

Witwer Harry Charles

Kid Scanlan



Harry Witwer

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Witwer H. C. Harry Charles Kid Scanlan

CHAPTER I LAY OFF, MACDUFF!

Brains is great things to have, and many's the time I've wished I had a set of 'em in *my* head instead of just plain bone! Still they's a lot of guys which has gone through life like a yegg goes through a safe, and taken everything out of it that wasn't nailed, with nothin' in their head but hair!

A college professor gets five thousand a year, a good lightweight will grab that much a fight. A school teacher drags down fifteen a week, and the guy that looks after the boilers in the school buildin' gets thirty!

Sweet cookie!

So don't get discouraged if the pride of the family gets throwed out of school because he thinks twice two is eighteen and geography is played with nets. The chances is very bright that young Stupid will be holdin' the steerin' wheel of his own Easy Eight when the other guys, which won all the trick medals for ground and lofty learnin', will be wonderin' why a good bookkeeper never gets more than twenty-five a week. And then, if he feels he's *got* to have brains around him, now that he's grabbed the other half of the team – money – he can go downtown and buy all the brains he wants for eighteen dollars a week!

So if you're as shy on brains as a bald-headed man is of dandruff, and what's more, you *know* it, cheer up! Because you can bet the gas-bill money that you got somethin' just as good. Some trick concealed about you that'll keep you out of the bread line. The thing to do is to take an inventory of yourself and find it!

Look good – it's there somewheres!

Kid Scanlan's was hangin' from his left shoulder, and it made him enough dimes in five years to step out of the crowd and watch the others scramble from the sidelines. It was just an ordinary arm, size 36, model A, lot 768, same as we all have – but inside of it the Kid had a wallop that would make a six-inch shell look like a lover's caress!

Inside of his head the Kid had nothin'!

Scanlan went through the welterweight division about like the Marines went through Belleau Wood, and, finally, the only thing that stood between him and the title was a guy called One-Punch Ross – the champion. They agreed to fight until nature stopped the quarrel, at Goldfield, Nev. They's two things I'll never forget as long as I pay the premiums on my insurance policy, and they are the first and second rounds of that fight. That's as far as the thing went, just two short frames, but more real scrappin' was had in them few minutes than Europe will see if Ireland busts loose! Except that they was more principals, the battle of the Marne would have looked like a chorus men's frolic alongside of the Ross-Scanlan mêlée. They went at each other like peeved wildcats and the bell at the end of the first round only seemed to annoy 'em – they had to be jimmied apart. Ross opened the second round by knockin' Scanlan through the ropes into the ten-dollar boxes, but the Kid was back and in there tryin' again before the referee could find the body to start a count. After beatin' the champ from pillar to post and hittin' him with everything but the bucket, the Kid rocks him to sleep with a left swing to the jaw, just before the gong.

The crowd went crazy. I went in the hole for five thousand bucks and the Kid went in the movies!

I had been handlin' Ross before that battle, but after it I wouldn't have buried him! This guy was a ex-champion then, and I don't want no ex-nothin' around *me*— unless it's a bill.

Right after that scrap, Scanlan sent for me and made me a proposition to look after his affairs for the followin' three years, and the only time I lost in acceptin' it was caused by the ink runnin' out of my fountain pen when I was signin' the contract. In them days I had a rep for bein' able to get the money for my athletes that would make Shylock look like a free spender. Every time one of *my* boys performed for the edification of the mob, we got a elegant deposit before we put a pen to the articles and we got the balance of the dough before we pulled on a glove. I never left nothin' to chance or the other guy. That's what beat Napoleon and all them birds! Of course, they was several people here and there throughout the country which was more popular than I was on that account, but which would *you* rather, have, three cheers or three bucks?

Well, that's the way *I* figured!

About a month after Scanlan become my only visible means of support, I signed him up for ten rounds with a bird which said, "What d'ye want, hey?" when you called him Hurricane Harris, and the next day a guy comes in to see me in the little trick office I had staked myself to on Broadway. When he rapped on the door I got up on a chair and took a flash at him over the transom and seein' he looked like ready money, I let him come in. He claims his name is Edward R. Potts and that so far he's president of the Maudlin Moving Picture Company.

"I am here," he says, "to offer you a chance to make twenty thousand dollars. Do you want it?"

"Who *give* you the horse?" I asks him, playin' safe. "I got to know where this tip come from!"

"Horse?" he mutters, lookin' surprised. "I know nothing of horses!"

"Well," I tells him, "I ain't exactly a liveryman myself, but before I put any of Kid Scanlan's hard-earned money on one of them equines, I got to know more about the race than you've spilled so far! What did the trainer say?"

He was a fat, middle-aged hick that would soon be old, and he wears half a pair of glasses over one eye. He aims the thing at me and smiles.

"I'm afraid I don't understand what you're talking about!" he says. "But I fancy it's a pun of some sort! Very well, then, what *did* the trainer say?"

I walked over and laid my arm on his shoulder.

"Are you endeavorin' to spoof me?" I asks him sternly. "Or have you got me confused with Abe Levy, the vaudeville agent? Either way you're losin' time! I don't care for your stuff myself, and if that's your act, I wouldn't give you a week-end at a movie house!"

He takes off the trick eye-glass and begins to clean it with a handkerchief.

"My dear fellow!" he says. "It is plain that you do not understand the nature of my proposal. I wish to engage the services of Kid Scanlan, the present incumbent of the welterweight title. We want to make a five-reel feature, based on his rise to the championship. I am prepared to offer you first class transportation to our mammoth studios at Film City, Cal.; and twenty thousand dollars when the picture is completed! What do you say?"

"Have a cigar!" I says, when I get my breath. I throwed a handful of 'em in his lap and give the water cooler a play.

"No, thanks!" he says, layin' 'em on the desk. "I never smoke."

"Well," I tells him, "I ain't got a thing to drink in the place, you gotta be careful here, y'know! But to get back to the movie thing, what does the Kid have to do for the twenty thousand fish?"

He takes a long piece of paper from his pocket and lays it down in front of me. It looked like a chattel mortgage on Mexico, and what paragraphs didn't commence with "to wit," started off with "do hereby."

"All that Mr. Scanlan has to do," he explains, "will be told him by our director at the studios, who will produce the picture. His name is Mr. Salvatore Genaro. Kindly sign where the cross is marked!"

"Wait!" I says. "We can't take a railroad ride like that for twenty thousand, we got to have twenty-five and –"

"All right!" he butts in. "Sign only on the first line!"

"Thirty thousand, I meant to say!" I tells him, "because –"

"Certainly," he cuts me off, handin' over his fountain pen. "Don't use initials, sign your full name!"

I signed it.

"How do I know we get this money?" I asks him.

"Aha!" he answers. "How do we know that the dawn will come? My company is worth a million dollars, old chap, and that contract you have is as good as the money! Be at my office at two this afternoon and I will give you the tickets. *Adios* until then!"

And he blows out of the office.

I closed down the desk, went outside and climbed into my Foolish Four. In an hour I was up to the trainin' camp near Rye where Kid Scanlan was preparin' for his collision with Hurricane Harris. Scanlan is trainin' for the quarrel by playin' seven up with the room clerk from the Beach Hotel, and when I bust in the door he takes a look, throws the cards on the floor and makes a pass at his little pal so's I'll think he's a new sparrin' partner. I pulled him off and dragged him to one side.

"How would you like to go in the movies?" I says.

"Nothin' doin'!" the Kid tells me. "They make my eyes sore!"

"I don't mean watch 'em!" I explains. "I mean act in 'em! We're goin' out to the well known Coast this afternoon and you're gonna be a movie hero for five reels and thirty thousand bucks!"

"We don't fight Harris?" asks the Kid.

"No!" I says. "What d'ye mean *fight*! Leave that stuff for the roughnecks, we're actors now!"

We got out to Film City at the end of the week and while there wasn't no brass band to meet us at the station, there was a sad-lookin' guy with one of them buckboard things and what at one time was probably a horse. I never seen such a gloomy lookin' layout in my life; they reminded me of a rainy Sunday in Philadelphia. The driver comes up to us and, after takin' a long and searchin' look, says,

"Which one of you fellers is the pugeylist?"

"Pugilist?" I says. "What d'ye mean pugilist? We're the new leadin' men for the stock company here. Pugilist! Ha! Ha! How John Drew will laugh when I tell him that!"

He takes a piece of paper from his pocket and reads it.

"I'm lookin' for Kid Scanlan and Johnny Green," he announces. "One of 'em's supposed to be the welterweight champion, but I doubt it! I never seen him fight!"

"Well," I says, "you got a good chance to try for the title, bo, if you ain't more respectful! I'm Mr. Green and that's Kid Scanlan, the champ!"

He looks at the Kid and kinda sneers.

"All right!" he says. "Git aboard and I'll take you out to Mr. Genaro. I'll tell you now, though, that if you ain't what you claim, you got to walk back!" He takes a side glance at the Kid. "Champ, eh?" he mutters.

We climb in the buckboard and this guy turns to me and points the whip at the Kid.

"He don't look like no pugeylist to me," he goes on, like he's lookin' for a argument, "let alone a champion! Still looks is deceivin' at that. Take a crab, for instance – you'd never think from lookin' at it that you could eat it, would you? No! Git up!"

Git *up* was right, because the animal this guy had suspended between the shafts had laid right down on the ground outside the station, whilst he was talkin' to us. The noble beast got gamely to its feet at the word from Gloomy Gus, give a little shiver that rattled the harness and then turned around to see what its master had drawn from the train that mornin'. It took a good eyeful and kinda curled up its lip and sneered at us, showin' its yellow teeth in a sarcastical grin.

"Hold fast!" remarks Gloomy Gus. "It's rough country here and this horse is about to do a piece of runnin'!" He takes off his belt and whales that equine over what would a been the back on a regular horse. "Step along!" he asks it.

Well, if they had that ride at Coney Island, they'd have made a fortune with it in one summer, because as soon as Old Dobbin realized he'd been hit, he started for South Africa and tried to make it in six jumps! He folded his long skinny ears back of his neck somewheres and just simply give himself over to runnin'. We went up hills and down vales that would have broke an automobile's heart, we took corners on one leg and creeks in a jump and when I seen the Pacific Ocean loomin' up in the offing I begin to pray that the thing couldn't swim! Gloomy Gus leans over and yells in my ear, "Some horse, eh?"

"Is that what it is?" I hollers back.

"Well, he's tryin' all right. He's what you could call a runnin' fool!" We shot past somethin' that was just a black blur for a minute and then disappeared back in the dust. "What was that?" I yells.

"Montana!" screams Gloomy Gus, "and –"

"Ha! Ha!" roars the Kid, openin' his mouth for the first time. "That's goin' a few! Let me know when we pass Oregon, I got a friend there!"

"Montana Bill!" explains Gloomy Gus, frownin' at the Kid. "That's the only place you can get lickin' within five miles of Film City!" He looks at the Kid again and mutters half to himself, "Champion, eh!"

Then he yanks in the reins and we slow down to about a runaway's pace right near what looks to be a World's Fair with a big wall around it and an iron gate in the middle. We shot up to the entrance and the horse calls it a day and stops, puffin' and blowin' like a fat piano-mover.

"Film City!" hollers Gloomy Gus. "Git out here and walk in. Mr. Genaro's office is right back of the African Desert!"

I thanked him for bringin' us in alive. He didn't say nothin' to me, but as he was passin' in the gates I seen him lookin' after the Kid and shakin' his head. "Champion, hey!" he mumbles.

This Film City place would have made delerium tremens lay down and quit. There was Indians, cowboys, cannibals, chorus girls, Japs, sheriffs, train robbers, and – well, it looked like the place where they assemble dime novels. A guy goes racin' past us on a horse with a lot of maniacs, yellin' and shootin', tearin' after him and on the other side a gang of laborers in tin hats and short skirts is havin' a battle royal with swords. Three feet from where we're standin' a house is burnin' down and two guys is sluggin' each other on the roof. We walk along a little further and run into a private conversation. Some guy in a new dress suit is makin' love to a dame, while another fellow stands in front of them and says at the top of his voice, "Remember now, you're madly in love with her, but father detests the sight of your face. Ready – hey, camera – all right – wait a minute, wait a minute, don't wrestle with her, embrace her, will you, *embrace her!*"

Kid Scanlan takes this all in with his eyes poppin' out of his head and his mouth as open as a stuss game.

"Some joint, eh?" he says to me. "This is what I call a *regular* cabaret! See if we can get a table near the front!"

A lot of swell-lookin' dames comes in – well, of course it *was* some warm out there, but even at that they was takin' an awful chance on gettin' pneumonia, and files out of a house on the left and starts to dance and I had to drag the Kid away bodily. We duck through a side street, and every time we turn around some guy with a camera yells for us to get out of the way, but finally we wind up at Mr. Genaro's office. He ain't in, but a guy that was tells us Genaro's makin' a picture of Richard the Third, over behind the Street Scene in Tokio. We breezed over there and we found him.

Genaro is in the middle of what looks like the chorus of a burlesque show, only the men is wearin' tights instead of the women. I picked him out right away because he was the first guy I had seen in the place in citizen's clothes, outside of the guys with the kodaks. He was little and fat, lookin'

more like a human plum puddin' than anything else. When we had worked our way through the mob, we saw that he was shakin' his fist at 'em and bawlin' 'em out.

"Are you Mr. Genaro?" I asks him.

"Joosta wait, joosta wait!" he hollers over his shoulder without even lookin' around. "I'm a ver' busy joosta now! Writa me the letta!"

"Where d'ye get that stuff?" I yells back, gettin' sore. "D'ye know who we are?"

I seen the rest of them gigglin', and Genaro dances around and throws up his hands.

"Aha!" he screams, pullin' at his hair. "You maka me crazy! What's a mat – what you want? Queek, don't make me wait!"

The Kid growls at him and whispers in my ear.

"Will I bounce him?"

"Not yet!" I tells him. "I'm Mr. Green," I says to Genaro, "and this is Kid Scanlan, welterweight champion of the world, and if you pull any more of that joosta wait stuff, you'll be able to say you fought him!"

He drops his hands and smiles.

"Excuse, please!" he says. "I maka mistake!" he grabs hold of his head again and groans, "Gotta bunch bonehead here this morning," he goes on, noddin' to 'em. "Driva me crazy! Shakespeare he see these feller play Reecharde, he joomp out of he'sa grave!" He swings around at them all of a sudden and makes a face at 'em, "Broadaway star, eh?" he snarls. "Bah! You maka me seek! Go away for one, two hour. I senda for you – you all what you calla the bunk!"

On the level I thought he was gonna bite 'em!

The merry villagers scatter, and Genaro turns around to us and wipes his face with a red silk handkerchief.

"You knowa the piece?" he asks us. "Reecharde the Third, Shakespeare?"

"Not quite!" I says. "What is he – a local scrapper?"

The Kid butts in and shoves me away.

"Don't mind this guy," he says to Genaro. "He's nothin' but a igrant roughneck! I got you right away. I remember in this Richard the Third thing – they's a big battle in the last act and Dick tells a gunman by the name of MacDuff to lay off him or he'll knock him for a goal!"

"Not lay off!" says Genaro, smiling "Lay on! Lay on, MacDuff!"

"Yeh?" inquires the Kid. "I thought it was lay off. I only seen the frolic once. I took off a member of Dick's gang at the Grand Oprey house, when I was broke in Trenton."

"Nex' week we start *your* picture," says Genaro to the Kid. "Mr. Van Aylstyne he'sa write scenario now. This gonna be great for you – magnificent! He'sa give you everything! Firsta reel you fall off a cliff!"

"Who, me?" hollers the Kid.

"Si!" smiles Genaro. "Bada man wanna feex you, so you no fighta the champ! You getta the beeg idea?"

"What's next?" asks the Kid, frownin'.

"Ah!" pipes Genaro, rollin' his eyes at the sky. "We giva you the whole picture! Second reel you get run over by train – fasta mail! You see? So you no fighta the champ!"

The Kid looks at me and grabs my arm.

"This guy's a maniac!" he hollers. "Did you get that railroad thing? He – "

Genaro goes right on like he don't hear him.

"Thirda reel!" he says. "Thirda reel you get hit by two automobiles, this bada feller try to feex you so you no fighta the champ!"

"Wait!" I butts in. "You must – "

"But fiftha reel – aaah!" Genaro don't pay no attention to me, but kisses his hand at a tree. "Fiftha reel," he says, "she'sa great! Get everybody excite! You get throw from sheep in ocean, fella

shoot at you when you try sweem, bada fella come along in motorboat, he'sa run you down! Then you swim five, six, seven mile to land and there dozen feller beat you with club – so you no fighta the champ!"

The Kid has sunk down on a chair and he's fannin' himself. His face was the color of skim milk.

"What you think?" asks Genaro. "She's a maka fine picture, what?"

"Great!" I says. "If that guy that wants to fix the Kid so he no fighta the champ loses out, they can't say he wasn't tryin' anyhow! Why don't you throw in another reel, showin' the lions devourin' the Kid – so he no fighta the champ?"

"That's a good!" Genaro shakes his head. "I spika to Van Aylstyne!"

He took us up to his office and when we get inside the door they's a dame sittin' there which would make Venus look like a small-town soubrette. She looked like these other movie queens would like to! Whilst we're givin' her the up and down, she smiles at the Kid and he immediately drops his hat on the floor and knocks over a inkwell.

"Miss Vincent," says Genaro, "this Mr. Kid Scanlan. He'sa work with you nex' week. This Mr. Green, hisa fr'en'."

We shake hands all around and the Kid elbows me to one side.

"Where are you goin' this afternoon?" he asks the dame. "Anywheres?"

Genaro raps on the desk.

"Joosta one minoote!" he calls out. "Mr. Kid Scanlan, I would like – "

"Joosta wait!" pipes the Kid. "Writa me the letta! I'm ver' busy joosta now!" He puts one hand on the mantelpiece and drapes himself in front of the dame. "And you haven't been here long, eh?" he says.

Genaro frowns for a minute and then he grins and winks at me.

"Miss Vincent!" he butts in. "You show Mr. Kid Scanlan all around this afternoon, what? Explain him everything about nex' week we maka his picture. What you think, no?"

"Yes!" pipes the Kid grabbin' his hat. "I never been nowheres. Lets go!"

The dame smiles some more, and, well, Scanlan must have been born with a horseshoe in each hand because she takes his arm and they blow.

Just as they were goin' out the door, in comes Gloomy Gus which brought us up from the station. He looks at the Kid and this dame goin' out and he sneers after 'em.

"Champion!" he mutters, curlin' his lip. "Huh!"

The next mornin' we meet this guy Van Aylstyne who doped out the stuff so the Kid "no fighta the champ!" He's a tall, slim, gentle-lookin' bird, all dressed in white like a Queen of the May or somethin' and after hearin' him talk I figured my first guess was about right. We also got to know Edmund De Vronde, one of the leadin' men and the shop girls' delight, and him and Van Aylstyne were both members of the same lodge. Whilst we're standin' there talkin' to Genaro, who I found out was the headkeeper or somethin', along comes Miss Vincent in one of them trick autos that has a seat for two thin people and a gasoline tank. Only, you don't sit in 'em, you just stoop, with your knees jammed up against your chin. She drives this thing right up and stops where we're standin'. If she ever looked any better, she'd have fell for herself!

"I'm going to Long Beach," she sings out, "and I'm going to hit nothing but the tops of the trees! Come along?"

De Vronde, Van Aylstyne and the Kid left their marks at the same time, but you know, my boy was welterweight champ and when that auto buzzed away from there he went with it.

"Ugh!" remarks De Vronde. "I loathe those creatures!" He dusts off his sleeve where the Kid had grabbed it to toss him to one side. "The fellow struck me!" he says indignantly.

Van Aylstyne picks up his hat which had fell off in the struggle.

"Thank Heavens," he tells the other guy, "we will soon be rid of him! I'll have the script ready for Genaro to-morrow! I never saw such a vicious assault!"

They walked away, and I turns to Genaro who had stepped aside for a minute.

"Say!" I asks him. "Is this De Vronde guy worth anything to you?"

"*Sapristi!*" he tells me, makin' a face. "I could keel him! He'sa wan greata big what you call bunk! He'sa no good! He can't act, he can do nothing. Joosta got nice face – that's all!"

"Well," I says, "he won't have no nice face, if he don't lay off the Kid! If Scanlan hears him make any cracks about him like he just did now – well, he'll practically ruin him, that's all!"

After a while the Kid and Miss Vincent comes back and she hurries away to change her clothes because she's got to work in this Richard the Third thing. The Kid is all covered with dirt and mud and his face is all cut up from the flyin' pebbles and sand.

"Say!" he says to me. "That's some dame, believe me! We passed everything on the road from here to Long Beach and on the way back we beat the Sante Fe in by a city block! Come on over and see her work; she's gonna act in that Richard the Third thing!"

We breezed over past the African Desert and there's the troupe all gathered around a guy in his shirt sleeves, who's readin' 'em somethin' out of a book. One of the camera guys tells me it's Mr. Duke, Genaro's assistant.

"A fine piece of Camembert he is, too!" says this guy. "He put me over on this side to get the battle scene from an angle and tells me to shoot the minute the *mêlée* starts in case I don't get his signal. One of them dames fainted from the heat a minute ago and the rest of 'em go rushin' around yellin' like a lot of nuts. Naturally I thought the thing went in the picture and I took forty feet of it before he called me off! He's gonna report me now and I'm liable to get the gate when Genaro shows up! I'll *get* the big stew, though, – watch me!"

At this stage of the game, this Mr. Duke waves for us to come over.

"Where's Mr. Genaro?" he wants to know.

"Search me!" I tells him. "I just left him an hour or so ago and – "

He hurls down the book and dances around like he's gonna throw a fit or somethin'.

"I been all over the place," he yells, "and I can't find him! I want to get this exterior while the sun is right and there's no Richard or no Genaro!"

The Kid, who has been talkin' to Miss Vincent, comes over then and says.

"What's all the excitement?"

"Who are you?" asks Duke.

"We're from New York," I butts in, "and – "

"Well, sufferin' cats!" hollers Duke. "Why didn't you say so before? One of you is the man I'm holdin' this picture for!"

"Why, Genaro says," I begins, "that next week is – "

"Never mind Genaro!" shrieks Duke. "He ain't here now and I'm directing this picture! See that sun commencing to get dim? Which one of you was sent on by Mr. Potts?"

"This guy here!" I tells him, pointin' to the Kid. "I'm his manager."

"Carries a manager, does he?" snorts Duke. "Well, run him in the dressin' room there and get a costume on him. Hurry up, will you – look at that sun!"

We beat it on the run for the place he pointed out, and as we started away I seen him throw out his chest and say to one of the dames.

"*That's* the way those stars should be handled all the time! Fussing over them is a mistake; you must show them at once that no such thing as temperament will be tolerated! Broadway star, eh? Well, you saw how *I* handled him!"

I didn't quite make that stuff, but I felt that somethin' was wrong somewheres. Genaro had told me the Kid's picture wasn't to be made for a week, but we were gettin' thirty thousand for this stunt so I says to the Kid.

"Get in there and shed them clothes of yours and I'll beat it over to the hotel and get your ring togs! They're gettin' ready to fix you so you no fighta the champ!"

I beat it back to the trick hotel and got the suitcase with the Kid's gloves, shoes and trunks in it and it didn't take me five minutes to get back, but that Duke guy is on my neck the minute he sees me.

"Will you hurry up?" he hollers, pullin' a watch on me. "Look at that sun!"

"He'll be out in a minute now!" I says. "I got a guy in there helpin' him dress."

"He knows this stuff all right, doesn't he?" he asks me. "I understand he's been doing nothing but the one line for years."

"Knows it?" I laughs. "He's the world's champion; that's good enough, ain't it?"

"That's what they all say!" he sneers. "All I hope is that he ain't no cheap ham! Look at that sun gettin' away from me!"

While I'm tryin' to dope out what all these birds in tights and with feathers in their hats has got to do with "How Kid Scanlan Won the Title," Duke grabs my arm.

"Drag that fellow out of the dressin' room," he says, "and tell him he enters from the second entrance where those trees are. He goes right through the Tower scene – he knows it by heart, I guess. I'll be right up on that platform there directing and that's where he wants to face – not the camera!"

Well, I went into the dressin' room and the Kid is ready. He's got on a pair of eight ounce gloves, red silk trunks and ring shoes.

"What do I pull now?" he asks me.

"Just walk right out from between them trees," I says, "and they'll tip you off to the rest."

We sneaked around the scene from the back and stood behind the tree which Duke had pointed out. A stage hand or somethin' who seemed to be sufferin' from hysterics told us not to let Duke see us till we entered the scene, because it was considered bad luck to walk before the camera first.

"Clear!" we hear Duke yellin', and then he blows a whistle. "Hey, move faster there, you extra people, a little ginger! Billy, face center, can't you! Now, Miss Vincent, register fear – that's it, great! All right, Richard!"

"That's you!" pipes the stage hand, and on walks the Kid. He stands in the middle of the scene like he done many a time in the newspaper offices back home and strikes a fightin' pose.

A couple of women shrieks and runs back of the trees hidin' their faces and Miss Vincent falls in a chair and laughs herself sick. To say the Kid created a sensation would be puttin' it mild – he was a riot! The rest of the bunch howls out loud, holdin' their sides and staggerin' up against each other, and the stage hands rolled around the floor. But the guy that was runnin' the thing, this Duke person, almost faints, and then he gets red in the face and jumps down off the platform.

"What do you mean?" he screams at the Kid. "What do you mean by coming out before these ladies and gentlemen in that garb? How dare you? Is that your interpretation of Richard the Third? Have you been drinking or what?"

"What's the matter, pal?" asks the Kid, lookin' surprised. "I got to wear *somethin'*, don't I?"

Off goes the bunch howlin' again.

"If this is a joke, sir," yells Duke, "it will be a mighty costly one for you!"

This De Vronde has been standin' on the side lookin' on and the Kid, seein' Miss Vincent, waves a glove at her. She waves back holdin' her side and smiles.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars this De Vronde guy. "How droll!"

The Kid is over to him in two steps. He's seen that everybody is givin' him the laugh and he realizes he's in wrong somehow, but the thing has him puzzled.

"Where d'ye get that 'haw, haw' stuff?" he snarls, stickin' his chin out in front of De Vronde.

"Why, you ignorant ass!" sneers De Vronde, out loud, so's Miss Vincent can hear him. "If you had any brains you'd know!"

"I don't need no brains!" snaps the Kid, settin' himself. "I got *this*!"

And he drops De Vronde with a right hook to the jaw!

"Boys!" screams Duke, pointin' to the Kid. "Throw that ruffian out!"

A couple of big huskies makes a dash for the Kid, and I figured I might as well get in the thing now as later, so I tripped one as he was goin' past and the Kid bounces the other with a short left. De Vronde jumps up and hits the Kid over the head with a cane, while Miss Vincent screams and hollers "Coward!" Then a bunch of supers comes runnin' in from the back just as the Kid puts De Vronde down for keeps, and in a minute everybody was in there tryin'.

Everybody but one guy, and he was turnin' the crank of his camera like he was gettin' paid by the number of revolutions the thing made.

While it lasted, it was some fracas, as we say at the studio. It certainly was a scream to see them guys, all dressed up to play the life out of Richard the Third, fallin' all over each other to get out of the way of the Kid's arms and bein' held back by the jam behind 'em. After the Kid has beat most of them up and I have took care of a few myself, a whistle blows and they all fall back – and in rushes Genaro.

"Sapristi!" he hollers. "What you mean eh? What you people do with my Reecharde?"

Duke tries to see him out of his one good eye.

"This scoundrel," he pipes, pointin' to the Kid, "came out here to play Richard the Third costumed like that!"

Genaro looks from me to the Kid and grabs his head.

"What?" he yells. "That feller want to play Reecharde? Ho, ho! You maka me laugh! You're crazy lika the heat! That's what you call fighting champion of the world! He'sa Mr. Kid Scanlan. We maka hisa picture nex' week!"

Duke gives a yell and falls in a chair.

I pulls on my coat and wipes my face with a handkerchief.

"Yes," I says, "and they just tried to fix him so he no fighta the champ!"

"Zowie!" pipes Duke, sprawled out in the chair, "I thought he was Roberts, the man we wired to come on from Boston! What in the name of Charlie Chaplin will we do now? Potts will be here to-morrow to see this picture and you know what it means, if it isn't made!"

The Kid is over talkin' to Miss Vincent and Genaro calls him over.

"*Viola!*" he tells him. "You see what you do? You spoil the greata picture, the actor, the everything! To-morrow Mr. Potts he'sa come here. 'Where's a Reecharde the Third, Genaro?' he'sa wanna know. I tella him – then, good-by everybody!"

"Everything would have been O.K.," says the Kid, pointin' to De Vronde who's got a couple of dames workin' over him with smellin' salts. "Everything would have been O.K. at that, if Stupid over there hadn't gimme the haw, haw!"

We go back to the dressing-room and the Kid gets on his clothes. That night, findin' that we was as welcome in Film City as smallpox, we went over to Frisco and saw the town.

When we come back the next mornin' and breeze in the gates, the first thing we see is Gloomy Gus that drove us up from the station.

"Say!" he sings out. "You fellers are gonna get it good! The boss is here."

"Yeh?" says the Kid. "Where's Miss Vincent?"

"Talkin' to the boss!" he answers. "I don't believe you're no fighter, either!"

"Where was you yesterday?" I asks him.

"Mind yer own business!" he snaps. He gives the Kid the up and down. "Champion of the world!" he sneers. "Huh!"

"Go 'way!" the Kid warns him. "I got enough work yesterday!"

"I think you're a big bluff!" persists the gloomy guy, puttin' up his hands and circlin' around the Kid. "Come on and fight or acknowledge yore master!"

He makes a pass at the Kid and the Kid steps inside of it and drops him, just as a big auto comes roarin' past and stops. Out hops friend Potts, the guy that practically give us our start in the movies. In other words, the thirty thousand dollar kid!

"Well, well!" he pipes, lookin' at the gloomy guy on the turf and then at us. "What does this mean, sir? Are you trying to annihilate all my employees? Do you know you cost me a small fortune yesterday by ruining that Richard the Third picture?"

"I'm sorry, boss," the Kid tells him, proddin' Gloomy Gus carelessly with his foot, "but all your hired men jumped at me at once and a guy has to protect himself, don't he?"

"Nonsense!" grunts Potts. "You assaulted Mr. De Vronde and temporarily disabled several of my best people! I had made all arrangements for the release of that Shakespeare picture in two days, and you have put me in a terrible hole!"

"Now, listen," I butts in, "I tried to – "

"Not a word!" he cuts me off, wavin' his hands. "One of the camera men, another infernal idiot, kept turning the crank while this disgraceful brawl was at its height and I have proof of your villainy on film! I'll use it as a basis to sever my contract with you and – "

"Slow up!" I says. "If you lay down on the thirty thousand iron men, I'll pull a suit on you!"

Along comes a guy and touches Potts on the arm.

"They're waiting for you in the projecting room," he says.

"Come with me – both of you!" barks Potts, "and see for yourself the damage you caused!"

We followed him around to a little dark room with three or four chairs in it and a sheet on one wall. De Vronde, Miss Vincent, Duke and Genaro are there waitin' for us.

Well, they start to show the picture, and everything is all right up to the time the Kid busted into the drama. Now I hadn't seen nothin' out of the way at the time it actually happened, but here in this little room it was a riot when they showed it on the sheet. You could see Scanlan wallop De Vronde and then in another second the massacre is on full blast!

On the level, it was the funniest thing I'd seen in a long time. A guy with lockjaw would have to laugh at it. Here was the Kid knockin' 'em cold as fast as they come on, with their little trick hats and the pink silk tights. There was a pile of Shakespeare actors a foot deep all around him as far as you could see. Potts is laughin' louder than anybody in the place, and when they finally shut the thing off he slaps the Kid on the back.

"Great!" he hollers. "Wonderful! Who directed that?"

"I did!" pipes Duke, throwin' out his chest. "Some picture, eh?"

"Joosta one minoote!" says Genaro, wakin' up, "joosta one minoote! It was under my supervision, Mr. Potts! I feexa the – "

"Cut that strip of film off!" Potts interrupts, "and take four more reels based on the same idea! Get somebody to write a scenario around a fighter busting into the drama and playing Shakespeare! It's never been done, and if the rest of it is as funny as that it will be a knockout!"

"But Reechar!" says Genaro. "What of heem?"

"Drop it!" snaps Potts. "Everybody get to work on this and I'll stay here till it's finished!"

I looked around and pipe the Kid – over talkin' to Miss Vincent, of course.

"Say!" he wants to know. "Do we go to Oakland in that rabbit-chaser of yours this afternoon, Miss Vincent?"

"Sir!" butts in De Vronde. "This lady and I are conversing!"

"Now listen, Cutey!" smiles the Kid. "You know what happened yesterday, don't you?"

De Vronde turns pale and Miss Vincent giggles.

"Of course we're going to Oakland!" she laughs. "I'm going to be your leading woman next week in 'How Kid Scanlan Won the Title.'"

"Suits me!" says the Kid. "But say, on the level now – I'm there forty-seven ways on that Shakespeare thing, ain't I?"

CHAPTER II

EAST LYNCH

Success has ruined more guys than failure ever will. It's like a Santa Cruz rum milk punch on an empty stomach – there's very few people can stand it. Many a guy that's a regular fellow at a hundred a month, becomes a boob at a hundred a week. What beat Napoleon, Caesar and Nero – failure? No, success! Give the thing the once over some time and you'll see that I'm right.

Success is the large evenin' with the boys at the lodge and failure is the mornin' after. As a matter of fact, they're twins. Often you can be a success without knowin' it, so if you been a failure all your life accordin' to your own dope, cheer up. But when you get up to the top where you can look down at all these other guys tryin' to sidestep the banana peels of life and climb up with you, knock off thinkin' what a big guy you are for a minute and give ten minutes to thinkin' what a tough time you had gettin' there. Give five minutes more to ruminatin' on how long the mob remembers a loser and you'll find it the best sixteen minutes you ever spent in your life.

In these days when the world is just a great big baby yellin' for a new toy every second, any simp can beat his way to the top. The real stunt is *stayin' there* after you arrive!

Kid Scanlan was a good sample of that. When the Kid was fightin' for bean money and the exercise, he never spent nothin' but the evenin' and very little of that. He didn't know whether booze was a drink or a liniment and the only ladies he was bothered about was his mother. But when he knocked out One-Punch Ross for the title and eased himself into the movies, it was all different. He begin to spend money like a vice-investigating committee, knock around with bartenders and give in to all the strange desires that hits a guy with his health and a bankroll. I stood by and cheered for a while until he crashes in love with this movie queen, Miss Vincent, that got more money a start than the Kid did in a season and more letters from well wishin' males than a newly elected mayor. Then I stepped in and saved the Kid just before he become a total loss.

I was standin' by the African Desert one day watchin' them take a picture called "Rapacious Rupert's Revenge," when the Kid comes over and calls me aside. Since he had become a actor he had gave himself up to dressin' in panama hats, Palm Beach suits and white shoes. He reminded me of the handsome young lieutenant in a musical comedy. Every time I seen him in that outfit I expected to hear him burst into some song like, "All hail, the Queen comes thither!" Know what I mean?

Well, havin' lured me away under the shade of some palm trees, the Kid tells me he's goin' over to Frisco on a little shoppin' expedition, and he wants me to come with him. I says I can't drink a thing because I have had a terrible headache since the night before when him and me and some camera men went to Montana Bill's and toyed with the illegal brew for a few hours.

"That last round," I says, "which I'll always remember because it come to six eighty-five, was what ruined me. The bartender must have gone crazy and put booze in them cocktails, because I've had that headache ever since!"

"It ain't the cocktails that give you the headache," the Kid tells me, "it was the check. And you must have had a bun on before that, anyhow, because you paid it! But that's got nothin' to do with this here trip to Frisco. I'm not goin' to stop anywheres for no powders. I'm gonna get somethin' I've needed for a long time!"

"What is it," I asks him, "a clean collar?"

"I wish you'd save that comedy for some rainy Sunday," he says; "that stuff of yours is about as funny as a broken arm! Since I been out here with these swell actors, I been changin' my clothes so often that I'll bet my body thinks I'm kiddin' it. Stop knockin' and come over to Frisco with me and –"

I don't know what else he was goin' to say, because just at that minute a Kansas cyclone on wheels come between us and I come to in a ditch about five feet from where the Kid is tryin' to see can

he really stand on his head. When I had picked up enough ambition to get to my feet, I went over and jacked up the Kid. About half a mile up the road the thing which had attacked us is turnin' around.

"Run for your life!" I yells to the Kid. "It's comin' back!"

Before we could pick our hidin' places, the thing has drawed up in front of us and we see it's one of them trick autos known to the trade as racin' cars. I recognized it right away as belongin' to Miss Vincent. The owner was in the car and beside her was Edmund De Vronde, the shop-girls' delight. The Kid and De Vronde had took to each other from the minute they first met like a ferret does to a rat. It was a case of hate at first sight. So you can figure that this little incident did nothin' to cement the friendship. Miss Vincent leaps out of the thing and comes runnin' over to us.

"Good Heavens!" she says. "You're not hurt, are you?"

She's lookin' right past me and at the Kid like it made little or no difference whether *I* was damaged or not.

The Kid throws half an acre of California out of his collar and removes a few pebbles and a cigar butt from his ear.

"No!" he growls, with a sarcastical smile. "Was they many killed?"

She takes out a little trick silk handkerchief and wipes off his face with it.

"I meant to step on the foot brake," she explains, "and I must have stepped on the gas by mistake!"

"You must have stepped on the dynamite," I butts in, "because it blowed me into the ditch!"

The Kid shakes a bucket or so of sand out of his hair and looks over at the car where De Vronde is examin' us through a pair of cheaters and enjoyin' himself scandalously.

"I see you got Foolish with you," says the Kid to Miss Vincent. "What's the matter – are you off me now?"

She smiles and wipes some mud off the Kid's collar.

"Why, no," she tells him. "Genaro is putting on 'The Escapes of Eva' this morning and I'm playing the lead opposite Mr. De Vronde. I happened to pick him up on the road and I'm bringing him in, that's all."

"Yeh?" says the Kid, still lookin' over at the car. "What are *you* laughin' at, Stupid?" he snarls suddenly at De Vronde.

De Vronde give a shiver and the glasses fell off in the bottom of the car. While he was stoopin' down to look for 'em, the Kid turns to Miss Vincent.

"I only wish he had been drivin' the thing," he says, "because then I'd have some excuse for bouncin' him! On the level, now," he goes on, winkin' at her, "he *was* drivin' the thing, wasn't he?"

"Oh, no!" she answers. "I was at the wheel."

The Kid frowns and thinks for a minute.

"Well," he says finally, takin' another look at De Vronde, "ain't the brakes or somethin' where he was sittin'?"

"No!" she tells him, grabbin' him by the arm. "Please don't lose your head now and start a fuss! I'm awfully sorry this happened, but as long as neither of you were hurt and –"

"It didn't do me no *good*, that's a cinch!" butts in the Kid, with a meanin' look at his spoiled scenery. He walks over to the car and glares up at De Vronde. "Hey!" he snarls. "What d'ye mean by bein' in a automobile that runs over me, eh?"

De Vronde moves as far over as the seat will let him, and then falls back on prayer.

"I must decline to enter any controversy with you," he pipes, after a minute. "You were standing in the right of way and –"

The Kid grins and holds up his hand. His face has lighted all up and he's lickin' his lips like he always did in the ring when he seen the other guy was pickin' out a place to fall. He's walked around to where De Vronde had been sittin' and piped a little handle stickin' up.

"What's this?" he calls to Miss Vincent, who's climbin' in the other side.

"That's just the oil pump," she says.

The Kid suddenly reaches up, grabs De Vronde by the arm and jerks him out of the car.

"You big stiff!" he roars. "Why didn't you pump that oil, hey? If you had done that, the thing wouldn't have hit us! I knowed it was all your fault – you deliberately laid off that pump, hopin' we'd get killed!"

With that he starts an uppercut from the ground, but I yanked him away just as De Vronde murmurs, "Safety first!" and takes a dive. Miss Vincent gets out and gives me a hand with the Kid, and De Vronde sits up and menaces us with his cane.

"That isn't a bit nice!" Miss Vincent frowns at the Kid. "That's ruffianly! You never should have struck him!"

"I didn't hit him!" yells the Kid. "The big tramp quit! If I had hit him he wouldn't be gettin' up."

He starts over again, but I held him until she has climbed into the car with De Vronde and they shoot up the road. Just before they disappeared, De Vronde turns around in the seat and shakes his finger at us.

"Only the presence of the lady," he calls, "saves you from my wrath!"

"Come on!" says the Kid, grabbin' my arm. "Let's get the next train for Frisco, before I run after that guy and flatten him! Believe me," he goes on, lookin' up the road after the car, "I'll get that bird before the day is over if I have to bust a leg!"

And that's just what he did – both!

All the way over in the train I tried to work the third degree on the Kid to find out what he was goin' to buy, but there was nothin' doin'. He stalled me off until we pull into the town and then he takes me to a street that was so far from the railroad station I come near castin' a shoe on the way over. About half way down this boulevard there's a garage and the Kid stops in front of it.

"Wait here!" he tells me. "And don't let nobody give you no babies to mind. I'll be right out!"

He slips inside and I'm lookin' the joint over when a big sign catches my eye. I took one good flash at the thing, and then I starts right in after the Kid. A friend of mine in New York had gone into a place with a sign on it like that one time and made a purchase. Six months later when he come out of the hospital, he claimed the bare smell of gasoline made him faint Here's what it said on that sign,

J. MARKOWITZ

USED AND NEARLY NEW AUTOS

FOR SALE

It was kinda dark inside and it takes me a minute to get my bearin's, but finally I see the Kid and a snappy dressed guy standin' in front of what I at first thought was a Pullman sleeper. When I get a close up, though, I find it's only a tourin' car. It was the biggest automobile I ever seen in my life; a sightseein' bus would have looked like a runabout alongside of it. There was one there and it did! The thing hadn't been painted since the *Maine* was blowed up, and you could see the guy that had been keepin' it was fond of the open air, because there was samples of mud from probably all over the world on it.

"You could believe it, you're gettin' it a practically brand new car!" the young feller is tellin' the Kid. "The shoes are in A number one condition – all they need is now vulcanizin', and Oi! – how that car could travel!"

"Just a minute!" I butts in. "Before you make this sale, I want to speak to my friend here."

Both him and the Kid glares at me, and the Kid pushes me aside.

"Lay off!" he says. "I know just what you're gonna say. There's no use of you tryin' to discourage me, because I'm gonna buy a car. Here I am makin' all kinds of money and I might as well be a

bum! – no automobile or nothin'. I should have had a car long ago; all the big leaguers own their own tourin' cars. There's no class to you any more, if you don't flit from place to place in your own bus!"

"Yeh?" I comes back. "Well, Washington never had no car, but that didn't stop *him* from gettin' over! I never heard of Columbus gettin' pinched for speedin' and Shakespeare never had no trouble with blowouts. Yet all them birds was looked on as the loud crash in their time. What's the answer to that?"

In butts I. Markowitz, shovin' his hat back on his ears.

"That brings us right down to the present!" he says. "And I could tell you why none of your friends had oitermobiles. Cars was too expensive in them days – a millionaire even would have to talk it over with his wife before they should buy one. But now, almost they give them away! Materials is cheaper, in Europe the war is over and now competition is – is – more! That's why I'm able to let your friend have this factory pet here for eight hundred dollars. A bargain you ask me? A man never heard a bargain like that!"

"Don't worry!" I tells him. "Nobody will ever hear about it from me. If you made him a present of it and throwed in the garage, it would still be expensive!"

"Who's buyin' this car?" snarls the Kid. "You or me?"

"Not guilty!" I says. "If you got to have a car, why don't you buy a new one?"

"This is the same as new!" pipes I. Markowitz.

"Speak when you're spoken to, Stupid!" I says.

"Don't start nothin' here," the Kid tells me, pullin' me away. "I don't want none of them new cars. They're too stiff and I might go out and hit somebody the first crack out of the box. I want one that's been broke in."

"Well," I laughs, "that's what you're gettin', believe me! That there thing has been broke in and out!" I turns to I. Markowitz. "What make is the old boiler?" I asks him.

"Boiler he calls it!" he says, throwin' up his hands and lookin' at the ceilin'. "It's an A. G. F. I suppose even you know what an A number one car that is, don't you?"

"No!" I answers. "But I know what A. G. F. means."

He falls.

"What?" he wants to know.

"Always Gettin' Fixed!" I tells him. "They make all them used cars. I know a guy had two of them and between 'em they made a fortune for three garages and five lawyers! How old is it?"

"Old!" says I. Markowitz, recovering "Who said it was old? Your wife should be as young as that car! It was turned in here last week, only eight short days from the factory. The owner was sudden called he should go out of town and –"

"And he went somewheres and got an automobile to make the trip," I cuts him off, "and left this thing here!"

"Don't mind him!" says the Kid, gettin' impatient. "Gimme a receipt." He digs down for the roll.

While I. Markowitz is countin' the money with lovin' fingers, I went around to one side of the so called auto and looked at the speedometer. One flash at the little trick clock was ample.

"Stop!" I yells, glarin' at him. "How long did you say this car had been out of the factory?"

"Right away he hollers at me!" says I. Markowitz to the Kid. "A week."

"Well," I tells him, "all I got to say is that the bird that had it must have been fleein' the police! He certainly seen a lot of the world, but I can't figure how he slept. He was what you could call a motorin' fool. It says on this speedometer here, 45,687 miles and if that guy did it in a week, I got to hand it to him! I'll bet he's so nutty over speed that he's goin' around now bein' shot out of cannons from place to place, eh?"

I. Markowitz gets kinda balled up and blows his nose twice.

"That must be the – the – motor number!" he stammers.

"Sure!" nods the Kid. "Don't mind him, he's always got the hammer out. Count that change and gimme a receipt."

"Wait!" I says. "Gimme one more chance to save you from givin' yourself the work. Have you heard the motor turn over? Does the clutch slip in all right? Do the brakes work? Has the – "

"Say!" butts in the Kid. "What d'ye think I been doin' – workin' here at nights? Don't mind him," he tells I. Markowitz, who ain't. "Hurry up with that receipt!"

"How is the motor?" I asks that brigand. "Tell me that, will you?"

"Convalescent!" he sneers, tuckin' the Kid's bankroll away.

"Some motor, eh?" pipes the Kid. "And it's got a one-man top on it besides, ain't it?" he asks I. Markowitz.

"Why not?" says he. "Everything new and up to date you would find on this car which only yesterday I could have sold to a feller for a thousand dollars!"

After pullin' that, he walks over to the thing and climbs in the back. "An example!" he says. "If you're alone in the car and there's nobody with you, you only should stand up on the seat and pull up the top like this, if it comes up a rain. Then you – "

I didn't hear the rest on account of him havin' trouble makin' his voice travel from under the seat, because he reached up and pulled somethin' here and jerked somethin' there – and that one-man top made good! I thought at first the ceilin' of the joint had fell in, and I'll bet I. Markowitz *knowed* it had, but then I seen it was only the thing that keeps the rain out of the car. Me and the Kid drags him out, and as soon as he gets on his feet and felt to see if he had his watch and so forth, he wipes the dirt out of his eyes and turns on me.

"It's a wonder I ain't now dead on account from you?" he snarls. "I suppose you're one of them wise fellers from New Jersey, which they got to be showed everything, heh?"

"Missouri!" I says. "Not New Jersey. If I was from New Jersey, I would probably be fightin' with the Kid to let *me* buy the car!"

"It's got a self-commencer on it, too!" yelps the Kid, climbin' into the front seat. "See – lookit!" He presses a button with his foot and a laughin' hyena or somethin' in the hood moans a couple of times and then passes away.

"The first time I wouldn't be surprised you should have to crank it," says I. Markowitz. "The motor has been standin' so long – I mean – that is – speakin' of motors, I think that one is maybe a little cold! Once she gets runnin' everything will be A number one!"

I goes around the front of the thing and stoops down.

"Put her on battery, if there's any on there," I calls to the Kid, "and I'll spin the motor!"

I. Markowitz steps over and lays his hand on my arm. His face is as serious as prohibition.

"Its only fair I should tell you," he whispers, "that she kicks a little!"

I give him a ungrateful look and grabs hold of the crank. After turnin' the thing ninety-four times without gettin' nothin' but a blister on my thumb, I quit.

"Nothin' stirrin'," I remarks to I. Markowitz.

"Believe me, that's funny!" he tells me, shakin' his head like he had ball bearin's in his neck.

"Ain't it?" I says. "Are you positive they's a motor inside there?"

He makes a funny little noise in his throat and not knowin' him long, I didn't know what he meant. There's a big husky in overalls walkin' by with plenty of medium oil on his face and a monkey wrench in his hand. I. Markowitz hisses at him, and they exchange jokes in some foreign language for a minute and then the new-comer grabs hold of that crank like the idea was to see if he could upset the car in three twists. He gives it a turn, and I guess the Kid had got to monkeyin' around them little buttons on the steerin' wheel because it went off like a cannon. First, there was a great big bang! And then a cloud of smoke rolls out of the back of the car and the bird that had wound the thing up come to in an oil can, half way across the floor. The Kid fell off the seat and me and I. Markowitz busted the hundred yard record to the front door.

"That was a rotten trick, wasn't it?" I asks him when we stopped.

"What do you talk tricks?" he pants.

"Why," I tells him, "puttin' that dynamite in the hood!"

"That wasn't dynamite," he says. "She only backfired a little. I wouldn't be surprised if it turned out there was, now, too much air in the carburetor. The only reason I ran out here is because I seen it passin' a friend of mine and – "

"I know," I cuts him off. "I seen it too!"

We go back to the Kid and his play toy, and he's leanin' up against the side of it rubbin' his shoulder and scowlin'.

"What kind of stuff was that, eh?" he growls at I. Markowitz. "I liked to broke my neck!"

"Snothin'!" says he, pattin' the Kid on the back and smilin'. "You could do that with a new car, you could take my word for it. It's all, now, experience!" He looks around. "Herschel!" he hollers.

It turns out that Herschel is the guy that had wound the thing up, and he gets out of the oil can and comes over, mutterin' to himself and glarin' at all of us. He takes off the hood and stalls around it with a hammer and a monkey wrench for a minute, still mutterin' away, and you could see he wasn't wishin' us no luck. Finally, he puts the hood on again and walks around to the crank.

"As soon as you could hear it buzz," he grunts at the Kid, "you should give her some gas."

I stood aside and picked out my exit, and I. Markowitz seen his friend passin' again so he started for the door. The Kid says we're both yellah and climbs gamely back into the seat. Herschel stops mutterin' long enough to give the crank a turn, which same he did. This time there was no shots fired, but the thing begins the darndest racket I ever heard in my life. A boiler factory would have quit cold alongside of that motor and a cavalry charge would have gone unnoticed on the same floor. I asked I. Markowitz what broke, and he says nothin' but that the noise is caused by the motor bein' so powerful, fifty horse power, he claimed.

"You can't tell me," I says, backin' away from the thing, "that no fifty horses could make that much noise, not even if they was crazy! The guy that brought that in here must have tied a lot of machine guns together with a fuse and Stupid there set 'em off when he turned the crank!"

He runs around to the side where the Kid is and shuts down the gas and I seen half of Frisco lookin' in the door, figurin' the Japs had got started at last, or else somebody was puttin' on a dress rehearsal of the Civil War.

"Ain't she a beauty?" screams I. Markowitz to the Kid, barely makin' himself heard over the din. "Give a listen how that motor turns over – not a break or a miss and as smooth like glass! That's hittin' on six, all right!"

"I'm glad to hear that," I says. "I'm glad it's only six, because the thing will have to quit pretty soon. There ain't no six nothin's could stand up under that hittin' much longer!"

I. Markowitz steps on the runnin' board and holds on with both hands. He had to, because that motor had got the car doin' a muscle dance.

"Where d'ye want to go?" he yells to the Kid. "I'll have Herschel take you out so he should show you everything."

"Tell him to wash his face instead!" the Kid hollers back. "I don't need nobody to show me nothin' about a car. Come on!" he yells at me. "All aboard for Film City!"

"Ha! Ha!" I sneers. "Rave on! I wouldn't get in that thing for Rockefeller's bankroll!"

I had to holler at the top of my voice to drown out that motor.

"C'mon!" yells the Kid. "Don't be so yellah – you got everybody lookin' at you. She's all right now, and as soon as she gets warmed up she'll be rollin' along in great shape!"

"Yes!" I says. "And so will I – in a day coach of the Sante Fe!"

Well, he coaxed, threatened and so-forthed me, until finally I took a chance and climbed in beside him. The populace at the doors give three cheers and wished us good luck as we banged and rattled through their midst. We went on down the street, attractin' no more attention than the German

army would in London, and every time we turned a new corner people run out of their houses to see was there a parade comin'. We passed several sure enough automobiles and they sneered at us, and one of them little flivvers got so upset by the noise that it blowed out a tire as we went by. Finally, we come to the city line and the Kid says he figures it's about time to see can the thing travel. He monkeys around them strange buttons on the steerin' wheel, pulls a handle here and there and presses a lever with his foot. The minute he did that we got action! That disappearin' cannon in the back went off three times and I bet it blowed up all the buildin's in the block. There was a horse and buggy passin' at the time and the guy that was drivin' it don't know what happened yet, because at the first bang, that horse started for the old country and it must have been Lou Dillon – believe me, it could run! I looked back and watched it. A big cloud of smoke rolls up from the back of the car, and I seen guys runnin' out of stores and wavin' to us with their fists and then a couple of brave and bold motorcycle cops jumps on their fiery steeds and falls in behind.

I guess the ex-owner of this bus was on the level at that about doin' them forty-five thousand miles in a week, because this car could have beat a telegram across the country, "when she got warmed up!" as I. Markowitz says. Every one of them six cylinders was in there trying and when they worked together like little pals and forgot whatever private quarrels they had, the result was *speed*, believe me! The Kid was hangin' on to the steerin' wheel and havin' the time of his young life and I was hangin' on to the seat and wishin' I had listened to that insurance agent in New York. We come to the top of a hill and as we start down the other side the prize boob of the county is waterin' the pavement around his real estate. When he hears us, he drops the hose which makes it all wet in front of us.

"Hold tight!" screams the Kid to me. "We're gonna do a piece of skiddin'. I forgot to get chains!"

Just about then we hit the damp spot and the Kid puts on the brakes. Sweet Cookie! You should have seen that car! It must have got sore at the man with the hose and went crazy, because it made eight complete turns tryin' to get at him and the poor simp was too scared to run. Finally the thing gives it up and shoots down to the bottom of the hill. We hit a log and I hit the one-man top. Then the motor calls it a day and stops dead. The Kid hops out and walks around to the crank. He gives it a couple of turns and it turns right back at him. He grabs it again and it was short with a left hook to the jaw, and then the Kid shakes his head and takes off one side of the hood. He sticks his hand down inside and pulls out a little brown thing that looks like a cup with a cover on it.

"No wonder she stopped!" he says, holdin' it up. "Look what I just found in here."

I give it the once over.

"What d'ye think of that, eh?" he says. "It's a wonder she run at all! I'll bet that boob mechanic left that in there when he started us off at the garage." He throws the thing in a ditch and puts the hood on. "Now," he says, "we're off for Film City!"

He grabs hold of the crank and gives it about eleven whirls, but there ain't a thing doin' and while we're stuck there like that, along comes a guy in another car.

"Can I help you fellows out?" he hollers.

"Yes!" I yells back. "Have you got a rope?"

He comes over and looks at the thing.

"What seems to be the trouble?" he asks the Kid.

"Nothin' in particular," the Kid tells him. "She's a great little car only we can't get her goin'."

"Have you got gas?" asks the stranger.

"Plenty!" says the Kid. "D'ye think I would try to run a car without gasoline?"

"I don't know," says the other guy. "I never seen you before! Is your spark all right?"

"A number one!" pipes the Kid.

"And she won't run?" he asks.

"She won't run!" we both says together.

"Hmph!" he snorts, scratchin' his head. He opens the hood and fusses around on both sides for a minute and then he rubs the side of his nose with his finger. He looks like he was up against a tough proposition.

"How far have you run this car?" he asks the Kid finally.

"All the way from Frisco," answers the Kid.

"Like this?" he says, pointin' to the motor.

"No!" I cuts in. "It was movin'."

"Why you couldn't have gone three feet with this car!" he busts out suddenly. "I never seen nothin' like this before in my life!"

"Why don't you go out at nights, then?" growls the Kid, gettin' sore. "Stop knockin' and tell us what's the matter with it."

"There ain't nothin' the matter with it," says the other guy with an odd little grin. "Not a thing — *only it ain't got no carburetor in it, that's all!*"

If he figured on creatin' a sensation on that remark – and from the way he said it, he did – he lost the bet. The Kid just gives him the baby stare and shrugs his shoulders like it's past him.

"No which?" he says.

"Carburetor!" explains the native. "The little cup where your gasoline mixes with the air to start the motor."

The Kid claps his hands together and yells,

"That little crook back in Frisco must have held out on me!"

But I had been doin' some thinkin' and I looks the Kid in the eye,

"What does this carburetor thing look like?" I asks the other guy.

He describes it to me, and when he got all through I gives the Kid another meanin' look and walks over to the ditch. After pawin' around in the mud for a while I found the little cup the Kid had throwed away.

"Is this it?" I asks the native.

"It is," he says. "What was it doin' over there?"

"It must have fell off!" answers the Kid quickly, kickin' at me to keep quiet.

Well, this guy finally fixes us up and about an hour later we hit the little road that leads into Film City, without havin' no further mishaps except the noise from that motor. About half a mile from the gates I seen a familiar lookin' guy standin' in the middle of the road and wavin' his hands at us.

"Slow up!" I says to the Kid. "Here's Genaro!"

The Kid reaches down to the side of his seat and yanks a handle that was stickin' up. It come right off in his hand and we kept right on goin'.

"That's funny!" says the Kid, holdin' up the handle and lookin' at it like it's the first one he ever seen. "We should have stopped right away – that's the emergency brake!"

He stamps on the floor with his foot a couple of times and shuts off the gas. We drift right on, and, if Genaro had had rheumatism, he would have been killed outright. As it was, he jumped aside just in time and the car comes to a stop of its own free will about twenty feet past him down the road.

"What's a mat?" yells Genaro, rushin' up to us. "Why you no stoppa the car when you see me?"

"Why don't they stop prohibition?" I hollers back at him. "We must have lost the stopper off this one, we –"

But he runs around the other side to where the Kid is sitting examin'in' all them handles and buttons.

"*Sapristi!*" he yells at the Kid. "Where you go, Meester Kid Scanlan? Everybody she's a look for you – Meester Potts he's a want you right away! We starta firsta reel of your picture to-day. Everybody she's a got to wait for you!"

"Keep your shirt on!" growls the Kid. "You told me this mornin' I had lots of time, didn't you?"

Genaro grabs hold of a tree and does a little dance.

"Aha!" he remarks to the sky. "He'sa make me crazee! What you care what I tole you this a morning? Joosta now I want you queek! You maka mucha talk with me while Meester Potts and everybody she'sa wait for you!"

"Well," says the Kid. "Get in here and we'll go there right away."

Genaro climbs in the back of the car.

"Hurry up!" he says, holdin' his ears. "Anything so she'a stop that terrible noise. Hurry up!"

"I'll do that little thing!" pipes the Kid – and we was off.

I climbed over the seat and in the back with Genaro so's he wouldn't feel lonesome, and, so's if the Kid hit anything, I'd have a little more percentage in my favor. Genaro seems to be sore about something and to make conversation I ask him what's the matter.

"Everything she's the matter!" he tells me, while the Kid keeps his foot on the gas and we bump and clatter along the road. "Everything she's the matter! I work all morning on lasta reel of 'The Escapes of Eva.' Got two hundred extra people stand around do nothing. De Vronde, the bigga bunk, he's a play lead with Miss Vincent." He stops and kisses his hand at a tree we was passing "Ah!" he goes on. "She'sa fina girl! Some time maybe I ask her – pardone, I talka too fast! Lasta reel De Vronde he'sa get what you call lynched. They putta rope around he'sa neck and he's a stand under bigga tree. Joosta as they pulla rope to keel him, Miss Vincent," he throws another kiss at a tree. "Ah! sucha fina girl!" he whispers at me rollin' his eyes. "Sometime I – pardone, everytime I forget! Miss Vincent she'sa come along on horse and sava he'sa life – you see?"

"I got you!" I tells him. "Then what happens?"

"*Sapristi!*" he says. "That's all! What you want for five reels? But thisa morning, Meester Potts he'sa come up and watch. He'sa president of company and knows much about money, but acting – bah! he'sa know nothing! Gotta three year old boy he'sa know more! He'sa standa there and smile and rub he'sa hands together lika barber while we taka lasta reel. Everything she'sa fine till we come to place where De Vronde he'sa get lynch and Miss Vincent – ah! – she'sa come up on horse and sava him. Then Meester Potts he'sa rush over and stoppa the cameras. 'No!' he'sa yell. 'No, by Heaven, I won't stand for that! That's a rotten! You got to get difference ending froma that!'"

"What was the matter?" I asks him. "Didn't he want De Vronde saved?"

His shoulders does one of them muscle dances.

"Ask me!" he says. "I couldn't tella you! He'sa know nothing about art! Joosta money – that's all. He'sa tella me girl saving leading man from lynch lika that is old as he'sa fren' Methuselah! He'sa want something new for finish that picture – bran' new, he'sa holler or no picture! All morning I worka, worka, worka, he'sa maka faces at everything I do!"

"Well!" I says. "If you –"

I happened to look up just then and I seen the well known gates of Film City about a hundred yards away, and if we was makin' a mile an hour, we was makin' fifty. I leaned over and tapped the Kid on the shoulder.

"Don't you think you had better slow up a trifle?" I asks him.

"I don't *think* nothin' about it!" he throws over his shoulder. "I *know* it! I been tryin' to stop this thing for the last fifteen minutes and there's nothin' doin'!"

"Throw her in reverse!" I screams, as them great big iron gates looms up over the front mud guards.

"I can't!" he shouts. "The darned thing's stuck in high and I can't budge it!"

One of them gates was open and the Kid steers for it, while I closed my eyes and give myself over to prayer. We shot through leavin' one lamp, both mudguards and a runnin' board behind.

"Hey!" yells Genaro. "What's a mat? Thisa too fasta for me! Stoppa the car before something she'sa happen!"

"Somethin' she'sa gonna happen right now!" I says. "Be seated!"

The Kid swings around a corner and everybody in Film City is either lookin', runnin' or yellin' after us. I often wondered what a wide berth meant, and I found out that afternoon. That's what everybody in the place give us when we come through there hittin' on six as I. Markowitz would remark. A guy made up like a Indian chief jumped behind a tree and we only missed him by dumb luck.

"Hey!" he yells after us. "Are you fellows crazy? Look out for the Moorish Castle!"

I yelled back that we wouldn't miss nothin' of interest, if we could help it and the gas held out, and just then I got a flash at the Moorish Castle. It had been built the day before for a big five reel thriller that Genaro was gonna produce and I understand he was very partial to it. As soon as he sees it he jumps up in the back of the car and slaps the Kid on the shoulders.

"Hey, crazee man!" he hollers. "Stoppa the car, I, Genaro, command it! Don't toucha my castle!" his voice goes off in a shriek. "*Sapristi!* – I – "

That was all he said just then, because we went through the Moorish Castle like a cyclone through Kansas, and as we come out on the other side the whole thing tumbled down, bringin' with it a couple of Chinese pagodas that had just come from the paint shop. All we lost was half of the radiator and the windshield. The Kid pulls a kind of a sick grin and licks his lips.

"Some car, eh?" he says, takin' a fresh grip on the steerin' wheel.

I missed Genaro and lookin' back through the dust I seen him draped over a fence with his head touchin' the ground and his feet up in the air. A lot of daredevils was runnin' towards us and yellin' murder.

"Where's Genaro?" asks the Kid, as we miss a tree by a half inch.

I shivered and told him.

"The big quitter!" snarls the Kid. "Left us flat the minute somethin' happened, eh? I always knew that guy was yellah!"

We shot across the African Desert and comin' around another turn we bust right into "The Escapes of Eva." There's about two hundred supers dressed like cowboys and Duke, Genaro's assistant, is up on a little platform with the Big Boss Potts, directin' the thing. De Vronde is under a tree with a rope around his neck and another one that don't show in the picture under his arms so's he can be pulled up and it will look like he was bein' lynched. A little ways up the road is Miss Vincent on a horse, ready to make her dash to save De Vronde's life.

As all this comes into view, the Kid swings around on me and shoves somethin' big and round in my face.

"Now!" he hollers. "We're up against it for real! The steerin' wheel come off!"

I pushed open the door on the side and stood on the runnin' board.

"Let me know how you make out!" I yells. "I got enough!"

With that I jumps.

Just as I hit the ground, I hear Duke yellin' through a megaphone.

"C'mon, now – gimme action! Hey! Get two of those cameras at an angle. When I say 'Shoot!' you, Nelson, and Hardy pull that rope so De Vronde swings about five feet clear of the ground! Be sure the rope is under his arms, too! Hey, you extra people – a little ginger there! This is a lynching not a spelling bee! Dance around some – yell! That's it. Now, all ready?" He blows the whistle. "Shoot!" he yells, "and gimme all you got!"

Well, the Kid did what he could – he blowed the little trick horn on the side of the car about a second before he shot into the mob. Them bloodthirsty outlaws just melted away before him, and them that was slow-witted was picked up and tossed to one side before they knowed what hit 'em. They's a big stone wall at the other side of the tree and that's where the Kid was headed for. Just as he sails under De Vronde, who's hangin' from the rope over his head, the Kid sees the wall, grabs De Vronde by the legs and hangs there, lettin' that crazy, six cylinder A. G. F. proceed without him. De Vronde and the Kid crashes to the ground and the car dashed its brains out against the wall.

While great excitement is bein' had by all, Duke jumps from the platform to tell the camera men to cease firin' and a handful of actors runs over to jimmy the Kid and De Vronde apart. I thought this Duke guy was gonna explode, on the level it was two minutes before he could speak.

"What d'ye mean, you ivory-headed simp?" he screams at the Kid, finally. "What d'ye mean by that? You've ruined a hundred feet of film, you – "

I hear somebody puffin' along beside me as I come runnin' up and I see it's Potts. He's red in the face and mumblin' somethin' to himself as he waddles along. I felt real sorry for the Kid – car and job, both gone! Potts rushes up and grabs Duke by the shoulder.

"There!" he yells, pointin' to the Kid. "There stands a man that knows more about the picture game than the whole infernal lot of you! *That's the kind of a finish I've been trying to get for this picture all morning!*"

CHAPTER III

PLEASURE ISLAND

Speakin' of boobs, as people will, did you ever figure what would happen if the production of 'em would suddenly cease? Heh? Where would this or any other country be, if all the voters was wise guys and the suckers was all dead?

In the first place, there wouldn't have been no ex-Land of the Rave and Home of the Spree, if Queen Isabella hadn't been boob enough to fall for Columbus's stuff, about would she stake him and his gang of rough and readys to a couple of ferryboats and they'd go out and bring back Chicago. Even old Chris himself was looked on as Kid Stupid, because he claimed the earth was round. The gang he trailed with had it figured as bein' square like their heads.

The guy that invented the airship was doped out as a boob until the thing begin to fly, the bird that turned out the first steamboat was called a potterin' old simp and let him alone and he'd kill himself – and that's the way it goes.

The sucker is the boy that keeps the wise guys alive. He'll try anything once, and it don't make no difference to him whether it's three-card monte or a new kind of submarine. He's the guy that built all the fancy bridges, the big buildin's, fought and won the wars that the wise guys started, and fixed things generally so that to-day you can push a little trick electric button and get anything from a piece of pie to a divorce. He's the simp that falls for the new minin' company stock, grins when the wise guys explain to him just how many kinds of a sucker he is, and then clips coupons while *they're* gettin' up early to read the want ads. He's the baby that's done everything that couldn't be did.

That's the boob!

The boob is the guy that takes all the chances and makes it possible for old Kid World to keep goin' forward instead of standin' still. Any burg that's got a couple of sure enough eighteen-carat boobs in it, known to the trade as suckers, has got a chance.

So the next time somebody calls you a big boob, don't get sore – thank him. He's boostin' you!

Gimme ten boobs in back of me and I'll take a town, because they'll take a chance. Gimme a hundred wise guys and the town'll take *us*, because them birds will have to stop and figure what's the use of startin' somethin'.

Me for the boobs!

Kid Scanlan was a boob. He was a great battler, a regular fellow and all like that, but he was a boob just the same. He started fightin' because he was simp enough to take a chance of havin' his features altered, and he won the title through bein' stupid enough to mix it with the welterweight champion. I was the wise guy of the party, always playin' it safe and seein' what made it go, before I'd take a chance. But the Kid got a whole lot further than I ever will. He made a name for himself in the ring and another in the movies and I ain't champion of *nothin'* – I'm just *with* Scanlan, that's all.

I'm gettin' offers from promoters here and there to have him start against some set up for money that was sinful to refuse, but there's nothin' doin'. The Kid has took to bein' an actor like they did to gunpowder in Europe, and not only he won't fight, I can't even get him mad!

"I'm off that roughneck stuff!" he tells me. "Nobody ever got nothin' by fightin'. Look what it did to Willard! Besides," he goes on, "what would John Drew and them guys think of me, if it should leak out that I had give in to box fightin' again? Why they'd be off me for life! Nope, let 'em battle in Russia, I'm through!"

Fine for a champion, eh?

Now here's a guy that went to the top in the one game where you can't luck your way over. Because he was a fightin' fool, the 'Kid had right-crossed his way to the title and now that he was up there, the big stiff wouldn't look at a glove! No! he was a actor now! I'd tell him that Kid Whosthis

had flattened Battlin' McGlue the night before and we could get ten thousand to go six rounds with the winner. He'd flick the ash off a gold-tipped cigarette and say.

"Yeh?" Then he'd grab me by the shoulder and pour this in my ear. "Did you get me in that Shakespeare picture last week? I hear the guy that writes up shows for the Peoria *Gazette* claims Mansfield had nothin' on me!"

A few months before he would have said somethin' like this.

"All right! Wire the club we'll fight him, and if I don't bounce that tramp in two rounds, I'll give my end to them starvin' Armenians!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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