andy wondered, in the peculiar turn of his thoughts, recalling his own somewhat impoverished boyhood, how it would seem to be as rich as that. A million dollars! What all couldn’t one buy with a million dollars. Yet these people, the young man took

note, seemed not to make any great display of their wealth. Their interests, for the most part, seemed to be in small, homely things, as their conversation showed.

When it came time to leave, the single guest was courteously invited to ride with the others. Nor did it suit Rodney Chadwick, who had the wheel, to have his new friend located any place in the elaborate car except beside him on the front seat.

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It was but a few moments' drive to the Y.M.C.A.

"See you to-morrow, Blake."

"Not to-morrow," Andy said quickly. "For I plan to be in Chicago all day."

"Well, I'll see you soon."

"We seldom play checkers at our house," Mrs. Chadwick smiled. "But Rodney has a lighted tennis court. And it will give us a great deal of pleasure if we may share your closer friendship with our neighbors."

It was a gracious invitation, charmingly given, and Andy was properly appreciative.

Briskly entering the Y.M.C.A. lobby, keyed up by the evening's pleasing experiences, he was surprised to find Tim Dine waiting for him.

"I came to thank you, Blake, for keeping my secret. It would have upset my plans if you had told the others

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what you knew. So, as you can imagine, I'm deeply grateful to you, and want you to know it."

Which wasn't telling much, Andy thought!

"I hope you had a successful trip," he tried to draw the other out, his curiosity growing.

"Time will tell," was Tim's noncommittal reply.

There was a moment's heavy silence.

"Have you talked with your uncle?" Andy then inquired.

"Yes. I saw him this morning at the bank."

"I suppose he told you about our three checker games."

"Yes. And, to that point, Blake," the thin face flushed, "I don't blame you for being suspicious of me. Of course, if I had known what was going to happen that morning, after leaving you, I never would have spoken as I did, to you or to anybody else. It made it harder for me later on. Without Uncle Tom's help I would have been up against it."

Andy gathered from this, as he had suspected, that he had been purposely sought that memorable noon by the banker. It had been no chance meeting.

"Uncle Tom wanted to quiet your suspicions," the mechanic seemed to read the other's thoughts.

"What he did, indeed," Andy confessed, "was to arouse

my suspicions, or, rather, my puzzled curiosity. It wasn't until later that I became suspicious."

"Uncle Tom is a brick!" The thin face was aglow now. "He paid my expenses to Washington out of his own pocket. I guess, though," came the earnest conclusion, "that he'd do a great deal more than that to help us."

Afterwards, Andy had cause to remember those words. Great, indeed, was the big-hearted man's interest in the struggling young company, as the youthful partners were to learn. It was this generous interest that all but cost the noble friend his life.

The following morning Andy ate an early breakfast and then went directly to the Rock Island depot, where the north-bound train was scheduled to take on Manton passengers at seven-fifteen.

Carefully groomed, wearing a freshly-sponged business suit, the young advertising man presented a most attractive appearance. His natty straw hat had just the right angle to lend to the fresh round face a desirable boyishness; his necktie was painstakingly arranged; his oxfords had magically turned aside the dust of the streets. "Snappy" is the word more commonly used to describe a boy of Andy's type. More than one waiting passenger turned to give the trim young business man a second approving glance.

Arriving in Chicago at eleven o'clock, he went directly to the Rollins offices, where he met Dingley in the lobby.

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"Well, well!" cried the delighted Chicago boy. "See what the cat dragged in. Came begging for your old job, huh?"

“Not yet,” laughed Andy, nodding to the bright-eyed girl at the information desk.

The two young friends clasped hands, after which the visitor went to the familiar private office. It was good to be back! The sight of his old desk brought up happy memories.

Dingley, of course, was chattering in his usual light way.

“Say, Andy, I heard something funny the other day. Remember Crabtree, who came here right after you did?”

The visitor smiled, stating that he recalled the former peculiar associate well.

“You mean the fellow we used to call ‘Apropos.’”

“That’s him,” Dingley nodded. “I never heard him speak in conference in my life that he didn’t ‘apropos’ something or other. Well, he’s ‘aproposing’ coaster wagons now.”

“What?” cried Andy, with quickened interest.

“Left here, right after Hatch, to adorn the advertising manager’s chair of the American Juvenile Vehicle Company. I told you about Hatch getting that account. He and Crabtree are old cohorts, or whatever you call it. ‘Two souls with but a single thought,’ and so forth and so on, only, take it from me, old Hatch is the team mate who supplies the thought. Crabtree is just a convenient tool, as I see it. Well, here’s the funny part: I met him in the cafeteria parade the other noon, me carrying the usual bowl of tomato soup *a la carte* and old hungry-face juggling a young banquet. Didn’t expect, of course,

that he'd have much to say to me about his work, being on Hatch's side, but, still, in my characteristic naïve way, I politely inquired how things were coming along with him—you can always ask a fellow that, you know, even a competitor, and in case he wants to say 'Yes, the last string of fish I caught was mud turtles,' that's up to him. But old 'Apropos' loves to talk . . . especially about himself. And thusly I learned that he is getting out a new coaster-wagon magazine called the 'Coaster Wagon Spokesman.' Of course, I didn't tell him anything about your work. Hardly. But did I ever want to snicker up my sleeve! The poor nut thinks he's doing pioneer work, as he calls it. I'd like to see his face when he learns that you're ahead of him by at least three weeks."

"The magazine is Hatch's suggestion," declared Andy, in quick placement of his thoughts.

"Sure thing. Crabtree, himself, couldn't plan a campaign to give away fat fleas to starving monkeys. Boy, he sure was a lame duckling around here. And how he ever picked off an advertising manager's job is beyond me. Some kind of a pull, I imagine. Or maybe Hatch, with his eyes on the account, got the job for him."

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Andy then quickly told about Bud York's experience on the train, in connection with which the inquisitive "Mr. Hemstreet" had turned out to be the former crooked junior partner.

Dingley's face showed his disgust.

"Can you imagine the guts of that man! Tell me, how does he get away with it?"

“He won’t always get away with it. There’ll come a day of reckoning.”

“What he did, of course, was to steal your idea and pass it off to the client as a brain child of his own.”

Andy gave a peculiar laugh.

“I have a notion to put Crabtree on our mailing list.”

“No!” Dingley quickly admonished, showing that he possessed finer business judgment than his facetious conduct sometimes suggested. “Don’t do it.”

“Oh, I was just joking. Still, I’d like to see his magazine when it comes out.”

“I’ll get a copy for you.”

“I don’t want to brag on my own work, but if he can beat Trigger Berg, he’s sure got a job ahead of him.”

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“Who’s Trigger Berg?” Dingley inquired curiously.

Andy had a filled portfolio.

“Here,” he brought out a copy of the latest COMET COASTER NEWS, “read this, in your spare time, and find out for yourself.”

Mr. Rollins, the visitor was then told, was out of town. At twelve o’clock the two friends had lunch together, after which the salesman boarded a west-bound surface car, arriving at the

big Baldwin-Jones plant about one-thirty.

In the spacious, ornate lobby a uniformed attendant of military bearing formally inquired the nature of the visitor's business, requesting the latter to register in a book for that purpose. He then attached a numbered badge to the salesman's lapel, directing him to the farm implement division in section seven on the second floor.

A stubbed, round-faced man of affable personality, Mr. Benton carefully read the manufacturer's letter of introduction.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Blake," a hand came out. "Any friend of Mr. Warman's is a friend of mine. Mighty fine old gentleman. Built the best carriage, in its day, that we ever sold. Solid value, all the way through. So, if he's still active in the business, I'm led to think favorably of the new product."

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This was a fine beginning, Andy thought.

"We feel, Mr. Benton," he spoke appreciatively, "that we have the best coaster wagon on the market. Mr. Warman designed it himself. It has special features, such as a self-steering front axle and double-disk automobile wheels, that aren't found in other coasters."

"And it's your wish to have me arrange a meeting for you with the head of the toy department?"

"If you please. We need the business, Mr. Benton. And your good word for the old line ought to help us with the new."

"I'm sorry that I can't deal with you myself. I would enjoy

giving you an initial order, in the event, of course, that the prices were right and the product, itself, of the high quality that you describe. But Mr. Corrigan is the man you'll have to see." There was a slight pause. "I've heard salesmen say that he is a hard man to do business with."

Andy could not doubt that the closing remark was intended as a friendly warning. And the now anxious young salesman found himself wondering what manner of buyer he was about to be presented to.

In the light of what followed, the Manton boy always carried in his mind a vivid recollection of his initial interview with the manager of the toy department. Even at the moment of his introduction to the executive he was unfavorably impressed by the other's personality. Grotesquely tall and lean, with deep-set, insolent eyes, Mr. Horace Corrigan seemed constantly to favor a barrier of arrogance. That was his way of putting salesmen at a disadvantage, which, no doubt, very often resulted in a more advantageous price for his company.

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Andy suspected the truth of the matter. But, though vaguely disturbed, his selling talk, once he got under way, was earnest and convincing, in every way a credit to him. The prospective customer, however, showed no particular interest in the young salesman's proposition. The boy flushed with embarrassment as he found himself running out of words.

"Well, Mr. Blake," the manager stifled a bored yawn, "this, of course, is all very informative." He handed back the pictures that had been placed before him, showing the product in its complete form, also sectional views. "Your coaster wagon

photographs well. And I dare say you're doing a good job of it from a manufacturing standpoint. But, to protect our reputation, it is a policy of mine, in buying, to take on only the more proven lines."

"Our coaster wagon is fully guaranteed, Mr. Corrigan," Andy hung on, sickened by the thought of defeat. "It will stand favorable comparison with any coaster wagon on the market. In fact, if we couldn't prove to you that it's better we wouldn't expect to hold your attention. Moreover, we have a plan for keeping alive the interest of our users—"

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"As I say, Mr. Blake," the grating voice cut in, "this is all very informative. And, as a buyer, I'm appreciative. But I would be doing you an injustice were I to take up any more of your valuable time. I'm not interested."

"We're in a position to make immediate deliveries, Mr. Corrigan. And you'll find that our prices—"

But the manager had risen to his feet. So the only course open to the defeated young salesman was to close his portfolio and leave.

Anger burned in the boy's heart as he left the building. Corrigan had bluffed him down. That was the substance of the unhappy situation. He clenched his hands, the old fighting look tenanted his face. It was galling to have his proposition fall in defeat before the maneuvers of such a man. He'd like to take the insolent fellow into an alley and punch his conceited head. Yes, he would! He needed some of the egotism pounded out of him.

“I wish I could go over his head in this matter and tell my story direct to the president,” the boy’s anger led him to ambitious thoughts. “I bet I could interest *him*. Old line or new, he’d buy where he could give his customers the most for their money. Corrigan makes me sick with his glib talk about sticking to ‘proven lines.’” Pausing, the speaker wiped his flushed face. “I’ll be hanged if I’m going to admit that I’m licked. There ought to be a way of getting around that bag of conceit.”

Absorbed in his constructive thoughts, he walked slowly to the street corner, intending to board a down-town car. But a whole string of cars passed unnoticed.

Later he sought a drug-store telephone, giving the number of the mail-order house.

“Mr. Benton, this is Andy Blake speaking. I should have stopped in your office to thank you for arranging the meeting with Mr. Corrigan, but it was so disappointing that I thought only of hurrying away. As I admitted to you, a contract with your company means a great deal to us right now. And though Mr. Corrigan turned me down flat, I’m not going to give up. It will help my case, I think, if I can get your president to thinking about our Comet Coaster. So, if you have no objection, I’d like to get from you the name and address of your chief executive, together with the names of his possible children.”

There was further comprehensive telephone conversation, after which Mr. Benton hung up the receiver, grinning boyishly.

“By George, that young chap certainly knows his business. And I hope he puts the deal over Corrigan’s head. That man is too overbearing, anyway. As a new buyer, he undoubtedly saves money for the company. But I sometimes wonder if the management realizes the ill feeling he creates among salesmen. I don’t like the way some of the salesmen are talking about us. It’s going to work against us in the end.”

CHAPTER XVI

ANDY'S WINNING SCHEME

His automobile motor mysteriously expiring at the very door of an outlying public garage, Mr. Orman Baldwin, the president of the Baldwin-Jones mail-order house, watched impatiently while a mechanic unsuccessfully administered first aid, then set forth, disgruntled, in the direction of his suburban home, three blocks away.

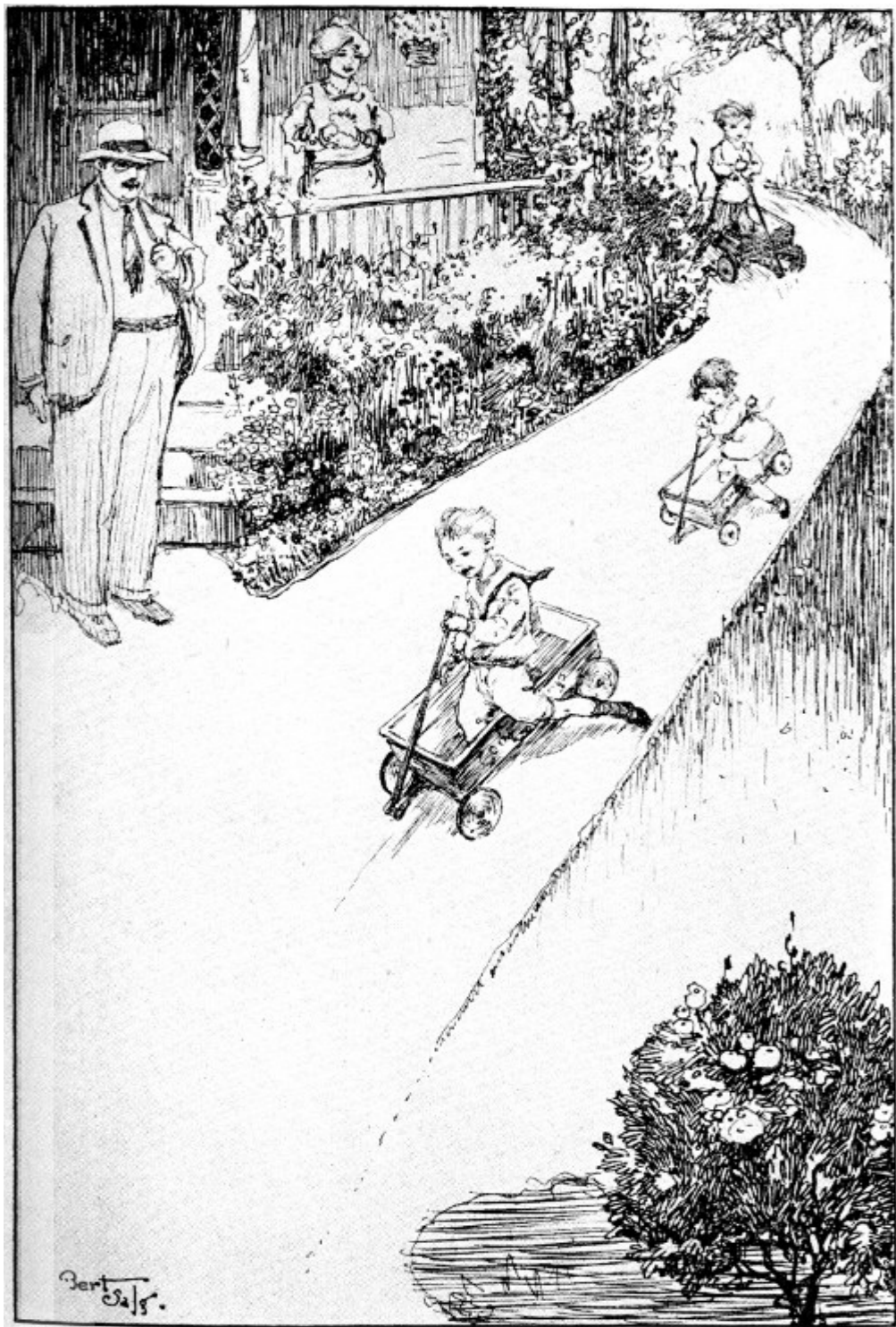
In a shady oasis he paused to swab his red face, unhappily contemplating the sun-drenched laps ahead of him. His sweltering indignation arose anew over the indifferent performance of his car. By George, he told himself, if this happened again he'd send for the junk man. That's exactly what he *would* do. For what right had a five-thousand-dollar motor car to imitate a temperamental flivver?

But his annoyance vanished magically when he came within sight of his well-ordered home with its spacious, spreading green lawn and wide, shady verandas. Around the corner came eight-year-old Ted Baldwin, buoyantly happy in the ownership of a brand new coaster wagon. In the wake of the quicker brother came little Mary Ester, the pet of the family, pushing a smaller coaster that evidently was her individual property. Then came ten-year-old Tom, similarly equipped. Where had all these new coasters come from, the father wondered, as the speeding procession flashed out of sight.

Mrs. Baldwin met her perspiring husband on the porch steps,

sympathizing with him over his car troubles.

“The coaster wagons were delivered this morning, dear,” she then informed. “It was splendid of you to order them. The children are delighted.”



Bert & J. S.

**“THE CHILDREN ARE DELIGHTED WITH THE COASTER
WAGONS.”**

Mr. Baldwin was puzzled.

“I ordered no coaster wagons,” he declared. “There must be some mistake. Are you sure of the address?”

“They came by express, each addressed to one of the children. I thought, of course, that you knew about them.”

The husband shook his head.

“Well,” Mrs. Baldwin maintained, “they certainly were intended for us. Did you get a close look at them, dear? They’re beauties.”

Mr. Baldwin took a business man’s view of the affair.

“Wasn’t there an invoice, or shipping memorandum, in any of the crates?”

“Not a thing.”

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“Do you recall the name of the shipper?”

“The labels read: ‘With the compliments of the Boy Products Company, Manton, Illinois.’”

Ted again whizzed into sight.

“Oh, Daddy!” he screeched joyously. “See me scoot. Lookit! I can go almost as fast as you can in your roadster.”

“And see me, Daddy,” Mary Ester piped up shrilly. “See how fast *I* can go.”

A home lover, Mr. Baldwin found great joy in his family.

“Come here, Ted,” the pleased parent beckoned. “I want to take a closer look at this new coaster of yours.”

The boy’s face was aglow.

“Isn’t it the cat’s fur, Daddy? Varnished, just like our auto. Big rubber tires, too, and disk wheels. And just notice the peachy front axle. It steers itself. We’re going to organize a Comet Coaster Club, Daddy. It tells all about it in a magazine that we got to-day. Oh, gee! You ought to read the funny story in the magazine about a boy named Trigger Berg. He puts shoe-blackening spots all over another boy called Friday and they have a circus parade. Friday was the Wild Man of Borneo. I wish I could do that. Can I be the Wild Man of Borneo, Daddy?”

Mr. Baldwin was too shrewd a business man not to suspect the truth of the situation.

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“It looks to me,” he told his wife, after sending Ted off, “as though some enterprising coaster-wagon firm is taking this way of interesting us in their product. ‘Comet Coaster.’ That’s a corking good name. And it looks like a corking good wagon, too. I’ll see Mr. Corrigan to-morrow. He may hold the key to the mystery.”

The following afternoon the president came home chuckling.

“Well, Martha,” he addressed his wife, “I can tell you all about

the mysterious coasters.”

“Oh, do!” the woman’s interest was revived.

“A new concern in Manton is trying to get us to feature their coaster wagon in our coming catalog. A company of young men, as I understand it. They’ve taken over the old Warman carriage factory. You remember the Warman carriage line—we handled it for years. Splendid goods, too. So it isn’t surprising to me that the new coaster is outstanding.”

Mrs. Baldwin’s interest in young people wasn’t confined to her own family. And particularly was she interested in ambitious boys.

“Are you going to give these young men an order?” she inquired hopefully.

“We may. Our advertising manager likes the idea of their free magazine. He’s going to see if it can’t be arranged to have the copies mailed to our coaster-wagon trade imprinted with the Baldwin-Jones name—this, of course, in the event that we do take the new line.”

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“But will the new company consent to that plan?”

“I see no reason why they shouldn’t, if they’re conscientious in wanting us to feature their product. Certainly, if we give them a standing order for several hundred coasters a month they’ll have an object in coöperating with us.”

“I’ve been reading the children’s magazine,” the mother smiled. “The story of Trigger Berg *is* fascinating, when

considered from the viewpoint of a child.”

“Yes,” the father smiled in company, “I found that out this afternoon when I read my copy at the office.”

CHAPTER XVII

PLANS FOR BIG BUSINESS

In addition to shipping the three Comet Coasters to the Baldwin children, Andy Blake had written the president of the mail-order house a somewhat long personal letter, making a point of the fact, first of all, that the new coaster-wagon company was an outgrowth of the old reliable Warman carriage firm, and, in later paragraphs, comprehensively enumerating the new product's outstanding features. Further, he had entered into the matter of prices and production facilities. Warman Carriage Service, he had summarized, was now Warman Comet Coaster Service, the same family, the same factory, the same experienced workmen, and, with but one or two exceptions, the same administrative force.

Thereafter he eagerly searched each in-coming mail. But the anticipated letter didn't arrive. His disappointment was noticeable. Nor was there the usual warmth in his ready smile when the observing partners joked him about "looking for a letter from his best girl."

Sickened by his failure, the humiliated salesman wondered what the others would say if they knew the truth.

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One morning George Warman came to the advertising manager's desk.

"Well," joked the young president, "I see you've ordered the

ring.”

“*What* ring?” Andy looked up.

“What ring! My, but you can act innocent. As though this letter wasn’t a dead give-away. I suppose, when the wedding is over, you’ll be ordering your wife’s boudoir furniture from Baldwin-Jones, too.”

Baldwin-Jones! At mention of the name, written so indelibly in the advertising man’s troubled mind, he got quickly to his feet.

“Where is it?” he cried. “Let me have it.”

A few minutes later the president discreetly drew the hilarious sales manager into a private room, away from the curious observing eyes of the amazed office force.

“Blake! What’s the matter with you? Haven’t you any dignity at all? My word! Who ever heard of an advertising manager dancing a jig on his desk?”

“Did I do that?” Andy laughed dizzily.

“No. But I’m not so sure you wouldn’t have done it if I hadn’t collared you just in time.”

“Boy, oh boy, oh boy, oh boy!” the excited one broke out anew.

“Blake! Be yourself. The office girls will think you’re crazy.”

“I am crazy,” Andy cried down from the peak of his great joy.

“And you’ll be crazy, too, when you read this letter.”

Harnden having been called into the private office, Andy then told his partners about his trip to the Baldwin-Jones plant.

“So that explains about the three coasters,” George caught the bookkeeper’s eye. “Harry and I wondered why you put the order through without consulting us. But we weren’t going to say anything.”

“I worked secretly,” Andy explained, “for I didn’t want to heap disappointment on you in case I failed.”

It was now the others’ turn to show excitement.

“Have you got an order, Blake?” came eagerly from one.

“Are they going to give us some business?” came as eagerly from the other.

“No,” Andy shook his head in answer to the first question, “I haven’t got an order. But the manager of the toy department states that he’ll be glad to open negotiations with us. And that, to me, is the equivalent of an order. For undoubtedly he’s acting on instructions from the president’s office.”

George and Harnden read the letter together.

“In case we do decide to feature your Comet Coaster,” the department manager had written in part, “we shall expect a guarantee, in writing, assuring us the exclusive mail-order distribution rights. Further, we will want to handle the distribution of your free magazine to our coaster-wagon trade

as a company proposition, which matter will be taken up with you in detail by the head of our advertising staff, Mr. A. M. Black.”

“Five hundred coaster wagons a month!” cried Andy, referring to the figures contained in an earlier part of the letter. “Why, this account alone will give us a yearly sales volume of twenty-four thousand dollars gross.”

“Not if we cut our price to three-seventy-five,” reminded Harnden.

“Who says we’re going to cut our price?”

“Corrigan seems to take it for granted that we will. The price has got to be three-seventy-five, he dictates, or he won’t sign the order.”

Andy’s lips curled.

“I’d expect *him* to say that, from what I saw of him.”

“If you were to ask me,” George spoke up, uneasily conscious of the urgent needs of the business, “I’d say we better grab the order while the grabbing’s good.”

“And accept the cut?”

“I’d rather a blamed sight do that than jockey back and forth for a possible higher price, only to come out in the end with what the little boy shot at.”

“The Baldwin-Jones people want our coasters,” Andy stood

his ground, “or else Corrigan wouldn’t have written this letter. I’d be willing to bet anything that he’s had definite instructions to buy from us. So why get cold feet, just when things are coming our way, and let him dictate the price to us? He knows that we need the business. And by making us feel that there isn’t anything certain about the order, he thinks we’ll eagerly jump to his terms.”

George gave an uneasy laugh.

“Well, if it were left to me to decide,” he sought to play safe, “I’d say ‘jump!’”

“I’ll run up to Chicago and call on Corrigan. Now that I know he wants our goods, I think I can handle him. In the event that I can’t bring him to our terms, I’ll offer to split the difference. Three-eighty-seven, as against three-seventy-five, means an added profit to us of a good many dollars a month.”

“I agree with Blake,” Harnden spoke up, “that we need the extra profit a whole lot more than Baldwin-Jones. Or, if he can put through the deal at our regular four-dollar price, so much the better.”

George proved that he knew the principles of leadership.

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“All right, Blake,” he gave in, “the matter is in your hands. Do what you think is best. But, for the love of mud,” he drew a deep breath, “don’t fumble.”

Andy grinned.

“I don’t intend to fumble,” he stated confidently.

“I couldn’t have wished for anything finer than this order,” George then took the conversational reins. “It will enable us to put through our stuff in quantity lots, thus reducing our production costs. And now that we’re talking production I think we better round up our factory heads and see just how they stand.”

Upon receiving a summons from the president, Tim Dine came quickly to the office. But the messenger reported that Mr. Warman couldn’t be located.

“Tim,” George properly took the conference in hand, “we’ve got some good news for you. The same people who featured Granddad’s carriage line in their mail-order catalog are flirting with us on coaster wagons. If the deal goes through, as we expect, it will boost our production, by that one account alone, five hundred coasters a month. And the question now comes up, are we equipped to handle this increased business advantageously, or will we have to do considerable factory reorganizing?”

“We’re using a great many make-shift jigs and attachments,” the mechanic finally admitted, visualizing the machine equipment as a unit.

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George nodded vigorously.

“That’s exactly what I thought. But if we’re going to make money we’ve got to be more efficient. What’s the chief trouble, Tim? Won’t Bill Swaggerton make use of your time-saving ideas?”

On the point of speaking, the mechanic peculiarly checked

himself.

“We can’t do everything at once,” he evaded, plainly unwilling to make a conference issue of his troubles with the surly superintendent.

“True enough,” conceded George, correctly interpreting the situation. “But from now on we’ve got to speed up. Remember, Tim, we’re back of you. We want you to go ahead and systematize our work. Nor is Bill Swaggerton, or anybody else, Granddad included, to hinder you.”

“I have a number of ideas,” admitted the mechanic. “But after my sad experience with the automatic wheel machine I’m almost afraid to put in anything new.”

“What do you mean?” George inquired quickly.

Again the mechanic essayed to speak, but checked himself.

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“I probably shouldn’t have mentioned the wheel machine,” he seemed anxious to dismiss the subject.

“I see you’re having considerable trouble with the new machine,” George spoke after a moment.

“Yes.”

“Well, don’t let it worry you, Tim. Moreover, don’t let it hold back any other good ideas.”

There was further conversation bearing on factory processes,

in the course of which the door opened.

“One of the workmen told me you wanted to see me,” Mr. Warman spoke to his grandson.

George quickly got a chair.

“Sit down, Granddad. We’re having a conference.”

“Everybody seems to be happy,” the old man smiled, looking around the circle of young faces. In moments such as this his mind went back to older days. There had been no conferences then. Everything had been done to his orders. And what a burden it had been! This was much the better plan, he saw. But what a change! Boys running the business. What a change, indeed!

“We should be happy,” George followed up his grandfather’s remark with a broad grin. “For Blake has the overture of an order from Baldwin-Jones.”

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The wrinkled face brightened.

“Well, well! Isn’t that fine. But, then, I’m not surprised.” The faded eyes warmly sought those of the proud young advertising manager. “No, sir, I’m not a *bit* surprised.”

Andy understood, and was grateful.

“We’re checking up on our factory machinery, Granddad. And it’s generally agreed that we aren’t equipped for extensive economical production. A lot of our machines are junk. And some of the needed new units will probably have to be built to

our order. Then, too, we're up in the air about materials. So far we've been buying stock wherever we could pick it up, ripping it into strips of the desired width and thickness. But Tim says we should buy our stuff planed and cut to length, as by that plan more stuff can be loaded in a car, thus reducing freight bills. Any Southern mill can do the planing and cutting a whole lot cheaper than we can. If this scheme works out all right, we'll have the simplest kind of a production problem. And if it's agreeable with you, Granddad, we'd like to have you make the southern trip, thus locating a mill that can fill our orders and give us good service."

The old man showed his surprise.

"This is rather sudden."

"Sure thing," grinned George. "But, to that point, the Baldwin-Jones order is sudden, too."

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The old gentleman nodded reflectively.

"I've been thinking of taking a vacation."

"I knew you'd do it for us," cried George. "And the trip *will* be a vacation, Granddad, for you can take your time about coming back."

Wiring Corrigan that he would see him the following morning, Andy went up to Chicago on a late afternoon train, having reserved a room for the night in one of the loop hotels.

At the mail-order plant the following morning he again went through the formality of stating his business and registering,

after which he was permitted to pass on to the toy department.

“Mr. Corrigan is engaged just now,” a girl of pleasing personality told the young salesman upon his entrance into the manager’s quarters. “I’ll let him know, though, that you are waiting.”

Presently a man of stocky build and burly personality came heavily from the manager’s private office. Andy was uneasily conscious of the searching scrutiny of a pair of penetrating, appraising eyes, which act in itself proved to the waiting visitor that he had been given some kind of mention, favorable or otherwise, in the manager’s office.

“Mr. Corrigan will see you now, Mr. Blake,” the girl informed.

The department manager was seated in state at his big desk.

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“Well, Mr. Blake,” was his characteristic opening shot, as the visitor seated himself, “I have some news that may disappoint you.”

Caught off his guard, Andy admitted to sudden dismay.

“You have a good coaster, Mr. Blake. I’ve made certain of that. But even at three dollars and seventy-five cents the price is too high. The manager of our furniture department tells me that we can build coasters of our own for less than three dollars apiece. So, unless you can materially lower your price, it will be impossible for us to get together.”

Andy now had himself well in hand, realizing, of course, that

Corrigan, as the saying is, was trying to “throw a scare into him.” Another scheme of the crafty buyer’s to gain a possible lower price for his company.

But the keen-witted young salesman was prepared to play the game, too!

“Mr. Corrigan,” he got to his feet, “we are not in business to give our coaster wagons away, even to accommodate a company of such excellent standing as Baldwin-Jones. If you feel you can manufacture coasters of your own, and safely get around our patents, that is entirely up to you. As a matter of fact,” came the bluff, “I had about made up my mind to tell you that our price of four dollars is entirely too low. In view of our heavy production costs, to say nothing of our concession in giving you exclusive distribution rights in the mail-order field, we are justified in asking four-twenty-five for our coaster, f.o.b. Manton.”

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This wasn’t at all what Corrigan had expected.

“When you were here the other day, Mr. Blake,” he spoke less arrogantly, “I really had no idea that we’d ever give your line any consideration. But certain things have developed in our organization to your interests. Still, don’t imagine for one minute that we can’t get along without your coasters. For you to hold out now for a price of four dollars and a quarter is equivalent to cutting your throat commercially, so far as doing business with us is concerned. In your letter to Mr. Baldwin you quoted a quantity price of four dollars even. As I say, I think that is too high. Much too high, in fact. But if you care to stand by the quoted price, I’ll give you a conditional order,

calling for delivery of five hundred coasters monthly. It's up to you now to say quickly whether you want Baldwin-Jones' business, or not."

Andy was human! Very clear in his memory was his earlier unhappy reception in this same office. And having successfully turned the tables on the arrogant buyer, he now wanted to make the other man sweat.

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"I'll call up my company this noon," he stated, "and see if they'll accept the business at the old price."

But the manager didn't want to wait until noon.

"Use my desk 'phone," he invited.

Hiding a grin, Andy put in a long-distance call. Nor did Corrigan offer to leave the room when the connection was made.

"Hello," came in Harnden's voice.

"This is Andy Blake speaking, Mr. Harnden. I'm calling from the Baldwin-Jones plant. Will it be satisfactory to you if I write the old price of four dollars into their order? Yes, that is the price I quoted in my letter to Mr. Baldwin. What's that? I'm afraid not. However, I'll ask Mr. Corrigan. He's here at my elbow. Just hold the line."

Andy got the manager's eye.

"Mr. Corrigan, is it possible for us to compromise on a price of four-ten?"

“Absolutely not!”

“Hello, Mr. Harnden,” Andy went back to the telephone. “Mr. Corrigan says no. Under the circumstances I think we should stand by our quoted price of four-even. What’s that? Speak louder, please.”

And the bewildered bookkeeper did speak louder.

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“ARE YOU CRAZY?” he bawled into the telephone.

“Very well, Mr. Harnden,” the young salesman ended politely. “Good-by.”

“Well?” the manager inquired crisply.

“You’ll be pleased, I imagine, to learn that I have the consent of our secretary to close the deal at the old price.”

A queer triumphant look flashed across the manager’s face. Andy wondered at it. And afterwards he remembered it.

With the signed contract in his inner pocket, the salesman was then shown into the private office of the advertising manager, where it was arranged that the copies of the COMET COASTER NEWS, going to coaster-wagon customers of the mail-order house, were to carry the Baldwin-Jones imprint. Andy saw that this could be done inexpensively; and it was little enough to do, he thought, to assure the business.

“Did you know,” Mr. Black smiled, at the close of the satisfactory interview, “that another coaster-wagon company is getting out a magazine similar to yours?”

“I heard that some such plans were under way,” the visitor admitted.

“We considered both your magazine and theirs, as well as the separate coasters. The decision, you will be glad to learn, was unanimously in your favor. As a matter of fact, the other magazine looked to me like a rank imitation.”

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Which was victory number one over Mr. Hatch, Andy grimly wrote down in his mind, as he left the building.

Arriving in Manton at five-fifteen, the successful young salesman hurried to the factory, where the office force was quitting for the day.

“There it is,” he breezed in, tossing the signed contract to the bookkeeper.

Harnden quickly scanned the paper.

“Hello, Blake.” George came noisily into the room. “What luck?”

“Here’s the order,” Harnden spoke up for the salesman.

“Get three-eighty-seven?” George inquired eagerly.

“No,” the bookkeeper shook his head. There was a painful silence, during which two pairs of merry eyes sought each other. “He got four-even,” the bookkeeper finally ended the suspense.

George gave a glad shout. Nor was it a modest, under-

developed shout, as one of the stenographers could have attested. Coming from the cloak room, the nervous girl almost jumped out of her skin, as the saying is. Possibly, in turning quickly, she expected to find the president frothing at the mouth.

“Blake,” the chief executive thrust out his hand, “you’re the cat’s elbows. Congratulations, old man. Five hundred coasters a month. Oh, baby! Some account. Let’s shake again.”

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Harnden touched Andy’s arm.

“Say, Blake,” the bookkeeper presented a puzzled face, “what in Sam Hill was your idea in calling me up on long distance this morning? I thought you were loony.”

Laughing, Andy gave his listeners a merry account of his call on the crafty department head.

“It isn’t a selling method I’d care to adopt,” the young salesman admitted in conclusion. “But I had to fight Corrigan with his own weapons.”

“I think we’d better wire your grandfather,” the bookkeeper suggested to the president. “For he’ll be pleased to learn that we’ve closed the Baldwin-Jones order.”

“Yes,” George agreed to the plan, “and we’ll tell him to get action on at least three car loads of stock.”

Harnden’s mind turned into accounting channels.

“It’s out of the question to get cut stock here for the delivery of the first five hundred coasters this month. But I hope we can

deliver at least a hundred from the stock that we already have.”

George’s face indicated determination.

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“We’re going to make the full delivery,” he declared. “We’ll do it if we have to put on a night crew. I can pick up plenty of stock in the local market to keep us going till our first mill shipment gets here. Now, Harry, tell me this: If we *do* ship five hundred coasters to Baldwin-Jones this month, will we show an August profit?”

Harnden engaged in some rapid figuring.

“I think so.”

That night the young sales manager was vastly too happy to content himself within his room. Reflectively he roamed the town’s streets until Time touched the midnight peak and started blithesomely down the slope of a new day.

How sweet, indeed, is victory!

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CHAPTER XVIII

A STRANGE ADVENTURE

Andy Blake sweltered at his desk in an office atmosphere blanketed by shimmering September heat waves. Shirt sleeves rolled to the elbows, the industrious young executive bent to the papers before him, manfully determined to concentrate on the work at hand.

But there were moments when his thoughts wandered. That noon George Warman had talked boyishly of an early-evening swim in the adjacent river. Truly, a recreation worthy of ardent contemplation, reflected Andy in the moments when he swabbed his sticky face and neck with a damp handkerchief.

Then, too, his thoughts not infrequently turned to his new chum, Rodney Chadwick, who, of course, would want to join the swimming party, following which there probably would be a long fast ride through the darkened country in the wealthy boy's car. Of late, Andy and Rodney had been very much together. The close friendship, so congenial to both, was also a source of much satisfaction to the Manton boy's parents.

Harnden was down town banking the current remittances. Always on these afternoon trips the secretary stopped in at the post office to glean the day's final orders from the three o'clock mail. Anticipating his partner's return, with thoughts of probable added business, Andy turned from his work when a scraping footfall sounded without the office door. But it wasn't the bookkeeper.

“Good afternoon, everybody,” the portly visitor spoke familiarly to the general office force. Pausing in the middle of the room, Mr. May placed his straw hat, upside-down, on the end of the high bookkeeping desk, after which he proceeded to mop his beet-like face, letting his under jaw sag humorously the while as he winked at the assistant bookkeeper over the top of his spectacles.

“I’m looking for Tim Dine, Margaret. I have a business letter for him. Suppose you tell me where you’ve got him parked this blistering hot afternoon.”

Miss Markley blushed and fell into confusion. Andy remembered then that he had observed Tim and the office girl together at picture shows, which intimate association in itself suggested that their interest in each other was deeper than mere friendship.

“Tim is the factory, Mr. May,” the confused worker finally found her voice.

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“That being the case I’ll stroll out there and look him up. Fearful hot for September. I trust, Margaret, that your ma and pa are both well.”

“Yes, Mr. May,” the girl showed uneasiness to go back to her work.

Starting for the door, the visitor wheeled and came back, with a waddling gait, to Andy’s desk, where an extra chair was quickly provided by the courteous young executive.

“Sit down, Mr. May, and make yourself comfortable,” the boy

smiled. "I'm sorry I haven't an electric fan to stir up a breeze for you."

"Young man," came brusquely, "what have you done with Herm Warman?"

"He's down in Arkansas," informed the young executive.

"What's he doing down in Arkansas?"

It was explained to the visitor that the old manufacturer had been commissioned to establish a satisfactory mill connection for the growing young coaster-wagon company.

"I understand that he ran across an old friend down there, which explains why he's so long getting home. George had a snapshot that will interest you. It shows the old gentleman with a string of fish a yard long."

This brought a snort from the irritated visitor.

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"Now, isn't that just like him! *Fishing*, mind you, and me up here sweltering in the harness. I would have joined him on his trip if he had asked me to. The selfish old coot!"

Andy's grin broadened, for he realized, of course, that the visitor's irritation was largely pretended.

"What's the latest news about checkers?" he inquired.

"Um. . . . That's a reminder, young man, that you haven't been hanging your hat on my hall tree any too often of late. What's the meaning of this neglect? Are you afraid of getting beat?—or

have you lost your appetite for Mrs. May's cheese sandwiches?"

The boy sobered.

"I've been running around a lot with Rodney Chadwick, Mr. May."

"Rodney is a good boy," the banker nodded. "I'm glad to see you pick friends of his type. But, however much fun you and Rodney have together, don't forget the older friends in your circle."

"I won't," Andy promised faithfully.

"How's business?" then came the earnest inquiry.

"Fine and dandy. Maybe Harnden hasn't told you that we closed the books last month with a profit of more than eight hundred dollars. Altogether we shipped more than a thousand coaster wagons. Think of that!"

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The big face glowed.

"Now, isn't that fine! I'm just as pleased over the new company's success as you are. Yes, sir, every bit as pleased."

"George made a wonderful showing on production, considering how we were up against it for suitable stock. Now, with our first mill shipment in the siding, we expect to put out not less than twelve hundred coasters this month, for the state dealers are taking advantage of our offer to fill their orders now, for the holiday trade, with the understanding that the

billing will be dated December first.”

“And you’re doing all this while Herm Warman is away from home, hey? Good for you! This shows what boys can do. I’ll rub it into the old loafer when he finally gets back. But I mustn’t take up any more of your time. Remember, Andy,” a warmer light came into the kindly eyes, “that there’s a big welcome for you at our house whenever you choose to take advantage of it.”

“Thanks, Mr. May. I’ll drop in to-morrow evening, if we don’t go swimming.”

Scarcely had the banker passed from sight, on his way to the factory, when the returned secretary came swiftly into the room.

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“Blake, the thing that Tim predicted weeks ago has happened.”

Andy saw instantly that some disaster was threatening. For, as a rule, Harnden wasn’t given to a display of his emotions.

“What is it?” the young salesman got quickly to his feet.

But the news bearer withheld his information until the two were closeted in the president’s office, where a business letter was then thrust into the sales manager’s hands.

“Read that,” Harnden began to pace the floor.

Kingston, Illinois, September 12.
The Boy Products Company,

Manton, Illinois.
Gentlemen:

Our attention has been called to your infringement of our coaster-wagon patent, No. 344,762, drawings and photographs of which are enclosed with this protest.

If you will agree, under bond, to discontinue the manufacture of your current front axle, which our attorney assures us is an open and direct infringement of our patents, we will refrain from taking legal action to recover the royalties due us on the Comet Coasters already manufactured and marketed.

Awaiting your assurance of an immediate compliance with this protest, we are,

Respectfully,
The Skyrocket Coaster Company.

Andy stared, first at the letter and then at his disturbed companion.

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“We had it coming to us,” Harnden spoke in a tense voice. “Tim warned George. You remember. But George wouldn’t listen. Now, if it turns out that we *are* infringing, as the letter contends, we’ll be up against it.”

“The Skyrocket Coaster Company,” Andy read the name, after which his eyes fell on the address. “Why,” he cried, looking up. “Kingston is the little town south of here on the Rock Island!”

It was a tense, apprehensive group that later gathered in conference in the president's private office. During the reading of the letter, Andy found himself covertly eyeing Tim Dine. Was there, he asked himself, with mixed thoughts, a definite connection between the infringement protest and Tim's mysterious trip to Washington? And had the time now come for the mechanic to speak up?

Having completed his inspection of the letter's accompanying blueprints and photographs, the mechanic cleared his throat.

"If the Kingston company has a patent on this device, and their patent application antedates ours, then we *are* infringing. The axles are virtually twins. One can see at a glance that our design has been copied."

"Copied?" cried George. "How could they copy our axle and antedate us on a patent?"

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"Not a hard job," Tim said quietly, "if some one in our engineering department sold us out."

"Which probably is the case," Harnden said quickly. "But the thing for us to do, instead of threatening to use our fists on the traitor,"—this as a hint to the furious young president to compose himself—"is to use our heads. These people claim to have a patent on their axle. If that's true, they must have put in their application last June, because we've had our application on file for more than eight weeks. Maybe we can go into court and prove that our design has been stolen. It's a chance. I wish I knew who's at the head of the new company."

"We can easily find out," Andy spoke up.

“In what way?”

“I’ll go over there and do some quick detective work, if you say the word.”

Here Tim Dine made a dramatic statement.

“I can name one of the men at the head of the new company.”

The others stared.

“It’s Bill Swaggerton,” Tim then informed.

Harnden was the first to recover his voice.

“This is a serious charge, Tim. We know you don’t like Bill. We know, too, that he’s given you good cause not to like him. But, even so, you shouldn’t accuse him of a thing like this unless you’re in a position to prove it.”

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“Tell them about our talk, Blake,” Tim sought Andy’s help.

There was another rough outburst from George when he had heard the sales manager’s story.

“Tim, we ought to clean up on *you*. If Granddad’s axle wasn’t right, why didn’t you tell us so?”

The mechanic flushed.

“I didn’t like to speak up and hurt the old gentleman’s feelings,” he sought to justify his silence. Then he hurried on: “But it’s a fact, our front-axle design isn’t what it should be. I

think my idea has the old axle beat a million ways. I've applied for patents in my own name. That is what took me to Washington. When I told Uncle Tom about Swaggerton—"

"What about Swaggerton?" George cut in roughly.

Tim got down to his story.

"It happened the morning I talked with Blake. Leaving him, as he says, I went directly to the experimental room to take up my regular work. In using my hacksaw I accidentally broke the blade. Swaggerton had used my tools off and on, so I didn't hesitate to go into his chest to get his saw. I wasn't snooping—but I couldn't help seeing an axle model in the bottom of the chest. That's the model," and Tim indicated the blueprints that had accompanied the letter.

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"Well?" George growled.

"Right away I got suspicious. I remembered other things that had puzzled me. And when I saw a letter from a Washington patent attorney, I read it. Oh," the speaker's face flushed, "I suppose I had my nerve. But, at that, I guess you fellows would have done the same. In the letter the attorney said he would promptly file an application on the Swaggerton axle model, which I could see was just a copy of Mr. Warman's design."

"Yes?" George further growled, as encouragement to the speaker to continue.

"I figured it out that Bill wanted a patent on his axle for just one purpose, and that was to break into the coaster-wagon game himself. Then is when I went to Uncle Tom. Being

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a business man, I figured that he could tell me just what to do. He did. He said I was to keep mum and let Swaggerton show his hand, thus proving his colors. But to protect our company, I was to go to Washington and apply for a patent on my axle in my own name. He said the fewer who knew about the matter the less chance there would be of Swaggerton learning what we were doing, so we kept things to ourselves, as Blake knows. Getting the money from Uncle Tom to pay my expenses to Washington, I put the matter in the hands of a reliable attorney, who promised quick results. Of course, when I get my patent I'll transfer it to the company. As I see it, this protest from the Skyrocket Coaster Company isn't going to cripple us so badly. I felt that something like this was coming, and I've been preparing for it. You fellows think I've been working on jigs to adapt our machines to the manufacture of the Warman axle, but I've been secretly fitting the jigs to my own model. We can start production on the new axle within a week, and you'll find we can turn out a better job for a lot less money."

"This is amazing, Tim," Harnden got his voice. "I can hardly grasp all the circumstances. But if what you say is true, it's a cinch you've lifted us out of a serious hole."

In a less vicious mood now, George was thinking of the morning Swaggerton had complained about the delay on the front-axle jigs. The young president understood now why the jigs had been held up!

"I think we can nicely turn the tables on Swaggerton," the mechanic went on. "He undoubtedly figures that this infringement protest will choke off our production. Of course, he doesn't know about my own invention—"

“Just a minute, Tim,” George held out a heavy hand.

“Are you *dead sure* that Swaggerton is back of the new company?”

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“I’ve told you about the axle model in his tool chest, and the letter. His model is the one the Skyrocket people claim patents on. Remember, too, that the new company is just a few miles away. It looks to me as though Bill is scheming to stick around here, pulling the wool over our eyes to the last minute, in order to get a line on our trade.”

“Why! . . .” Andy spoke up, with an added touch of excitement. “Now that I recall, I caught Swaggerton one noon going through our order file. He was writing down names. But I thought nothing of it at the time.”

Tim Dine then brought up another matter.

“As I say, I’ve been suspicious of Swaggerton for some time. And having watched him like a hawk, I can name a hundred things that I’ve seen him do, on the sly, to lower the standard of our work and slow up production. You fellows have wondered what was the matter with my automatic wheel machine. But, until now, I couldn’t tell you the truth, not wanting to be led into other disclosures. When I was away Swaggerton sprung the disk dies, thus throwing the whole machine out of alignment. Probably he did it as much as anything to spite me. Other things have happened to the machine that I lay to him.”

“What treachery!” cried Harnden.

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George, though, was strangely quiet. Conscious of the superintendent’s long period of service in the carriage factory,

it was a shock to the young executive to learn of the employee's dishonesty. The boy realized how deeply grieved his grandfather would be when the truth was known.

"Do you suppose," Andy spoke up, considering the matter from the standpoint of his own department, "that the other company will make a bid for the Baldwin-Jones business?"

"What reason have we to doubt it?" Harnden elected to answer. "For Swaggerton knows all about our affairs. I venture to say that the Baldwin-Jones account has been a chief objective with them."

"We can cut our prices, if necessary, and give the other company a run for its money," Tim put in. "For our labor cost on the new axle will be reduced a third."

At this point the banker's voice sounded in the outer office.

"Margaret, you must have been mistaken when you told me that Tim was in the factory. For I've tramped through your blooming plant from top to bottom without seeing hide nor hair of him."

"He was in the factory, Mr. May. You'll find him in Mr. Warman's private office now, in conference."

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The nephew got quickly to his feet and opened the door.

"Hello, Tim. Here's a letter for you. I was up to the house visiting with your ma when the mail man stopped. Noticing that the letter was from Washington, I says to myself: 'I bet a cookie it's Tim's patent.' So, knowing that you'd want to see it without

delay, I brought it down.”

The mechanic made quick work of opening the letter. Nor was its contents in any way disappointing. In the excitement that prevailed at sight of the patent papers, Mr. May was drawn into the room, joining in the lively conversation.

“From now on,” Harnden took the lead, “we’ve got to move cautiously, to keep Swaggerton from finding out about Tim’s patent. I won’t even answer this letter of protest until we get Blake’s report on the new company. Then,” the young face hardened, “will be the proper time to deal with Mr. Bill! George,” the president was consulted, “how many coasters are you putting through the factory on current orders?”

“Oh, about two hundred.”

“You haven’t started to ship the September Baldwin-Jones allotment?”

“Not yet. But a lot of the stuff is ready.”

“How soon can you clean up the stock you’re working on and get the complete Baldwin-Jones allotment billed?”

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“Tell me first,” George countered, “what’s your idea in asking that?”

“Suppose you worked a full crew all night. Could you get the allotment into transit before nine o’clock to-morrow morning?”

“It isn’t impossible.”

This was the answer Harnden wanted.

“Fellows,” he told the others, “we’re going to get around this patent protest with a loss of not more than a hundred dollars. Here’s the idea: By nine o’clock to-morrow morning we’ll be entirely cleaned out of old-style axles. Not a one in stock. In a week or two we’ll be working full tilt on the new design.”

“But why all the rush?” George inquired.

“I’m offering the prediction,” Harnden jerked his head, 203
“that in to-morrow morning’s mail we’ll get a letter from Baldwin-Jones telling us to hold up all coaster-wagon shipments until further advised. That will mean, of course, that they have been approached by the other company—thanks to Bill Swaggerton’s insight into our secret affairs!—and will want to dicker with the Kingston concern, whose coaster so nearly matches ours, to see if they can’t save money. If we can get the September shipment into transit before their letter reaches us, they’ll be in duty bound to accept it. Then, by the end of the month, we’ll be in position to talk turkey to them on coasters of our new design. Yes, sir, our biggest job right now is to get action in the factory. For if we fail in getting the Baldwin-Jones allotment into early transit, we’re going to close the books with a September loss.”

George was glad of an outlet for his suppressed energy.

“We’ll all pitch in and help,” he suggested.

Andy got Harnden’s eye.

“Maybe I had better delay the Kingston trip until to-morrow.”

“No,” the bookkeeper shook his head, “the sooner you can get a line on the new company, the better prepared we’ll be to protect ourselves.”

“Talk with the workmen and tell them that we’ve got to get the mail-order job shipped the first thing in the morning,” George gave his orders to Tim Dine. “Offer double time to the men if they’ll come back after supper and work all night. We’re lucky,” the president concluded, “that we have more than four hundred coasters all ready to ship.”

“How about Swaggerton?” Tim put in anxiously. “As I say, he probably knows that this letter of protest was mailed to us to-day. And when he learns that we’re cleaning up our stock, and rushing through the Baldwin-Jones job, won’t he be liable to tumble to our scheme and try to stop us? Naturally, he’ll want the September Baldwin-Jones business for his own company.”

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“Maybe I can give you boys a lift in that quarter,” the banker spoke up. “We’re carrying a note of Bill’s at the bank. So you send word to him, after I leave, to see me immediately on important business. If necessary, I can stretch the conversation out a mile long. So it will be after six o’clock before I get through with him, which means that instead of going back to the factory he’ll go home. Then, after supper, I may come down and do some factory work myself. I’m not much good on stooping jobs,” the fat man humorously drew attention to his swollen waist line, “but at the very least I can check boxes and help pack.”

“Mr. May,” George cried warmly, “you’re a brick!”

The banker hurrying away as planned, a message was then dispatched to the superintendent. Four grim-faced young men covertly watched the dishonest executive come from the factory and start down the street. Then they filed from the room, each prepared to do the work assigned to him.

Giving a few quick instructions to his assistant, Andy walked briskly to the Y.M.C.A. Thirty minutes later he boarded a north-bound inter-urban, riding as far as Hector Corners, where he made arrangements with the management of the town's only hotel to hold his traveling bag until called for.

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At a clothing store he purchased a cheap suit, equally cheap shoes, a cap and a colored work shirt. Changing his clothes in the rear of the store, he put his neat business suit into a box, hiring a boy to deliver it at the hotel.

Black hair dye and a tawny skin stain lost for Andy Blake the young American's identity, and in his place stood Tony Salbingo, a bright-eyed youth of seemingly Italian parentage.

Elaborate precautions, truly, but, with the thought of possible spying eyes, Andy was taking no chances.

A south-bound freight train rumbled into the sun-baked town, and when the train continued its southerly passage, one of the open box cars contained a solitary unpaid passenger.

It was seven o'clock in the evening when the freight train pulled into Kingston, after a long delay at a lonely junction. In broken English the young foreigner, seeking his kind, haggled with a slovenly woman over the price of a room in her boarding house. In spite of his inward excitement, and

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the clamoring noises that tenanted the uninviting place, he slept well. Awakened the following morning by the early factory whistles, he set forth on the second lap of what promised to be the strangest adventure of his life.

CHAPTER XIX

ANDY LEARNS OF THE TRAGEDY

Obtaining his breakfast in a near-by dingy restaurant, Andy casually inquired of the talkative Greek proprietor the way to the Skyrocket Coaster Company's plant.

"You no want to git job there," the man misunderstood the object of the query. "No pay good money," he shook his head depreciatingly.

"Aren't they very busy?" Andy inquired guardedly.

"Somet'ings they do; only leedle. New beesiness. Not git good start yet."

"Do you happen to know the name of the factory manager?"

"Maybe Spielman. Me not know for sure. New beesiness. Not of interest to me."

Spielman! Andy reflectively wrote down the name in his memory.

"Is this fellow Spielman a Kingston man?" he next inquired. And to hold the proprietor's attention he tossed a five-cent piece on the counter, indicating a preferred brand of chewing gum.

"No, no. Factory men tell me he come from Chicago. No like heem, they say. Make too much hard work."

That it was going to be another sweltering hot day Andy could not doubt. Born but a short hour out of the eastern sky, the sun attacked the world with withering, blistering intent. Men passing along the street on their way to work seemed tired and dispirited, as though the fatigue of the preceding sweltering day still lay heavy on their weary shoulders.

Walking the length of several city squares, the young adventurer now found his course paralleled by industrial walls, where workmen, treading both sides of the street, were deflected from the main artery of travel into separated factory gates and entrances.

The Kingston Gas Engine Works! Andy repeated the name, searching the doors and gateways of the adjacent factory buildings, the restaurant keeper having told him that the new coaster-wagon company was housed in the back room of a building otherwise completely occupied by the engine works.

Shortly before seven o'clock he arrived at his destination. The plant, a two-story, flat-roofed building of rectangular proportions, sheathed on the sides with corrugated iron, painted black, was obviously a factory of the poorer type. Peering into an alley that paralleled one side of the building, Andy detected a doorway cut into the sheathing, approached by a squatty flight of wooden steps.

As he had expected, this side door, giving into the rear of the building, carried on its glass panel the name of the rival coaster-wagon company. The adventurer's heart beat more rapidly. Very close was he now to the source of information. The big job at hand was to decide how best to

proceed.

The windows of the coaster-wagon factory were raised to invite the morning air. But the framed openings were too high up in the buildings walls to permit the young detective to see within. Going to the rear, where he found an open shipping door, he swept the interior with itemizing eyes. A few workmen were idling in the room, awaiting the commands of the seven o'clock whistle, soon to blow. Andy gave them scant attention. More interesting to him just then was the machinery, each unit of which seemed to be an exact counterpart of the separate machines that he had casually observed in his trips through the Manton factory.

“Hello, Tony,” one of the workmen sought to have some fun with the supposed young foreigner. “Sell-a da banan to-day?”

“No, no,” Andy returned glibly, in good character. “Da banan he spoil and I lose-a da mon. No sell-a da banan no more. Maybe you put-a Tony to work in factory.”

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“No chance,” laughed the man.

“Maybe Meester Spielman, da beeg boss, he put-a Tony to work.”

“Don’t kid yourself. Spielman isn’t hiring men to-day.”

Here the final whistles lifted their raucous voices. Within the factory the electrically operated machinery was put into motion, the men dispiritedly picking up their separate tasks.

Presently a heavy-set man came authoritatively through the side

door. At sight of the newcomer Andy caught his breath. Then, as the sharp-eyed manager came quickly to the shipping door, the young detective wisely walked away.

“Who was that fellow?” the manager inquired of the nearest workman.

“A dago looking for a job.”

“Was he in here?”

“No, he just looked in.”

“Well, I don’t want people looking in here. If he comes back, let me know.”

Having directed his steps to the front street, Andy pored over the mystery of where, and under what peculiar circumstances, he had met the burly manager. Vaguely he associated Spielman with some other man of his acquaintance. Could it be, he asked himself, that this third man, also unidentified in his mind, was the “king pin,” as one might say, of the triangular partnership?

It never had occurred to him to seek temporary employment in the connecting engine works until he came in front of the building and observed a sign suspended from a hook just without the factory door.

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Andy Blake, janitor! Well, why not, he chuckled to himself. Removing the sign from its hook he swung through the doorway into the building, getting the attention of a man at the employment desk.

“Do you think you can push a broom without leaning on the handle and going to sleep?” the employment agent inquired, when the young Italian applied for the janitor’s job.

“Me no go-a to sleep,” Andy acted his part. “Do-a da beeg day’s work.”

Later the new janitor was supplied with a heavy factory broom and definitely introduced to his duties, which included the care of two rows of enameled lavatory basins in the factory washroom.

The new employee understood what was expected of him, but in the sweltering performance of the uninteresting work there were moments when his mind turned longingly to his comfortable desk chair in Manton. Long before the dinner hour arrived his muscles were throbbing and weary.

In keeping with a preformed plan he remained in the washroom until twelve-fifteen. By this time the factory was practically deserted, as the workmen who carried lunches were enjoying their noonday meal in the outside shade.

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A door at the rear of the big manufacturing department gave into the smaller coaster-wagon factory. Andy lifted the latch. But no sooner had he stepped through the doorway than he was accosted by the workman of the morning’s conversation, who roughly ordered him to “beat it.”

“Well, that’s that,” the baffled detective reflected whimsically, retracing his steps to the lavatory. Washing up, he quickly passed down the street and bought his dinner.

Upon his return to the factory a workman, bent and old, hurried, with rheumatic steps, to overtake him.

“I see you’ve got my ol’ job,” cackled the wrinkled newcomer, disclosing, by the removal of his hat, a thatch of dirty gray hair.

It would be wise, Andy decided, to keep in character.

“You do-a da push with da broom, too?” he inquired.

“Yep. Too hard work, though, for a’ ol’ man like I be,” the aged one waggled. “So t’other day I sez to the boss, sez I: ‘Mr. Baines, I calc’late you better hire another janitor and give me a drillpress job. Unless you do,’ sez I, ‘I’m goin’ to quit.’”

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Uninterested at first, Andy suddenly wondered if here wasn’t a good chance to pick up some possible desirable information.

“You push-a da broom in da engine works when small-boy wagon factory heem start-a da biz?”

“Yep. Perty near quit, I did, when Spielman come in with his coaster wagons. Mr. Baines sez to me, sez he: ‘Charley, until they git on their feet you better do their sweepin’, too, along with our’n.’ An’ I sez, sez I: ‘For which I’ll prob’ly git a raise in pay, hey?’ That made him hot. An’ he sez, sez he: ‘Raise in pay, nothin’. You jest sashay in there with your broom every afternoon an’ clean up for Spielman, as I tell you, or you kin ring out.’ Well, that made me perty hot under the collar. But they was only one thing for me to do to hold my job, and I did it. Calc’late I swept up in there as much as two weeks a-fore Spielman up an’ got huffy as blazes at me an’ ordered me out

for bein' a spy, which I wasn't."

"A spy?" Andy put in, forgetting, in his quickened interest, that, supposedly, he was a young Italian.

"Yep. It was one evenin' about a month ago. I had bin to a funeral that afternoon, so I figured on workin' in the evenin' to catch up. Spielman was talkin' on his tellyphone to some one in Chicago when I come into the coaster-wagon department with my broom. Well, sir, you'd 'a' thought I was intendin' to steal his ol' coasters an' the whole shebang, the way he come at me. 'Git out of here, you ol' spy,' sez he, an' he shook his fists at me. 'Git,' sez he, 'an' if I catch you further spyin' around in here after quittin' hours I'll wring your neck.'" 214

There was a brief pause.

"Young feller," the speaker then became more confidential, "do you know what I think?"

Andy smiled.

"What-a you t'ink?" he got back into character.

"They's somethin' confounded queer about that coaster-wagon man. People who play a squar' an' honest game ain't kep' in their offices nights tellyphonin' stuff when nobody's around."

"Meanin' da which?"

"Lately I've bin goin' to the factory to work evenings. An' every time I've been there Spielman has talked tellyphone stuff, for I listened an' know. About seven o'clock" 215

every evenin'. An' it's the same Chicago man he talks to. Hod is what Spielman calls him. It's Hod this an' Hod that, an' the talk is always about coaster wagons, like it was a report he was makin'. I tol' my wife about it, an' she sez, sez she: 'Charley, you suspicious ol' gilly, he's jest talkin' to his partner. Nothin' crooked in that.' An' I sez, sez I: 'Mebbe so, Mother; mebbe so. But what's he so all-fired scared for that some one will listen in on his talk? What's he do it nights for?'"

Andy quickly decided on a course of action, congratulating himself upon having had the good fortune to fall in with this talkative old man. When night came he would conceal himself in the coaster-wagon department. And if Spielman should again talk with the mysterious partner, a third pair of ears would be tuned in on the conversation.

The afternoon carried through. Sweltering in the performance of his duties, the young janitor told himself that another such day as this and he would be a grease spot. One of the wash-room windows looked into the west. Standing here, he observed the dipping sun change from molten white to orange as a dark haze lifted giantlike fingers out of a scowling horizon.

A workman came in to wash up early.

"I had a hunch that this blistering hot spell would end up in a storm. For weather like this isn't natural at all. So, look for an old buster to-night, Tony. We'll be lucky if we aren't all blowed away."

At six o'clock the factory machinery went into repose for the

night and the building echoed hollowly with the tread of departing feet. The minutes flew. Andy glanced at his watch, observing that it was six-fifteen. Confident that he was alone in the place he came quietly from the wash room and picked his way, on tiptoe, to the connecting door.

“Hello. Is that you, long distance? Yes, I got that. Well, then leave word with his wife to have him call me thirty minutes earlier tonight. I want to drive over to Manton ahead of the storm if I can make it.”

It was a narrow escape for the young detective. And his heart jumped into his throat as he quietly closed the door, retreating to a safe hiding place behind a pile of big engine bases, from where he later heard the slamming of a door. To make sure, however, that the coaster-wagon manager had left the building, the secret worker ran quickly to a front window, through which he saw Spielman getting into his car. A moment later the automobile disappeared down the street.

Going quickly to the coaster-wagon department, Andy discovered that many of the coasters gotten ready for shipment contained the addresses of hardware dealers who had written to him for prices. This, to the detective, was ample proof that the dishonest superintendent was systematically rifling the Manton company's mail.

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Ting-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling went the telephone. Running to the office, determined, in the manager's absence, to answer the call himself, to thus find out, if possible, who the mysterious third partner was, Andy was dismayed to find the door locked. For a wild moment he was tempted to batter the door down.

Then, making good use of his wits, he darted to the tool rack, getting a hammer and chisel. It was then but the work of a moment to drive out the door's hinge pins.

"Hello," he panted into the mouthpiece.

"Hello, Skyrocket Coaster Company," came the operator's crisp voice. "Here is your Chicago party."

In the brief interval that it took to complete the long-distance connection, Andy observed the gathering storm. An initial bolt of lightning seemed to set the whole heavens aflame. Then came the rumbling, shattering crash of thunder. With its iron sheathing, the building rattled like pebbles in a tin can.

And there was another sound the young detective did not hear:
The metallic click of a key in the lock of the outside door!

"Hello."

"Hello," came over the wire. "Is that you, Pete?"

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Andy trembled. That voice! He could not mistake it. Then, all in an instant, he recalled that it was in Corrigan's office that he had seen Spielman. That was the day he had gotten the order.

"Hello, Pete. Say, how in the name of common sense did you come to let Swaggerton run wild? I just got word—"

Following a quick step from behind, Andy received a blow on the side of the head that sent him reeling, the telephone crashing to the floor.

“You sneaking spy!” grated Spielman; and the trapped one retreated in terror before the expression on the other’s face. The brutal head was thrust forward; the thick lips were curled, wolf-like, over set teeth; the corners of the mouth hung downward in a snarl; the eyes, like a serpent’s, were glittering spots.

Closer and closer came the man, step by step, panther-like, his huge hands opening and closing convulsively. Andy’s back was now against the partition. He could retreat no farther.

“Didn’t I see you hanging around here this morning?”

“Yes,” the single word escaped the boy’s white lips.

“Who are you?”

“The janitor in the engine works.”

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“Janitor and spy, huh? Well, you’ll suffer for this.”

Andy staggered under a battery of blows, delivered to his head and chest. Defending himself with his left hand, he struck out with his right, landing squarely in the man’s face. There was a howl of rage. Then the big body crushed the fighting boy to the wall. A powerful hand closed around the younger one’s throat.

Andy realized that to save his life he must get into the center of the room where he could brace himself on his feet and make his blows count. Raising his right knee, he brought it with telling force into the man’s stomach. The clutching hand momentarily relaxed its grip, thus giving the boy the chance he needed. Like an eel he slipped to the floor, upsetting the other into a heap.

The thunder without the building was terrific. Incessant flashes of lightning gave the now darkened room its only illumination. Under the lash of the shrieking wind the windows rattled like furiously beaten drums.

Andy tried to get to the door, to make his escape, but the big body lunged forward, cutting him off. The trapped boy hammered with his fists until the knuckles were bruised and bleeding. But the strangling fingers retained their deadly grip on the younger one's throat. The lightning's glare, to the boy, became a blue torch. The blue flame changed to green and from green to purple.

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Realizing that he was being choked to death, Andy, in a spasm of terror, exerted his complete strength, thus succeeding in breaking the other's hold. Again the young fists beat the brutal face and neck. Another lunge. The clutching hand struck goal. Gasping, Andy felt himself going to the floor. In his fall he collided with the office table. There was a crash as the table's contents spilled in a heap.

Forced upon his back, his right hand came in contact with, and closed around, the stem of the fallen telephone. Down it came on the man's head with all the energy Andy could muster. Again and again. The clutching fingers relaxed. Then, following a gurgling moan, the huge body crumpled in a heap on the floor.

Gasping for breath, and trembling in every nerve and muscle, Andy staggered to the doorway, where he felt up and down the casing for a light switch. Aided by the flood of light that followed the pressure of the located switch, he tore the straps from a pair of overalls, using these as thongs for the man's

wrists and ankles. A wise precaution, because even before he had set the knots firm the prisoner had regained his senses. The air reeked with his profanity as he struggled unsuccessfully to free himself.

The telephone, miraculously uninjured in its fall and later mistreatment, was chattering mechanically.

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Staggering forward, Andy picked it up.

“Good heavens!” came over the wire in Corrigan’s voice.

“Don’t you understand, Pete? Why don’t you answer me? I got word an hour ago that Swaggerton’s body was picked up on the railroad track near Joliet. Oh, we’re in a nice mess! Who was it that he killed in Manton, Pete? Have you heard who—”

Andy was held in the grip of frozen horror.

“*What?*” he panted into the mouthpiece.

Then came a blinding glare; a shattering crash; the instrument went dead in his hands and again fell to the floor.

One can readily understand Andy’s panic. Unmindful of the man on the floor, and of his own blood-splotted clothing and bleeding hands, he ran from the building into the storm. The lightning flared unnoticed in his face; the thunder crashed unnoticed against his eardrums; the dashing rain wet him to the flesh, but in no small measure did he seem to feel it. He had but one thought—to get back to Manton.

Colliding with Spielman’s car, parked close to the building in the alley, he hesitated not an instant to climb

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into the driver's seat and spin the starter.

On the concrete highway, threading north, he opened the throttle to its widest point. Higher and higher crept the speedometer's recording finger. The roaring motor ate hungrily into the highway's miles.

The lights of the Manton city hospital loomed ahead. Harnden was coming from the doorway. The car shivered under the brutal application of its brakes.

"Why, Blake!" cried the astonished secretary, recognizing the driver.

"Tell me," cried Andy, abandoning the car, "was it George?"

Harnden understood.

"No," he slowly shook his head.

That left Tim Dine!

"Poor Tim," Andy murmured, reeling.

"Blake! You're covered with blood! Are you hurt?"

The story of the night's adventures was told by the exhausted detective in tumbling, panting sentences.

"How was Tim killed?" he inquired dully in conclusion.

"Tim's all right, Blake. It's Mr. May. Swaggerton hit him on the back of the head with an iron bar. I've just been to

see him. His body is paralyzed, the doctors say. He may never be able to use his arms or legs again.”

The two then went to Andy’s room where Harnden gave a more detailed account of the tragedy. Swaggerton had learned that the boys were rushing through the Baldwin-Jones order. Coming to the factory, he had tried to shut off the power. The banker had interfered. And then—

“Swaggerton thought, as we did at first, that Mr. May was killed outright. In the excitement he made his escape from town. But God’s vengeance overtook him.”

Andy’s bed went untouched that night. Hour after hour he paced the floor of his room. Sleep seemingly had deserted him.

CHAPTER XX

ANDY'S REMORSE

The passing days ate into the drab calendar of winter like a greedy, consuming moth. Locked in its icebound prison, the river brooded morosely and ground its frozen teeth. The hibernating oaks and hickories tenanted the slopes and the floor of the valley sighed forlornly under a freight of snow, their naked limbs a prey to each cruel caprice of the cutting wind.

Then one glorious balmy morning the winter-weary world opened its doors to find that over night spring had spread its carpet of green. The chill was gone from out of the air, and in its stead was a fragrance that dripped, nectar-like, from the delicately painted cups of peach and apple blossoms. Men joyously appeared in their gardens with spades and seed packets. Bustling housewives hummed snatches of girlhood songs as they brought emasculated geraniums from dim basement corners, setting the gaunt leafless stalks into the warm earth with high hopes and optimistic hearts.

A change was wrought in Andy Blake with the passing of the months. It was as though the white winds of fall and winter had chilled his ardent enthusiasm and optimism. He seemed not to be the old Andy Blake at all.

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Less frequently now was he seen with Rodney Chadwick. He felt the need of solitude, for always in his distressed mind was the pitiful picture of a stricken man, struggling against the

creeping death that already had laid claim to the limbs of the body.

George and Harnden were deeply distressed by the marked change in their associate. They were helpless, however, before the other one's new moods. Outside of office hours he plainly avoided them, as also did he avoid the boy who earlier had been a bosom chum.

"What *is* the matter with Andy Blake?" Mrs. Chadwick made troubled inquiry of her young son. "We see so little of him lately. And he acts so depressed."

But Rodney had no answer.

Embraced by the warmth of a southern sun, the stricken banker sought relief in a Florida sanitarium. And strange as it may seem, in the succession of weeks into spring, Andy had written only once. That was early in October. It was a brief letter. Mrs. May had answered it promptly. But there the exchange of letters had ended.

Yet the Manton boy constantly hungered for news touching on the invalid's condition. Nightly he scanned the "personal" columns of the local newspaper. At the beginning the southern reports had been tinctured with hope. "The doctors in charge of the case are confident that the invalid will respond to their treatment and fully regain the use of his limbs." But in the waning winter there was less optimism. "Very likely Mr. May will be brought home as soon as the weather permits. His many distressed friends will be further grieved to learn that the treatment engaged in has been

unsuccessful.”

The mutilated body of the deceased superintendent had been quietly buried in the local cemetery, attended in its last earthly journey by a scattering of the older factory workmen. Drawn to the fresh mound, Andy had stood there in the golden glory of the declining day, his lips white from the strain of the inward cry: “Oh, how could you strike down a man so kind and just as Mr. May? He was a friend to all boys and to all men. How could you commit so wanton a deed?”

Mr. Warman, too, spent the winter in the south, close to his stricken friend. When the aged manufacturer returned to Manton in the spring his face was noticeably more pinched and thin; the shoulders seemed more bent with the burden of advancing years. The factory had no interest for him. He was wont to roam the streets like a lost soul. 227

Then came a day in May when it was reported that the long-closed home in West Main Street was open again.

“Granddad was there when the family arrived,” George told his office associates. “They wheel Mr. May in a chair. He can talk; but his arms and legs are dead.”

Andy reached instinctively for his desk telephone. Then, on second thought, he let his hand fall without touching the instrument. The returned family might not care to have him invite himself in so soon. It would be better, he decided, to await their invitation.

That evening, as he appeared in the streets, a motor car drew up at the curb.

“Dad asked me to come down town and look you up,” spoke Mr. Thomas May, Jr. “He wants you to come out to the house this evening, if you will.”

As on other happier evenings, Andy found the banker and his wife in the lighted sun parlor. Mrs. May took the visitor’s hat. It seemed to the distressed boy that there was a fever in her pulse, so burning was her handclasp. And he could trace white lines in her delicate face, painted there by the winter’s worries.

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“Sympathy hurts him, Andy,” came the guarded whisper. “So be watchful of your words.”

The boy quickly went forward.

“Hello, there, you young scoundrel!” came the hearty greeting. “Wouldn’t write to me, huh? I ought to take a stick to you. Sit down, now, where I can get a good look at you.”

A trifle thinner, the invalid’s face had lost none of its characteristic warmth and color. The friendly glow that had pierced Andy’s boyish heart still tenanted the blue eyes.

Oh, the pity of it, thought the sympathetic young friend—a man half living, half dead! Then, catching the attendant’s anxious glance, the disturbed one checked himself.

“It’s good to see you again, Mr. May,” he spoke naturally, with a touch of the old enthusiasm. “I’ve missed you like sixty.”

The roving blue eyes embraced the boy’s general appearance.

“You look older, Andy. More like a man grown. Working too hard, I guess. Having a good run of business?”

“Yes, sir,” the young visitor replied, dropping into a seat directly in front of the wheel chair.

“Well,” came the sensible counsel, “don’t forget the old saying: ‘All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.’”

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“I get plenty of play,” the boy assured.

He told them, in pleasing word pictures, of a new canoe that he and Rodney Chadwick had put in the river that spring.

“So you and Rodney are still chums, eh?”

“Yes, sir.”

Having come into the room, old Mr. Warman now moved about like a brooding, restless shadow. The talk of canoe trips in the river’s watery lanes, and similar distinctly boyish pastimes, seemed to annoy the older ears.

“I guess I’ll be going, Tom,” the old friend finally shuffled to the door. “See you again in the morning.”

“If you’re going to look and act like a funeral,” came ungraciously, “your company certainly isn’t going to excite me.”

“Please, Pa!” the distressed wife put in.

The temperamental invalid quickly showed remorse.

“Just overlook that, Herm. You know me—I never did have any sense. Still, if it’s possible for you to park that ‘gates ajar’ look at the curb, I’ll be grateful. I’m not the man, in some respects, that I used to be, but, even so, I intend to outlive you by ten years. So why waste sympathy on me?”

“Good night, Tom,” the departing friend spoke humbly.

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“Good night, Herm.”

Mrs. May and her tall son passed into an adjoining room.

“Now, Andy, suppose you draw your chair closer and tell me how you’re getting along at the coaster-wagon factory. Are you making lots of money?”

There was a slow nod.

“But coaster wagons are fair-weather toys, so our sales fell low during the coldest winter months, picking up again in the spring. We’re now turning out three thousand coasters a month. The new design is making a big hit. If nothing happens we’ll end our first year with a cash surplus of not less than ten thousand dollars.”

“From which I take it that the other coaster-wagon company isn’t doing much.”

“The Kingston company has gone out of business. They couldn’t compete with us on the new model. Maybe you know, Mr. May, that Corrigan, the manager of Baldwin-Jones’ toy department, was one of the backers of the Kingston concern. He schemed to swing the mail-order business over to the new

company. Swaggerton was Corrigan's brother-in-law. I guess we'll never know whether Swaggerton went to Corrigan with the scheme of starting the rival company, or whether Corrigan got the idea and interested his brother-in-law and Spielman."

"Who is Spielman?"

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"Before taking charge of the Kingston coaster-wagon factory, he was a foreman in one of the Baldwin-Jones woodworking shops."

The banker nodded reflectively.

"Three birds of a feather, evidently. Andy," then came the sound counsel, "it doesn't pay to be crooked, in business or in anything else. Take Swaggerton. He might have been living to-day if he had behaved himself."

"Corrigan paid, too," the visitor further informed. "He lost his job."

"I'm not surprised."

"I went directly to the president with my story—not to fight Corrigan, personally, but to get back the Baldwin-Jones business. I understand the discharged manager is somewhere in the East."

"And the Kingston company, you say, is all shut up?"

"Months ago. They offered their axle patent to us for five hundred dollars. But we turned it down. For why should we buy their patent when we have a better axle of our own?"

“How’s my nephew coming along?”

“Tim Dine? Oh, he’s doing some splendid work in the factory. I’ll take you down there some day, Mr. May, and show you the new arrangement of our machinery. You won’t recognize the place.”

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“And how about Trigger Berg?” then came the whimsical inquiry.

Andy grinned.

“Trigger is going stronger than ever with the kids. In the last installment he and his gang rode a sway-backed horse to Sunday school, and while they were reciting their lessons Christopher Columbus got loose in the preacher’s yard and ate a rubber plant on the parsonage porch.”

“I swan!” came the hearty laugh. “That little rascal is into everything.”

The outlook of the coaster-wagon business then came up for discussion.

“Young man,” the banker spoke reflectively, “you have big possibilities ahead of you. What you need, as I see it, is wider recognition.”

“We realize that, Mr. May. And as fast as possible our successful Rodeo scheme is going to be carried into adjoining states. We may have hundreds of high-school boys working for us this summer.”

“Next winter you want to work the South.”

“We’re intending to. We talked of doing it the past winter, but decided to first get firmly established at home.”

A whimsical expression tenanted the blue eyes.

“Andy, you’re going to be a rich man some day. I can see that, all right.”

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“I hope so, Mr. May.”

“What are you going to do with your money when you get it?—spend it on yourself?”

The younger man slowly shook his head. And at his noticeable earnestness the other smiled.

“No, I wouldn’t want to do that. I’d prefer to buy an interest in a chain of factories, thus making my money work for the good of others, as well as for myself. Mr. Chadwick is the kind of a rich man I want to be.”

The big face beamed.

“You’ve got the right idea, Andy. Don’t ever get the feeling that money is just an open door to expensive pleasures. As you say, make it work for the good of the community. The rich man who thinks only of himself is a parasite.”

There was a brief pause.

“How about a checker game?” the host then suggested.

Andy moved uneasily in his chair.

“I know what you’re thinking,” the man chuckled. “You’re saying to yourself: ‘How can *he* play checkers when he can’t even lift a finger?’ Well, I’ve got a surprise for you. Suppose you get my checker table in the next room.”

Complying, the visitor found that a sheet of transparent paper had been pasted over the table’s checkered top, each blank square having its own written number.

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“Mother did it for me this afternoon,” the smiling man explained. “She is pleased to think that I can enjoy the old game. You’ll find the white men lettered. All I need to do is to name my moves and you do the work. Who moves first?”

“You do,” Andy said quickly.

The big face clouded.

“Young man, I want to tell you this: Just because I’m physically handicapped, as you might say, I’m expecting no favors. If you expect to play checkers with me, you’re going to buckle down to business, as you did the first night you were here. Any time I find you’re not doing your best, there’ll be no more checkers in *this* house. Is that plain to you?”

“I understand, Mr. May.”

“Very well. As it was your suggestion, I’ll take the lead. You can move my ‘A’ man to square ‘ten.’”

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CHAPTER XXI

MR. HATCH BEGS FOR FAVORS

Returning to his room at a late hour, his mind more at peace than it had been in weeks, Andy was surprised to find Rodney Chadwick sprawled on the bed, absorbed in a book.

“Hello, Rod,” came the pleased greeting. “I didn’t know that I was going to have a bedfellow to-night. You old hunk! How are you, anyway?”

The visitor got up and stretched his long legs.

“I didn’t come to spend the night with you, Andy, though I probably can if you insist.”

“Why didn’t you ’phone West Main Street? You knew I was there. And I would have broken away earlier if I had known you were waiting for me.”

“That reminds me, Andy, that Dad wants you to ’phone him.”

“You’re joking!”

“No, honest.”

“I don’t know why your father should want to speak with *me*,” came the grin, “unless it is to get a line on you and your date book.”

“Aw! . . . Go lay an egg.”

“Or, possibly,” the fun-loving room owner strutted around, “he wants to offer me the job of general manager. Ahem! ‘I’m very sorry, Mr. Chadwick,’” the mimic carried on the fun, “‘but the five thousand a year that you mention isn’t quite amply superfluous to interest me. Sir? You say you’ll double it? That is very generous of you. *Most* generous, in fact. But you—ah—very probably realize, Mr. Chadwick, that for a young man of my extra scrumptious talents ten thousand dollars a year is a mere fly in the gravy. Now, if you can see your way clear to—ah—raise it another five thousand—”

“For the love of mud!” laughed the two-legged audience. “I only wish Dad *could* hear that. Go call him up, you dunce. Do you suppose he wants to sit up all night?”

A few minutes later Andy had the proper connection.

“This is Andy Blake speaking.”

“Yes, Andy. I would like to ask you a few questions about your coaster-wagon magazine, if you have no objections.”

“None whatever.”

“How long have you been publishing your magazine?”

“About ten months. As I recall, our first issue came out last August.”

“Did you know that the American Juvenile Vehicle Company have been putting out a similar magazine?”

“Yes, sir.”

“But yours came out first.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You’re quite sure of that.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Is it true,” then came the unexpected question, “that Mr. Charles Hatch talked with a friend of yours on the train, giving a fictitious name?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You can prove that statement.”

“Yes, sir, if one wants to take Bud York’s word.”

“You fully believe, then, that your young friend told you the truth.”

“Bud always tells the truth, Mr. Chadwick.”

“If you were to venture an opinion, what motive would you attach to Mr. Hatch’s decidedly unethical act?”

“He did it, I think, to get a line on our activities.”

“And you feel, to use plain words, that he stole your idea?”

“I do.”

“That is all Andy. Many thanks for your patient replies.”

“Say, Dad,” Rodney quickly spoke over his chum’s shoulder, “is it all right with you and Mother if I sleep with Andy to-night? He wants me to.”

“I see no objection to the plan. But don’t go skylarking around the country in your car,” came the sensible counsel.

Andy showed a puzzled face.

“Your dad asked me a lot of questions about our coaster-wagon magazine,” he spoke, from his seat on the side of the bed. “I wonder why?”

“I expected you to ask him about that fifteen-thousand-dollar job,” Rodney’s eyes twinkled.

“Boy, I forgot it!”

“Yah!” came the jeer. “I guess you did.”

The two chums then went downstairs to get some ice cream. And what was Andy’s amazement, in stepping into the lobby, to come face to face with the very man whose name had been mentioned in the telephone conversation.

“May I speak with you, Blake?” came the agitated request.

Andy had wondered at Mr. Chadwick’s odd questions. Now, in much the same train of thought, he further wondered at Hatch’s presence in the Y.M.C.A.

“Why should you want to speak with me?” the younger one showed his unfriendliness.

“I know how you feel toward me, Blake. Nor do I blame you in the least. It isn’t to be denied that I gave you an unfair deal. But, even so, I hope you won’t turn your back on me. For I need your help.”

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Andy laughed harshly, his thoughts going back to those earlier days in the agency.

“I can’t imagine myself doing anything to help *you*.”

“I’ll admit,” the man flushed, “that I’m not deserving of your help. But I’m willing to pay the price. Will ten thousand dollars interest you, Blake?”

Ten thousand dollars! Staring, completely amazed, Andy, too, was conscious of a pleasing thrill. Then he grew strangely cold. Hatch was trying to buy him! He had yet to learn the other’s scheme, but he could not doubt that it involved dishonesty.

“Here’s the situation, Blake,” the man nervously presented his case. “I stand to forfeit the Rainbow account—and all because of my very brainless application of your magazine scheme. Mr. Chadwick, of the Rainbow company, is also a heavy stockholder and director in the American Juvenile Vehicle Company. Somehow it came to his attention that I cribbed your idea, later passing it off as original work of my own. However much he distrusts me, though, with his strict business ethics, I probably can smooth matters over if you’ll stand by me.”

It was plain to Andy now why Mr. Chadwick had questioned him about the coaster-wagon magazine!

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“Simply deny to Mr. Chadwick, in case he asks you, that I gave your young friend a fictitious name on the train, and the money is yours.”

“You mean, I am to lie?”

This brought another flush to the thin face.

“You needn’t put it so bluntly, Blake. Remember, I am not asking you to do this for nothing.”

A peculiar calm had settled over the boy.

“Hatch, tell me the truth—do you honestly believe, down in your heart, that I would *lie* for ten thousand dollars?”

“Don’t be a fool, Blake. You have nothing to lose. And I have everything at stake. Say the word, and the money is yours.”

Many times Andy had humanly contemplated the joy of a moment such as this, when the enemy would be in his power. But now, strangely, the situation was without flavor. There was even sorrow in the boy’s heart as he thought how hopeless was the cornered one’s attempt to save himself from the consequences of his earlier unworthy acts.

Unable to read the youthful face, the man began begging.

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“Remember, Blake, that I’m a family man. So, if I go down at your hands, others will suffer. Be merciful.”

“Mr. Hatch,” the name was spoken with peculiar politeness, “I’m more glad than I can tell you that you didn’t come here

earlier. For, as much as I despise you, it would have grieved me, I think, to directly expose you. But an Agency was working against you that no man can beat. . . . I've already talked with Mr. Chadwick. He knows the truth."

The following afternoon the Manton boy appeared unexpectedly in a familiar Chicago office.

"Mr. Rollins," came the simple, direct story, "here is the advertising contract that you would have gotten months ago from the Rainbow Tire Company if I hadn't made a mess of that carriage campaign. I didn't tell you at the time, but one of my motives in going to Manton was to help you. I felt I would be helping you if I could make a success of the coaster-wagon proposition, for I'm still regarded down there as a Rollins man, hence my successes are your successes. As you know, we're doing big things. And in the minds of men like Mr. Chadwick the earlier mistake has been forgotten."

The surprised agency head was on his feet.

"But, Blake!" came after hurried thanks. "How in the world did Mr. Chadwick happen to give *you* the contract? And how about Hatch?"

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Andy completed his story. That morning he had talked with the president of the tire company. The contract had been granted in mutual trust.

"There's an old saying," the manager expressed himself, "that a thief will hang himself if given sufficient rope. But Hatch seems to have done a surprisingly thorough job of it. Still, I feel sorry for the man. He and I worked together for years. I

don't know what made him go wrong.”

“I feel sorry for him, too, Mr. Rollins. The account is a big loss to him.”

“Andy,” came earnestly, “this is a wonderful object lesson to all of us to consistently and unswervingly follow the straight and narrow path. Dishonesty sooner or later leads to dishonor. The two are running team mates.”

The Manton newspaper later briefly mentioned the fact that the local tire company, with its heavy advertising expenditures, had arranged to have that branch of its work handled through the Rollins Company of Chicago.

Of the broken connection there was no mention. But in certain circles it was regretfully whispered that the younger advertising firm, due to the business indiscretions of its manager, was on the verge of financial collapse.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE GREAT MIRACLE

Through a succession of weeks, Andy Blake regularly visited the stricken banker in his home, where countless hours were spent by the two friends over the older one's beloved checkerboard. One evening Mrs. May walked with the loyal guest to the street.

"Andy," a thin hand touched the boy's arm, "words cannot express our gratitude for these evening visits. All day long Mr. May looks forward to your coming. But we can't be selfish and continue to take up all of your spare time. You are denying yourself other pleasures."

"No," the earnest boy shook his head. "There's nothing I'd rather do than spend my evenings here. I think the world and all of Mr. May. He seems like a father to me."

Losing control of her emotions, the worn woman wiped away a tear.

"Andy, you're a dear good boy. I shall always love you for your kindness to Mr. May."

The younger one was strangely stirred.

"Can the doctors do nothing for him, Mrs. May?"

"We had hopes at first. But nothing has been accomplished so far. When winter comes, I imagine that we'll take him back to

the sanitarium. The doctors there still contend that overnight he will regain the use of his limbs. Dr. Maxon, though, declares that the paralysis is permanent.”

With the coming of July the books of the coaster-wagon company were closed for the fiscal year.

“I feel rich to-night!” Andy later wrote to his mother, enclosing a check. “The sixty shares stock that were placed in reserve at the organization of the new company were distributed to-day, in equal parts, to Harnden, Dine and myself. This stock is worth easily one hundred and ten dollars a share. Moreover, we declared a dividend of ten per cent, which nets me another two hundred dollars. I can well afford the little present that I am sending. The money is all for you, Mother, to spend on yourself.”

“It would seem that things are working out fine for me here. I guess, if it weren’t for poor Mr. May, that I would be the happiest boy on earth. Certainly, I have everything to make me happy—a wonderful little mother, a host of friends, and a job that is growing in importance each month. My future here is as big as I care to make it.

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“But always the thought of Mr. May’s condition is in my mind, filling me with vague distress. I can’t get over it. It is as though I, myself, were indirectly responsible. You know, Mother, if it hadn’t been for my suggestion there probably would have been no coaster-wagon company; and if there had been no such company the tragedy might never have occurred.

“More than ever to-day I’ve been thinking of Mr. May. Did you

ever have the uneasy, almost frightened feeling that something was going to happen? That's the way I feel to-night. I never felt that way before. It is something entirely new to me. I can't understand it."

Later Andy restlessly launched his canoe in the river, hoping that the exercise, and the quiet of the moonlit stream, would settle his nerves, thus preparing him for a good night's sleep.

Dipping his paddle, the lights of the town melted into gloom behind him. Then came a bend in the stream where the towering trees shut out the moonlight. The air seemed suddenly dank and clammy.

The canoeist shivered, thinking of a tomb. Quickly he turned and paddled for home.

What *was* the matter with him, he wondered, trembling.

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His canoe carefully put away, he was attracted, as by a fatal magnet, to the familiar residence section of West Main Street. The banker's home was a well of light. People were moving from room to room. The soft night air was charged with the murmur of hushed voices.

Andy was in a panic now. It seemed to him that some particular thing, very precious to him, was fast slipping from his grasp.

Mrs. May gave a glad cry when she found the white-faced boy on her doorstep.

"A great miracle has happened, Andy. He can move his right arm. The doctors are sure that in a few hours he will be

walking.”

The moon looked down and painted the face of a strangely silent boy with a halo of gold.

Andy Blake was himself again. His warm blood pulsed with the joy of living. His happiness was complete.

—THE END—

This Isn't All!

Would you like to know what became of the good friends you have made in this book?

Would you like to read other stories continuing their adventures and experiences, or other books quite as entertaining by the same author?

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[The end of *Andy Blake's Comet Coaster* by Edward Edson
Lee]