

Hobo

HOW PAUL, THE SISSY BOY OF THE BOWERY, ACQUIRED A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

By Myron Brinig

AFRAID! It was astonishing how all things presented to him devils' faces, jeering:

"I'm going to crush you, to flatten you down! I'm going to blow out your life as if it were a candle flame!"

It was astonishing, and it was frightful. As far back as he could remember, Paul's day-long battle had been with fear. He was afraid of his father, of his work, of his surroundings, and, most of all, of people.

It was too bad that his mother died when he was only six years old. It had been such a solace to run to her when he was frightened. When she infolded him in her arms, what a haven, what reassurance, was there! The mysterious noises outside his bedroom door, his father's wolfish cruelty, the multitudes of strange faces he met in the streets, the numberless ogres of the city who tramped you down if you didn't get out of their way—his mother's arms had meant secure and restful escape from all of these.

But now she was gone, and there were only his father and himself in the family. Their home was one of those aimless, transitory furnished rooms in the Bowery that overlook the gaunt, clanging Elevated—the grim steel tightrope over which demons roar with a diabolic perfection. They had only this small furnished room, with its drooping, soiled window curtains and its faded, lonely photograph of Paul's mother on the wall. When his father had one of his bad fits of temper, the boy was sure that tears came into his mother's eyes, as if she were real and alive, instead of only an insentient picture, a painful likeness of that which was irreparably vanished.

Paul worked in a press clipping bureau from half past eight in the morning until half past five at night. It was his business to clip, clip, clip stories and pictures and

names from hundreds of newspapers, so that the more vain of the human race might acquaint themselves with what the world was thinking of them at that particular moment. He had been clipping away the golden minutes and hours and days of his childhood for five dusty years, ever since he had been twelve; and for this, fifteen dollars a week was his precious reward.

His days were as much alike as hospital cots all in a row. Up at seven, glad to be out of the sight of his always threatening parent; a hasty, cheerless breakfast at the German bakery down the street, and then to the eternal grind of clipping again—the whining, rasping song of the shears. After half past five he went back again to the furnished room, where his father greeted him with—

"Got your raise yet? Are you going to work for fifteen dollars a week all your life? Where's your nerve, you shrimp! You sissy!"

It was that, and worse. Usually, it was a beating, so that a disappointed ward healer might let off the accumulating steam of a fruitless, despondent life.

There are thousands like Paul in New York—poor waifs left alone and forgotten, tail ends of the seven million. They behold the first green leaves of spring in the parks, and dream, for a blissful moment, of glades and woodlands beyond the Elevated railroads and the leering tenement windows. They watch the first evanescent snowflakes of the winter dancing aimlessly down upon streets and roofs, and wonder about trees in the country, etched in silver sorceries of beauty against December skies. They dream for a moment, an ecstatic moment of forgetfulness, before they are snatched back into the thorny avenues of the dreaded routine.

Paul could never understand why his father had such a grudge against the world—particularly that atom of the world which was Paul. He had seen his persecutor smile only once—when the ward boss had called with instructions to report next morning as watchman at the voting booth in Giovanni's barber shop. Paul remembered that his mother had once addressed her husband thus:

"Why don't you go to work, instead of hanging around with a lot of no-good politicians all the time?"

For her advice she had received a sickening blow on the face.

"You're a bad man!" Paul had cried to his father, and the protest had brought forth a beating. There are some boys who do not care for Horatio Alger, Jr., and Paul's case may suggest the reason why.

If Paul had been wiser in the problems of psychology, he would have realized that his parent, a dreamer, a seeker after sensual rewards, had soured on the world because the world demands labor in payment for ease. Paul's father was constantly following some new political star in the gross shape of a district boss who promised golden returns if O'Grady or Spielberg was elected; but after the candidate came into office, the returns, golden or even brass, did not materialize. Paul's father was just as poor after election as before.

There had been Clancy's bar in the old days, where one could drink off such disappointments; but now that prohibition held its arid sway, there was only Paul left to beat and bait. The picture of that hulking, disappointed politician manhandling seventeen-year-old Paul is not one to describe in detail for readers who properly recoil before such stark realism.

When a lad who has arrived precariously at the age of seventeen cringes and slinks and runs away from life, it isn't necessary to go far in placing the blame. There must be some exclusively devastating chamber of horrors reserved in Purgatory for the fathers of Pauls.

II

AFRAID!

"Aw, father, I don't want to ask for a raise. I know I won't get one. He'll just tell me to quit if I don't like it."

"You poor shrimp! Are you gonna work for fifteen dollars all your life? Trouble with you is, you're lazy. Call yourself a man? You got no guts, you poor, weak-

kneed shrimp! Hey? What's matter? Cat got your tongue?"

"No, father."

"Girl! Sissy! Come here! Look me in the face! Aw, come on, before I lick the hide off you! Now listen to me. Are you going to ask for a raise Saturday?"

"But, father, I know I won't get it! Father, look! There's a thread on your coat. Let me brush it off. Let me—"

Paul's solicitude was rewarded with a sharp blow across his cheek, making his skin look blotched with an unnatural color which quickly faded to a bluish white.

"Talk to me about threads, huh? I'm talkin' about money, which is more important. Threads—hell! You can't even support yourself—at your age, seventeen! If you don't come back with a raise in your pay envelope next Saturday, I'll beat the skin off you. Is that plain? Haven't I got enough worries without havin' to get your board bills paid for? Wouldn't your mother feel proud of you, if she was alive? Wouldn't she be proud of a sissy boy like you for a son!"

"I wish you wouldn't say that, father!"

The older man took a firm, ruthless grip of Paul's shoulders, and shook his son until the boy's teeth rattled.

"You keep your trap shut! I'm not askin' your advice about what I got to say. Your worry is bringing more money into the house or bein' raised out of here by the seat of your pants. Stand up like a man before your boss and demand more—demand it, see?"

"Yes, father—I'll ask him."

Afraid!

All that night Paul tossed and fretted on his bed, working himself into a state of terrified exhaustion. Toward dawn he lapsed into a sinister nightmare. It seemed that all the city had suddenly gripped him by the shoulders, and was shaking him until his teeth rattled. First it was his father, then his employer, and, last, a crowd of three-headed men who rushed out of press clipping bureaus all over the city just to take delight in shaking a poor boy until his teeth rattled.

Paul endeavored to escape, but his efforts were puny and useless. His tormentors leered at him, and said things about his having no guts and being a sissy. It was too monstrous! At last, when it seemed as if the breaking point had been reached, and there was nothing left but to

collapse, the screech of the alarm clock penetrated the dream and showed Paul that it was cold, blue dawn.

And so the week passed, and it was Saturday. It was time to face his employer and ask for more, in the manner of *Oliver Twist* holding up his bowl scraped clean of porridge.

Paul tried to summon courage into his vitals. He even went so far as to approach his employer's desk; but when that cool, blunt-faced individual looked up at him, Paul's daring oozed away and left him icy and trembling. He received his fifteen dollars and moved away like a slinking puppy.

As the elevator proceeded downward, Paul had one dismal glimpse into the immediate future, and quailed. His father would be waiting for him with those awful hands like claws. There would be a stream of abuse, then a beating.

Yet Paul, through force of habit, turned his steps in the direction of the Bowery, and he had covered several blocks before he fully realized the torture he was entering into. The future was like an animal trainer cracking a whip before his eyes. At each crack of the whip Paul slowed up his pace. Finally he stopped altogether, to stare blankly into the window of a confectioner's store.

The sidewalk swarmed with shop girls and clerks released from their places of employment; and because they looked so happy, they became a part of the whole cruel conspiracy arrayed against Paul, waiting, waiting for him.

He stood for perhaps half an hour gazing vacantly into that window. Then, suddenly, as if some alien force were motivating him, he turned his steps uptown, away from the Bowery. He walked on and on, at first with a stumbling dubiousness, then, after an hour, with a desperate, quickened energy. Toward evening, he imagined that his father was just behind him, and he began to run.

He had no idea where he was. The thought of direction did not occur to him. His whole force of mind and body was concentrated on getting away—*getting away*.

There were streets crisscrossing and getting tangled up. There were mystifying corners that ran up to him and showed him gates of questionable freedom. It was all very bewildering. Paul had never dreamed that there were so many streets in the

world, so confusing, such a pattern of danger and despair.

Not so far away, was there an open road leading to some place where escape would begin? Was there a hill seated in majesty among green valleys, crowned by a gorgeous sun? Well, that might mean surcease from pain, a kind of a paradise where newspaper clippings were unheard of, and fathers weren't such bad fellows.

A sharp rush of wind flapped against his eyes, and the knowledge that he was on an open road only served to instill a newborn fear in him. He stopped in amazement. It was black all around him. The thick-wadded forms of trees on every side were surely glowering bandits about to attack. He tried to shout, but even the tiniest scrap of sound refused to formulate in his throat.

Why, oh, why had he ever run away? There was fear in the city, but there was a greater terror out here, compressed about by countless shadows and fantastic silhouettes of the wild night.

He stumbled on a few paces; and when a bird, startled by his approach, flew away, brushing his cheek, he fell on his knees and seemed to float away in terror. First his limbs, then his head, floated away; then his senses were clipped, and the juice of his consciousness dried up. Fear was his parting emotion.

III

"For to admire an' for to see,
For to behold this world so wide."

PAUL had been hearing that verse sung for some minutes past. There had been nothingness for a long time, a black solitude of space where nothing was seen or heard; then, inexplicably, the song had pierced his oblivion and had strummed through his veins, giving him back life and feeling.

Inside his stomach something burned and crackled like a bonfire. The next minute, Paul was aware of a face looking down at him—a face with round, blue eyes and a wide, whimsical smile. There was something very young about the face, extraordinarily young; but as Paul continued to discover its form and character, it occurred to him that the face was old, too—old enough to know nearly everything about things and places and people.

When, after a long time, Paul realized that he was propped up against a tree plant-

ed on a green bank that sloped upward from the road, he became more fully conscious of his companion. He became aware, too, of the fact that the man held a half empty whisky flask in his hand; and the boy knew, all of a sudden, why he had that burning sensation in his stomach.

"For to behold this world so wide," sang the man in his deep voice, like an organ playing to the accompaniment of rustling leaves and the slow, hot droning of bees.

When he had finished his song, he unexpectedly turned a handspring on the sloping green bank. Regaining his feet, he came close to Paul again, and smiled in a wild, faunlike sort of way.

"Well, that's fine! I thought you would never open 'em. Here!" He offered Paul the remainder of his flask. "Have a nip. It 'll drive away the willies."

"No, thanks," replied Paul, and tried to rise; but his legs would not support him.

He remembered with a painful clarity that he was playing truant from a furnished room in the Bowery. His face grew white with terror, and he looked up and down the road nervously, as if expecting to see his father coming after him.

"What you frightened of, boy?" asked the flask man, again smiling that far-off smile. "What you scared of, out here where there's nothing but trees and birds, and there's no living soul but me—Hobo?"

Paul forgot his father then.

"Who?" he asked in amazement.

"Hobo," repeated the flask man. "Don't be scared o' me, boy! I studied to be a minister once, but I was too strong for the pulpit, and I got to be a prize fighter. I'd be in the ring yet if it wasn't for this flask here. That's what made a hobo out of me. Not that it matters much. It's all in a lifetime!"

This was a little too much for Paul. It was so much that he giggled out of sheer bewilderment and nervousness. When a chipmunk scurried past behind the tree, Paul jumped in fright.

"Don't let 'em get me!" he gasped. "Don't let 'em!"

"There you go again," chided Hobo. "Take it easy! Where you from, boy?"

"The Bowery."

"My! Is that so? And where you bound?"

Paul shivered, and experienced some difficulty in keeping the tears from falling out of his eyes.

"I—don't—know," he said weakly.

"Good idea! You're learning, boy! When you don't know where you're going, you're going! Look at me. I've been going all my life, and I'm still on my way!"

Paul felt reassured. It was pleasant to talk to a man so sympathetic, so aimless.

"You mean you don't know where you're going, either?" Paul asked.

"Well, in a hazy sort of way I'm heading for Frisco, and maybe, after that, Honolulu and the South Seas—and maybe, after that, heaven. I'm always on the go and never arriving. That's me—Hobo! But say, boy, you're scared of something. Don't shiver that way! You're free now."

"How did you know that I was running away?" Paul asked in surprise.

"Why, your eyes, boy! I can read 'em. Didn't I study to be a minister once? I could tell you a lot of things about yourself, but I won't; because now you're going to forget that you were ever scared of anybody. Watch me! I never worry about nothing. Did you ever do this?"

The amazing man turned another handspring on the sloping bank.

"Where did you learn to do that?" Paul asked, with absorbed interest.

"In a circus," answered Hobo. "I've been quite a number of things in my day. Once I wrote a book, but nobody would ever publish it. Another time I went over Niagara Falls in a barrel. That was more exciting. Have another swallow of whisky, boy? It 'll put heart into you."

"No," said Paul. "It makes me burn. Say, you've been a lot of things, ain't you?"

"Oh, a few," answered Hobo modestly. "I owned a mine in Montana once. Say, did you ever read Walt Whitman, boy?"

"Who was he?" asked Paul curiously.

"An old man with a long white beard, who kept on traveling and writing poetry. He was a great one, Walt was—one of us. Sort of a hobo, too, only more refined. Every time he came to the top of a hill he'd write down a beautiful thought. I always carry Walt around with me."

The amazing man pulled a little leather book out of his trouser pocket, and showed it proudly to Paul.

"What do you mean by a beautiful thought?" asked Paul, who was forgetting rapidly.

Hobo pointed up the road to a place where a great tree stood richly against the sky.

"That's a beautiful thought," he said.

Paul was growing fonder of Hobo with every second's passing, though he could not exactly tell why. He had never seen such a man—such an odd blend of wisdom and frivolity, so sympathetic and kind, yet so uncouth.

"You're a hobo—that's funny!" said the boy, wonderingly.

"It's a great life!" cried Hobo, with enthusiasm, his blue eyes twinkling. "It's the great teacher. I learned a lot of things in schools, but I didn't know anything till I took to the road. Have another drink, boy?"

"It makes me burn," declined Paul.

He rose slowly to his feet, but the world began to dance around him, and he was forced to slide down against the tree again.

"I guess my feet won't hold me," he said doubtfully. "I don't know how I'm going home."

Hobo laughed.

"Come along with me and see the world," he invited. "It 'll make you strong. I bet you've never seen a geyser. You've never been to the Yellowstone!"

"But I only got fifteen dollars," admitted Paul.

"And I've got fifteen cents," replied Hobo. "Who cares about that? Money don't count with me. Come on, boy. Travel! Get the fright out of your eyes!"

"Might as well," agreed Paul. "But say, I'm awful hungry!"

"Hell!" cried Hobo. "That's the least of your troubles. There's a farmhouse behind that tree, and I saw a pile of wood in the yard with my own eyes. A little work, and we eat—savvy?"

When Paul tried to walk, his feet proved as unreliable as ever, and he stumbled down the bank into the roadway. Almost immediately the agile figure of Hobo was at his side, lifting him into the air as if he were a feather.

"Put your hands around my neck, boy. Now give me your feet. I'll carry you pickaback. Bless my soul, how much do you tip the scales at? A little breeze would blow you over. You'll have to go in training, boy, if you ever want to be a prize fighter!"

Paul laughed at the idea. He felt curiously, strangely happy, as if he had been born anew into a delightful world after a long, horrible nightmare of many years. As Hobo bore him along, he felt, somehow,

as if this man was carrying him away from all the hardships and bitteresses that had spoiled and warped his young life. It was like riding into a new, exciting fairyland on the back of a good genie. He laughed again, and imagined himself *Aladdin* who had just rubbed the wonderful lamp.

"Laughing, boy? That's good. Just forget everything, and pretend you were born this very minute.

"Billy was a bos'n on a brigantine, That sailed from San Francisco to the Philippines,"

sang Hobo in that rich voice like an organ.

"Why didn't you ever come to the Bowery, Hobo?" asked Paul.

"Oh, I've been there," answered his sturdy steed; "but I don't like the town. I've got to have plenty of space to move around in, and plenty of fresh air. The Bowery cramps my style.

"'Oh, howd'ye do?' said he.

'You sure look good to me!'

She rolled her hula eyes and said:

'Hoy, hicky, hicky, hicky hoy!'

Said the hula maiden coy

To the handsome sailor boy:

'Hicky hoy, hicky hoy, hicky hoy!'

"Hey, there! How about a little dinner, partner?" Hobo addressed a farmer coming in from the fields. "Me and the kid here are on our way to Frisco, and we'll never get there if we don't eat first. Chop that wood? Sure—I'm on! Here, take the kid into the kitchen, will you? He's not very strong, the kid ain't. Seasickness! Just got back from a tour of the Dead Sea, and he ain't got his land legs yet. Now, boy, you just go with partner here, while I earn our beans."

"But I got enough to pay for our dinner," remonstrated Paul. "I got fifteen dollars."

"You have?" asked Hobo. "Well, hold on to it, boy. We may need some of it before we get to Frisco."

IV

ALL the month of April they tramped their way from town to town, doing odd jobs as they found them. Poughkeepsie, Schenectady, Niagara Falls, and then westward along historic trails where Indian tribes once waited in ambush for the French invaders from Canada. It was all strangely new to Paul, and there was a vivid excitement about it that caused the blood in his veins to flow with a new freedom, to throb with an original ecstasy.

As they trudged the winding roads and narrow trails, their eyes were welcomed by sharp inquiries of new green leaves, triumphant banners of spring. They found violets eying them shyly from unexpected corners of fragrance. In the fields the farmers were plowing up the soil for planting, and the deep furrows of rich, black loam smelled warm and piercing, giving up winter's essence of imprisoned odors to the caressing touch of early summer.

Troy, Rome, Syracuse—was Paul living all this? In the early mornings, somewhere between the edge of deep slumber and stirring wakefulness, there would appear a huge doubt before his eyes. It was all a dream, and he was waiting, nervously, for the alarm clock to jeer at him. In a few minutes his father would be at him again, waiting to catch hold of his shoulders, to shake him cruelly, until his flesh burned with pain and his teeth rattled in his head.

That huge doubt between slumber and wakefulness caused Paul to cry out in alarm:

"Hobo! Hobo!"

"Here I am, boy!" the man answered. "Awake already? Well, I must say you're the early bird!"

Then Paul knew that it was real. The realization caused him to jump up with happiness, to turn handsprings learned from Hobo, to box with shadows of swaying leaves after Hobo's instructions.

Hard? Uncomfortable? Yes—there were no soft beds, no sensuous pillows stuffed with eider down. Usually his bed was the earth, his pillow was his coat rolled into a bundle. Above, no ceiling of plaster pressed down on him with a blank stare. His ceiling was the sky—nature's long, dark train, spangled with moonbeams, held up by her twinkling pages, the stars.

Profound, fathomless, was the sky at night—beauty without all reason, beyond all limit! The land was Paul's bed, the sky his canopy, and the breeze that rustled the foliage his soothing lullaby.

Up the road, down the road, to wonder with a quickened heart what he would see around the bend. A house? A tree? A limpid, bottomless lake, into which he could dive until all his fatigue was cooled away and his eyes made slumberous with lipping lassitude?

Or perhaps there was a railway track, with a freight car waiting empty, just for himself and Hobo. If formidably locked

against intrusion, there was Hobo to help him into his open-air Pullman. Hobo was a past master at this difficult art. It was never quite so easy for Paul.

"What's life, boy, but courage?" Hobo said one day. "What's the use of it all, if you can't meet it with your guard up and a fight in your eyes?"

So Paul swallowed his fear, and took the chance. The bumpers cramped your limbs, and a false move meant instant death—quick mastication by those incessantly moving wheels, whose bright steel teeth swallowed up the earth mile upon mile.

"Quit thinking about it," counseled Hobo, "and it's easier than having your own drawing-room, and a damn sight more exciting. When I ride the bumpers, I'm always thinking of the place I'm bound for; and almost before I know it, I'm there. Now supposing I'm on my way to Detroit—what do I think of? Why, Henry Ford, and F. O. B., and Ty Cobb!"

Paul quickly discovered that this formula worked like a charm. On the way to Chicago he thought of the cow that kicked over the lantern and started the great fire. He thought of Marshall Field, and the stockyards and the White Sox; and thus he completely forgot his fear.

Within an hour he began to like the sensation of the open-air Pullman. The grinding of the wheels, the quick passing of the roadbed, the stamping of the live stock on the floor of the freight car—all these sensations numbed his senses until the moment ceased to be dangerous, and all his thoughts were of the nebulous and fairy-colored future.

V

PAUL and Hobo arrived within the outskirts of Chicago at an early hour of the morning. After several miles of walking, they came to a district famed for its lawlessness—a street of ramshackle tenements that seemed to cringe from the golden respectability of sunlight. They passed a place known as the Bootleggers' Paradise, and Hobo suddenly remembered his importunate thirst.

"Just one drink," he pleaded. "I'll meet you on the bridge near the La Salle Station at six o'clock. Sure I'll be there!"

"Come on!" urged Paul. "You're no good when you're soused, Hobo. You'll spend all your money, and we'll need it if we expect to get to Frisco. Come on!"

Hobo hesitated, but the old habit overwhelmed him.

"If it wasn't for prohibition, I'd quit drinking," he moaned. "When it's so hard to get, how do they expect you to resist temptation? I'll sure meet you at six, boy. I ain't never failed you, have I?"

Before Paul could summon a new argument, Hobo disappeared inside the dive.

At six that evening, Paul was on the bridge overlooking the dun ripples that wavered beneath him, but Hobo had not appeared. At seven, the boy began to feel vaguely uncomfortable. He tried to busy his mind with thoughts of the future; he whistled; he hummed; he repeated to himself snatches of the verse that Hobo had taught him.

At eight, he became acutely conscious of the roar of the great city all about him—a tremendous humming sound that issued from the iron lungs of the Western metropolis. It was like New York. It was like the Bowery. It was the old fear returning to oppress Paul after so many days of peace and happiness. It was the old devil again, leering at him, crying:

"I'm going to crush you, to flatten you down! I'm going to blow out your life as if it were a candle flame!"

The Elevated trains hurled javelins of raucous sound into his ears as they whizzed by, completing their circuit of the Loop. The tall buildings, with their numberless glass eyes, stared burning and sinister glances into his body and soul, until he felt that he was being destroyed, slowly, irrevocably. The cry, the roar, the endless, searching activity of Chicago was fear to Paul—the fiend waiting to tear him in bits, to fling him into the morose, aimless eddies of the river that lurked darkly under the bridge.

It was nine o'clock—then ten—then eleven. Paul felt doomed forever, lost, buried in the clogged and vicious arteries of the great town. What should he do now? Where was he to go without his friend, the companion who had rescued him from the morass of fear, from whom he had learned health and vigor and courage? Where were those qualities now?

"What's life, boy, but courage? What's the use of it all, if you can't meet it with your guard up and a fight in your eyes?"

Hobo had told him that. He must remember and remember. He must steel himself with those words.

"What's life, boy, but courage?"

Riding the bumpers, so close to destruction, he had been told that, and had conquered his fear. Approaching farmhouses at night—houses guarded by snarling watchdogs, Paul had repeated over and over again:

"What's life, boy, but courage?"

The trees, tall, stately maidens with their green hair unfurled to the sun, had whispered Hobo's words to him. The clouds had written the same phrase across the heavens in a feathery white script.

Everywhere he had gone, he had found that courage asserting itself against great odds. He had seen it in mills and factories, watched it in lonely farmhouses miles away from the nearest habitation. The men who produced the cold, gleaming steel out of the raw ore; the women who rose before the light of dawn to prepare the large farmhouse breakfasts; the miners delving thousands of feet under the surface, facing death at every angle—there was courage!

Fear meant imprisonment and agony of soul and stifled growth. Courage meant going your own way in happiness, with a song on your lips, with daring and resolution in your eyes. Walt Whitman had sung the song of courage as he tramped fear down into the dust of the roads he trod, making music out of muscle and steel and trees and mountain tops.

Hobo—Hobo, who had taught Paul so much about life, who had said, "What's life, boy, but courage?"—where was he? Did he lie helpless somewhere?

Paul clenched his fists, erased the sinister gestures of the menacing city from his mind, and retraced his steps to the place where he had parted from his companion.

Down a crooked street, where flickering lights looked anæmic and sly; down a flight of grooved, mysterious stairs, and into the Bootleggers' Paradise. It was midnight, and a few aimless fragments of vice-ridden men and women occupied shadowy tables from front to rear. Paul searched the tables for a sight of Hobo, but his friend was not to be seen.

Keen, appraising eyes looked him over, head to toe, but he was not deterred from his search. Upstairs, in a dim, dusty room, he found his friend at last. There, doubled up on a couch, lay Hobo, white and helpless as if dead.

"Hobo!" cried the boy. He shook his friend grimly, fighting down his tears.

"Hobo! What's the matter, Hobo? What's the matter, old boy?"

A demon had entered into Paul—a demon that would not hear of disaster, of defeat and death. For several minutes he tried to rouse his companion. At the end of that time, Hobo opened his eyes slowly and looked in a dazed sort of way at his friend. He moved his lips and fumbled for words, which came at last.

"They robbed—drugged—robbed—"

Hobo was again unconscious.

Drugged and robbed!

"Who?" cried Paul, shaking Hobo again. "Who did it?"

Hobo could not answer. There was a wan pathos about his drawn features and his inert frame, and Paul was powerless to reclaim that lovable vagabond into the familiar hilarity. This was his friend, who had been strong and quick to mirth, treacherously laid low by thieves. This was the gentle and kind Hobo, who had opened a new life to Paul—Hobo, who lay here so helpless and pitiful.

"What's life, boy, but courage?" he had said. "What's the use of it all, if you can't meet it with your guard up and a fight in your eyes?"

"I'll get your money back!" said Paul through clenched teeth. "I'll get it back, Hobo!"

Down those sinister stairs he flew, into that dim room, where the sound of his footsteps, the rhythm of his deep, rugged breathing, caused every one to look up at him curiously. He confronted them with a keen, driving passion, with a quick, blazing anger that hurled itself from out his eyes. He was a Paul molded by experience and discovered by courage.

"One of you has got my friend's money!" he stormed. "One of you has drugged my friend upstairs! Who is it? I want to know! Who?"

He was answered by a stream of vile epithets. The proprietor of this place, outwardly an individual of silk and satin, approached him cleverly.

"Now, my lad, what's eating you? Are you looking for somebody? Now, my lad!"

"My friend upstairs has been drugged and robbed. I want to know who did it. Quick, or I'll tell the police!"

He stood there, this former child of fear, this persecuted boy of the Bowery, and he was unafraid now, backed by the develop-

ment of courage and strength that comes through contact with places and people. This was Paul born anew, son of the long and romantic roads, child of glorious circumstance.

His audience was inclined to make light of the situation. These people were a peculiar lot, something like mushrooms in a deep, dank cellar, or silkworms spinning elaborate cocoons of vice. They had the habit of dodging in and out through the loopholes of the law.

A slimy-looking man, with a face extraordinarily like a weasel's, rose from his table in the rear of the place and approached Paul sidewise. He advanced by fits and starts, as if suspicious of himself, until, magically, he was within three feet of Paul. The words he uttered seemed to form themselves in his nostrils.

"Well, suppose somebody has got your friend's money! What you gonna do about it, hey? What could you do about it?"

"I want to know *who*?" answered Paul, all aflame with a consuming indignation.

"Supposin' it was me!" squeaked the weasel, distorting his face with an unexpected grin.

"I'd ask you to give it back," said Paul, holding his ground.

"Now, boys, no rough-house, please!" came the voice of the smooth, silky proprietor. "Settle your scores outside. Now, my lad, what's eating you? Nobody's got your money, nor your friend's money, nor your uncle's and aunt's money. Now, my lad!"

"But I have got it," the weasel confessed, with a leer; "and I'd like to know what this here puppy's gonna do about it. What are you gonna do about it, Fido? I got your friend's money right here in my pocket, an' it's stayin' there, what's more. How d'ya like that, Fido?"

Speak, courage that the boy has learned from the road! Speak now, courage that he has imbibed in his wanderings, through his contact with life as it glows fiercest in the furnace!

Paul has shot out his fist and caught Weasel under the chin. Weasel is back at him, and they are fighting thickly, swiftly, out for blood.

He was a poor weakling, the butt of his father's cruelty, the victim of the city's lashings; but the open road has taught him courage, and dreamless sleep under the stars has given him strength. He is beat-

ing Weasel to a pulp. He is showing the thief no quarter. The silk and satin covering of vice is being ripped from end to end as Paul wedges his opponent in between tables and astounded spectators. He is drawing first blood, while the smooth, silky proprietor is shrieking:

"Now, my lad! Now, my lad!"

"Here! Take your friend's money, for Gawd's sake!" screams Weasel, in an agony of fright and pain. He has had enough. "Here, take your money! Lemme go! Ouch! Tear him away from me before I'm murdered! Tear him away before he kills me! Ouch! Tear him away!"

They tear him away at last. They see him triumphantly pocket Hobo's money and fairly fly up the stairs to the place where Hobo lies. They hear him cry, in his young voice of ecstasy, of triumph:

"Hobo! Open your eyes, man! Here's your money! I got it! Let me carry you, Hobo! I'm strong—strong enough to carry you, old pal! See, here's the money! Now, put your arms around my neck. Gimme your legs. That's it! I'll carry you, Hobo. I'll carry you. We're on our way to Frisco! Who says I can't? Why, I could carry two like you, old pal!"

VI

WHILE Hobo lay recuperating for two weeks in a Chicago hospital, Paul helped to slaughter cattle out at the stockyards—not a particularly fragrant or delightful occupation, to be sure, but remunerative enough to carry the two wanderers out into the Wisconsin forests, through the attentive forest corps of green-eyed elms and red-coat maples, and into the grain elevator country of Minnesota. After Minnehaha, with her laughing waters, and the mighty spectacle of the Mississippi, they reached North Dakota, the land of the golden wheat fields.

This was a new Paul who worked his way with Hobo from ranch to ranch—a Paul grown inches in height, with broadened shoulders and rolling muscles under a bronzed skin. This was a Paul who had shed his city pallor, and had been transformed into a red Indian, fleet of foot, lithe of limb, and dexterous as a circus acrobat. In all their exploits he was now leader; it was now Hobo who lagged behind and begged Paul to wait.

Through sunshine, through storm, they tramped through the mighty Northwest,

where buffalo had once ranged in ponderous, stampeding herds, and where pioneers, with the light of glorious courage in their eyes, had repelled the surrounding menace of Indians. North Dakota, and then Montana, where the Gallatin Valley with its wheat fields makes a golden radiance for miles, stretching clear to the sapphire blue of the horizon.

Onward, onward, through the fierce heat and the cooling, fragrant rain!

"Look here, boy! Look here! Why do you walk in the rain like that? Why do you climb all these mountains? You're too strenuous for me, boy. You're traveling too fast for me. Some day you'll want to settle down. You'll want to stick in one place."

"Settle? Stick?" echoed Paul, with healthy contempt. "Huh! Not for me! I ain't seen all I want to. There's the Yellowstone, and California, and the Pacific. There's Honolulu and Tahiti. Let's go on and on, Hobo—on and on!"

"Well, boy, it's all right to go on and on if you're an old man like me, who never had a home, and never wanted one; but some day, boy, you'll wake up and see a house where folks are happy, and you'll be crazy to have a home of your own—only it may be too late, boy. Listen to me. I know somebody in Frisco who'll make a great fighter out of you. He's an old pal of my ring days. What do you say, boy? What's the answer?"

"Do you really think I can fight, Hobo? Do you really think so?"

Paul, pleased as *Punch*, executed an up-percut on an imaginary opponent.

"On the square, boy, I mean it. Don't think I haven't been watching you all these months. You were born to be a scrapper, only you're just finding it out—just like I was born to be a hobo, even if I did study to be a minister. You can't be a tramp all your life, boy. You needed it for a while, but now you've got your diploma."

"You've been a tramp all your life, Hobo, and it agrees with you. Why, it's the only life, you've been telling me. You always said you wouldn't change with anybody in the world."

"Nor I wouldn't," answered Hobo; "but it's you we're talking about. A nice young fellow like you wants to get a bank account, and a wife, and kids."

Paul burst out laughing at this advice, so strange from the lips of Hobo.

"But what 'll become of you, Hobo? Will you be my boarder?"

"Me?" Hobo made a wide, sweeping motion with his arms. "Why, boy, what 'll I be doing but the same things I always have? There's the road for me, and the bumpers, and the blue sky above."

"And for me, too, Hobo! I like this sort of life. I ain't anxious to quit yet—not by a long ways."

So the future hung in abeyance, while they started through the mighty Yellowstone, where they held silent and epochal confidences with the spruce-lined mountains and the deep, breath-taking chasms. The Yellowstone was like something imagined and never beheld. Now its dim chambers of woodland sanctuary held them in thrall; now they watched the dazzling tumult of the geysers shooting out of the earth with a delicious, crystal rapture.

The mornings were etched with frost and vivid with sharp, fresh winds; and there was the fragrance of pines, catching up with your highest aspirations, and pushing them even higher, until your thoughts had a blissful secrecy among themselves. What is like the Yellowstone but Paradise? And Paradise is only a dream, a hope far away, untrod and unbreathed.

They crouched by the great bonfire in the very shadow of Old Faithful. Some one in the dark, encircling space was singing to his banjo:

"There's a long, long trail a winding
Into the land of my dreams."

"Now I know what it means to live," Paul said. He turned to his friend with tears in his eyes. "You gave me all this, Hobo! If it hadn't been for you—oh, I can't bear to think of it! What are you, old man? Are you a hobo? Are you a poet? Are you just a dream I'm having, Hobo, while the Elevated trains are roaring past and the Metropolitan Tower is striking the time? Hobo, are you real, or are you just an idea?"

"I'm just a poor bum," answered Hobo, while the banjo strummed:

"Where the nightingale is singing,
And a white moon beams."

VII

IN San Francisco, Hobo sought out his old sparring partner, and between them they managed to get Paul a trial in the

ring. He looked good from the first ring of the gong, and showed the stuff that brands a coming conqueror. In his first fight he manifested an agility and a natural cleverness that won him an easy decision. After two more battles he was thought far enough advanced to meet one Jeff Morse, an aspirant for the lightweight title. Through all this strenuous apprenticeship, Hobo was his trainer and teacher. Hobo was always present with brave words and ambitious suggestions.

"You'll win, boy! There's no going back for you. You'll win, and some day you'll be champ. There's the whole outdoors in you, boy—the sun and the trees, the wheat and the Yellowstone. They won't let you lose. After you've won, you'll have your own drawing-room to travel in!"

"And where'll you be, Hobo? Where'll you be?"

"Oh, under the drawing-room, riding the bumpers!"

So Paul steps out. The bright white arcs that hang above him in the ring show how perfect his condition has grown to be, how smooth and rippling is the movement of his muscles, how packed with dynamite are his shoulders.

Watch him step out! There's a touch of Corbett, the gentleman, in the way he meets his opponent. There's a suggestion of Dundee in his bright, decisive manner. There's much of the wit and unconcern of Jack Johnson in his repartee; and there's Dempsey in his wide-spaced, out-of-doors freedom. He's a blend. He's the earth and the sky, the waters and the trees, all in one vigorous body. The lines of his face show victory over fear and weakness and wretchedness. He remembers:

"What's life, boy, but courage?"

He's stepping out. His blows are like machine gun fire—*rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat*. Torrents of rivers are in his ruthless, inescapable boxing gloves. He rains blow after blow upon his opponent, who strikes back gamely, but in vain. His grace is as the wind's. In the open road he learned his tricks.

This ring, is it not life? These two fighters, one is fear, crouching, battling, taking the boy by surprise, getting him unexpectedly in the jaw, while there is a far-off rumbling, as of fear's battalions waiting to spring down upon him and tear him to

bits. All this is life, nothing less, nothing more. When Jeff Morse knocks Paul down, and the referee begins counting — “One, two, three, four, five”—it is fear who has knocked him down, who is trying to take the heart and soul out of him. It’s his father in the old days, shoving him to the wall—“one, two, three”—to the wall—“four, five!”

As Paul lies there, as the referee counts over him, there are memories that rush through his mind, reels of pictures projected on the blank screen of his thoughts. He is coming down that elevator fearing to face his father; he is running into a bewildering maze of crazy-quilt streets, up and down, zigzag, perilous, confusing.

Then there is blackness for a long time—blackness thick with spears of pain. Then comes blessed morning, with Hobo’s song:

“For to admire, an’ for to see,
For to behold this world so wide!”

“What’s life, boy, but courage?” cries Hobo.

“One, two, three, four, five, six—”

Six seconds, and Paul is on his feet again, fighting back, blow for blow, blood for blood.

“You can’t beat me!” he laughs, while the blood from a cut in his forehead stains his face until he looks like a painted clown. “I’ve met you before!” he laughs at his bewildered opponent, who doesn’t understand. “Don’t think you can beat me now! I’ve met you in the Bowery, old killjoy! I’ve met you in crooked streets. I had a tussle with you on a certain bridge out in Chicago. You had me down then, but you couldn’t beat me. I had it out with you in that bootleggers’ joint, and I beat you! I’ve been meeting you and winning all the way from New York to Frisco. I’ve beaten you in the small Wisconsin tanks, I’ve mauled you in the Dakota wheat fields, and I’m beating you again!”

He’s stepping now. Watch him! It’s the fifth round, and poor Jeff Morse, who has been, to Paul, the embodiment of fear, is getting the beating of his life.

“My name’s Morse!” Jeff is gasping as they clinch. “You call me Fear, but my name’s Morse!”

Jeff comes to life with a pinching jab to Paul’s ribs.

“Your name’s Fear, and I’m beating you!” Paul laughs back. “I ought to

know your name. I’ve met you a dozen times. I tell you, your name is Fear, and I’m knocking you out!”

Up with that right—zing!—a geyser in the Yellowstone, shooting up, up, up. Up with that right, until Fear is lifted a foot off the floor, and then descends into limp, mutilated defeat.

“I told you I was going to knock you out!” grins Paul, as he stands there, bruised but game, battered but triumphant.

The arena quivers with cheers and the telegraph keys go *clickety-clickety, click-click*. They’re tapping out the code of victory far and wide, to the Bowery and Wisconsin, to Dakota and the Yellowstone. They’re tapping out the code of victory over fear!

VIII

In the drawing-room of the West-bound limited, Paul turned from a dismal view of the passing country and addressed his new fight manager, who accompanied him.

“I can’t understand it. Where do you suppose he went? After the fight I went back to our room, where he was supposed to meet me, but he wasn’t there. I only found a note—a little piece of paper, on which he had written:

“‘You’re safe now, boy. Good-by!’”

Paul’s manager looked curious.

“What did he mean by saying that you’re safe now?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Paul casually. “It’s something you wouldn’t understand—something between Hobo and myself. I wish I could find him! He warned me, too. When we were out in Montana, he said that some day I’d be riding in a drawing-room and he—”

Paul suddenly jumped up from his seat and dashed out of the room, out into the aisle of the car, and into the vestibule, where he waited tremulously for the train to stop. At the first station he darted outside, and his bewildered manager saw him looking under each coach, as if hoping to catch sight of some one under the cars.

Evidently his search was fruitless, for when the train started moving again, Paul reëntered the drawing-room and threw himself despondently into his seat.

“He’s not there!” he murmured in a low voice. “Not there!”

The train passed out of the mountainous country and dived into the golden wheat

fields of North Dakota. A look of exaltation came into Paul's face. The grief faded from his eyes, and there was an air of unconquerable beauty about him—the beauty that comes in the tick of a second from out the measureless distance and lights us up incredibly with a complete understanding.

Paul turned toward his manager.

"He always said, 'What's life, boy, but courage?' Isn't that a fine thing to re-

member? How can a fellow forget a thing like that? Why, it makes you strong and wise and happy!"

He threw up the window, and a breeze saturated with the fragrance of earth caressed him swiftly and blew his hair back from his forehead.

"Some day he'll turn up again," whispered Paul. "He'll be younger than I remember him, because he's a clean, fine spirit that can't die!"

The Fifollet

HOW EGIDE RACICOT STROVE TO AVERT THE DOOM OF HIS
FRIEND FRANÇOIS PARADIS

By William Merriam Rouse

THE house of Egide Racicot stands empty now, as empty as the old quarry pit behind it, but the memory of Egide is not lost to the people of Notre Dame des Anges; nor will it ever be, so long as the Angelus bell sounds from the church of Our Lady of the Angels and the calm St. Lawrence flows to the sea. Snow drifts through the roof of the house of Racicot, and the dormers are sagging down, but the two-foot stone wall will stand for another century, a monument to Egide.

He was one of those old men who seem always to have been old; and this was somewhat, perhaps, because of his appearance. He wore, summer and winter, the *ceinture fléchée* of other days—a red knitted belt that passes two or three times around the waist and hangs in gay fringed ends at the left side. He had a fondness for the lopsided blue *tuque*, which hangs jauntily over one ear and expresses so well the spirit of *beau Canada*.

There was more than this, however. Egide Racicot had been known to say, as easily as if he were swearing at his horse, that he was not afraid of the devil! One knows well that this is dangerous. It is not only dangerous, but suspicious. If Egide had not done his religious duties as well as the next man, he would probably

have been shunned by his neighbors. He lived alone and read a good many books; but in spite of these things he had friends—and among them none closer than François Paradis.

To Paradis, Egide stood something in the relation of a foster father, for the young man had had no parents of his own since the year of the smallpox. When François came back from a winter's work in the woods above the rivers, he went to the house of Racicot and stayed there until he found employment for the summer.

This was very good for both of them. It gave Paradis a home in his native village, and to Egide it gave a son of whom he was tremendously proud.

Truly, any one might have been proud of François Paradis. He was as graceful and as strong as a young elm, and, while he had the faults of the *bûcheron*, he was blessed with more virtues than most woodchoppers seem to be. All the world liked him; and so did Yvonne Laplante when she saw him for the first time the spring after her family had moved to Notre Dame des Anges.

Eh, bien! The affair went as those affairs always should, with Heaven smiling upon the joy of the young people, and the old women of the parish nodding approval. The gray eyes of Yvonne grew dark with