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by Harold M. Sherman**

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Author: Harold M. Sherman

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DOWN THE ICE, AND OTHER WINTER SPORTS
STORIES ***

DOWN THE ICE!

Books by
HAROLD M. SHERMAN

IT'S A PASS
INTERFERENCE
DOWN THE ICE
OVER THE LINE
STRIKE HIM OUT
UNDER THE BASKET
THE TENNIS TERROR
CAPTAIN OF THE ELEVEN
TAHARA—BOY MYSTIC OF INDIA
TAHARA—AMONG AFRICAN TRIBES
TAHARA—BOY KING OF THE DESERT
TAHARA—IN THE LAND OF YUCATAN
THE FUN LOVING GANG—IN WRONG RIGHT
THE FUN LOVING GANG—ALWAYS UP TO SOMETHING

DOWN THE ICE
AND OTHER WINTER SPORT STORIES

BY

HAROLD M. SHERMAN

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DOWN THE ICE!

"Look out! There he comes!"

Leaning far forward, riding a little black object along the ice in the crook of his stick, the blades of his skates throwing a fine spray of ice as he swerved to right and left, Carl Hemmer, Taber High's great hockey star, was in the midst of one of his famed solo dashes. An amazing individual performer, Carl had twice split Howard Prep's defense wide open, charging recklessly in on her goalie to smack the puck into the net. There was nothing he relished more than disconcerting the enemy and the entire Howard sextet was certainly frantically bewildered at his maneuvers. No team had, thus far, been able to keep Carl bottled up. Irrepressible in nature, he defied opposing sixes to stop him—combining daring with superb stick handling and dazzling skating. The tougher the going, the more it stimulated him, Carl possessing the ability to rise to all situations.

"We'll get him this time!" said Bentley, Howard's right defense, grimly.

He stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Morton, Prep's left defense, both of whom were smarting under previous assaults.

"Get him if you have to dump him!" answered Morton. "That boy's been going through us like tissue paper!"

Disdaining an attempt to go around the human bulwark of the two forms huddled to impede his progress, Carl—going at top speed—crouched for the impact. Spectators were up on their feet, thrilled at the spectacle Carl was presenting. He was actually a one-man team. Taber hadn't lost a game since his advent in school and ice hockey, through his exploits, had become the town's most popular sport.

"Hit 'em high! Hit 'em low!" sung the Taber rooters, as though they were cheering a football team.

It was the third period of a game in which Taber led, three to one. No necessity for Carl's tempestuous drive down the ice except that his dynamic nature sent him always on the attack whenever he could get his stick on the puck.

"Worry the enemy every minute of the game," had been his motto, "and the enemy won't worry you!"

Smack!

Howard Prep's two defense men met the whizzing Carl Hemmer head-on. This time Taber High's crack hockey player did not go through. Instead his body was catapulted backwards, with pieces of broken sticks flying in air, to land heavily some feet away and go skidding across the ice to bring up with a sickening thud against the sideboards.

"Wow! They certainly stopped him that time!" breathed a spectator. "Looked like dirty work, too! Illegal body-checking and free use of their sticks!... Yes, sir—there's the referee waving them off the ice ... a major penalty for both of 'em!"

A chorus of boos followed the two Howard defense men as they skated to the sideboards and clambered into the penalty box to remain out of the game for five minutes which, in this case, meant that the contest would be over before they could return.

"Hello—Carl's hurt!" discovered the crowd, as the huddled figure sprawled near the sideboards, failed to rise. "He took quite a wallop!"

Knocked unconscious by the impact and suffering a jolting bump on his head, Taber's hockey star was carried off the ice to the dressing room as the crowd gave him a burst of sympathetic applause. Minus two of her players, Howard Prep's scoring possibilities were so reduced that she was forced to go strictly on the defensive save for lone attempts to put the puck in from long range. Taber High won the game a few minutes later, three goals to one—the injured Carl's two goals again providing the margin of victory.

"Wonder how Carl is?" was Lank Broderick's first question, as the teams left the ice. "I'd like to take a punch at those two Howard guys. Sorry they didn't get back in play!"

Lank was Carl's team-mate at left wing, Carl serving as forward on the right wing. They thought much of each other, Lank sacrificing his chances of scoring to feed the puck to Carl because of Carl's admittedly greater prowess.

"I'm not interested in who makes the scores, just so they're made," Lank had often said. "Besides, I've got sense enough to know that we'd have just an ordinary hockey team if it wasn't for Carl ... and we'd be foolish if we didn't build our six around him ... since he can do so much for us!"

In the locker room, stretched out on a rubbing table, fellow team-mates found their idol, Carl. Taber High's right wing had just regained consciousness and was staring dazedly at the ceiling. He raised up on his elbows and reached out his hand for an imaginary stick.

"Game's over!" said Doctor Lawrence, pushing Carl gently back.

"And we won!" informed Lank, stepping to Carl's side.

The injured star nodded and moistened his lips, still staring.

"How did I get in here?" he asked, and put a shaky hand to his head. "The last I remember I—I was going through...!"

Lank grinned, reassuringly. "Yes, but they gave you the works, Carl, old boy ... and you did a backward flip-flop, landing on your bean. That was 'lights' for you."

"It—it must have been," said Carl, faintly.

"I'm glad it wasn't a knee or an ankle," kidded Lank. "Only your head!"

"*Only?*" repeated Carl, too stunned to react to kidding.

"I mean—you'll soon be over this bump. We'll sure need you week after next when we run into Siddall. You'll have a chance to give your one rival some real competition then," Lank went on.

"Whiz Deagen?" spoke Carl, and bit his lips. "Gee—my head! If you don't mind ... I don't want to talk hockey now ... I want to get home.... Where's my clothes?... I want to get home...!"

"We'll get you home all right," declared Doctor Lawrence. "Just take it easy."

Motioning to Taber High's team-members to 'clear out', Doctor saw to it that Carl Hemmer was dressed and sent home in a car. Then, returning to the locker room he called the squad together and said: "Carl's suffered a slight concussion. Nothing serious but he'll feel the shock for several days. Better if he doesn't talk or think hockey. I suggest you let him alone. A fellow usually reacts against an unpleasant experience. A few days' rest and his old zest for the game will return naturally. Say nothing about this ... and when you see him ... act just as though nothing has happened. Get me?"

"Yea, Doc!"

"Okay—that's all!"

Historic was the only word to describe the battles between Siddall and Taber, rivals of long standing. It was generally acknowledged that these two high schools turned out the best ice hockey teams in the country ... best of their class, that is. "We thirst for each other's blood," was the way a Siddall roter expressed it, putting on what he described as a "bloodthirsty" expression. This season both sextets looked forward to their clash with more than ordinary interest because each possessed a hockey player of outstanding ability. Whiz Deagen had been to Siddall what Carl Hemmer had been to Taber and this was the highest compliment that could be paid—practically signaling that he was all but the whole team.

"When those two boys clash it will be worth coming miles to see," a Taber supporter had declared.

Concern, however, was now secretly expressed as to the possible extent of injuries Carl Hemmer may have suffered. Had Doctor Lawrence withheld any vital information? The fact that Carl was being kept in bed two days after the game did not sound so good.

"Say, if Carl's out of that game, we might as well forfeit!" commented a sports authority. "Whiz will skate the rest of our team dizzy!"

Great was the relief when, two days before the Winston game, Carl Hemmer showed up at the locker room, ready to don his togs.

"I feel fine," he announced, quietly.

"That's great!" greeted Lank, cordially. "Glad to have you back!"

Coach Corcoran conferred with Doctor Lawrence. The Winston game was not expected to tax Taber seriously.

"Better not scrimmage him yet," was Doctor's advice. "I doubt if the team needs another scrimmage session. Just a running through their formations."

"I think you're right," said the Coach.

In practice the presence of Carl Hemmer brought back the old snap in the team. The puck skimmed from player to player as they swept up and down the ice in formation.

"I want to see these plays click in the Winston game," called Coach Corcoran. "It'll be our last chance to brush up on 'em before we hit Siddall!"

"They'll look like a million!" promised Lank.

Thirty cents is as far from a million as the earth is from the moon. That Lank's enthusiastic prophecy was not fulfilled was due not so much to Winston as to the fellow who had been Taber High's spark plug. Since most of the plays were built around him, Carl Hemmer absolutely had to be functioning himself if the formations were to be successfully completed. But the game was not five minutes old before players and spectators alike knew that something was radically wrong with the usually dependable and scintillating right wing. Carl started his dashes with the usual fervor but they faded rapidly as he passed center ice and, instead of going through at all costs, he veered to right or left, attempting to evade the Winston defense and slipping into the end zone along the sideboards. His efforts, as a result, were reduced almost to naught with the puck being lost repeatedly and Winston's starting an offensive of its own.

"This sometimes happens to a fellow who gets a bad bump on the head," remarked Doctor Lawrence privately to an anxious Coach Corcoran. "That's why I wanted Carl to take things so easy. It's just as though he'd been beamed by a baseball. He has a nervous reaction to thoughts of another possible crash. But it'll wear off!"

"That may be," conceded the Coach. "But when? That's the question!"

"He should get better before this game is over," said the Doctor.

But Carl Hemmer's improvement was not noticeable. And the falling off in his playing form was making what should have been an easy game look hard. As late as the third quarter, Taber High was leading by only one goal to none, and this goal scored by Lank who'd smacked in the rebound of a long shot which Carl had fired from the blue line.

"What's the matter, Carl, old warhorse?" Lank finally asked, as team members looked on, wonderingly.

"Nothing!" was Carl's tight-lipped answer.

And no one had the heart to question him further.

The game ended without a change in the score and sports writers now had something to write about. "Injury Affects Hemmer's Playing," one heading said. "Hemmer Shadow of Former Self," declared another. "Crippling of Hemmer Menaces Chances Against Siddall," was a third feature title. But it remained for one sport scribe to offer the explanation that "Hemmer played under wraps, apparently by instructions of Coach Corcoran who was running no risks against his not being in shape to meet Siddall next Saturday. There's little doubt but that Carl will be in his customary great form at that time ... and then we'll be treated to a whirlwind battle between himself and Whiz Deagen—two of the smartest performers in high school hockey."

Rated as two evenly matched sextets, Taber and Siddall High Schools drew a capacity crowd at the

Taber rink to witness what had been heralded as probably their most spirited encounter. Both rooting sections buzzed with excitement as their respective teams skated on the ice. This excitement reached high tension when Whiz Deagen and Carl Hemmer met up with each other and shook hands near the Siddall bench.

"Hey, Carl," called a wit, "which one of you's the better player?"

"We don't know yet," Taber's great star grinned in reply.

"But it won't be long now," added Whiz, showing a nice set of teeth.

"Those two could cut each other's throats," the bloodthirsty fan confided to the rooter next to him.

"They're just letting on that they're friends. Wait till you see what they do to each other in a game!"

Slashing sticks, racing forms, skidding slides, bruising falls—all in the pursuit of a mad-traveling puck! The first period of the Taber-Siddall battle was replete with thrills, both teams putting up a frenzied defense, breaking up formations by stiff body-checking and clever poke-checking with their sticks. The puck changed hands in mid-ice with bewildering rapidity as the main fight centered between the blue lines. Long shots were taken when it was found almost impossible to crash through the human defense walls. During this hectic period even Whiz Deagen and Carl Hemmer were swallowed up in swirling action. Occasionally they would get free and the crowd would roar in anticipation of a spectacular dash but their chances didn't materialize. They were set upon before going far and forced to retreat or surrender the puck.

"Whiz and Carl are killing each other off!" opined one rooter as the period ended, nothing to nothing. "They're so afraid one or the other is going to break loose that they're spending their time on each other's necks! However, the game is young yet!"

Siddall started the second period with a rush. Having sounded out Taber's system of play the first fifteen minutes, the enemy—led by their redoubtable Whiz Deagen—assailed the Taber net. This time they broke through Taber's defense for close-in shots and goalie Frank Cary had a man-sized job on his hands warding the fast-flying puck off with stick, pads, gloves, body and head. He elicited cheer after cheer for his marvelous goal-guarding but Siddall's persistent battering was not to be denied. Whiz Deagen, capturing the puck in mid-ice, whirled and feinted a pass, then zig-zagged past Taber's two defense men who made desperate attempts to stop him. He rode on his skate runners up to the very mouth of the cage and shoved the puck, lightning fast, past goalie Cary who, even then, threw himself prone in the wild hope of averting a score.

"No soap!" grinned Whiz, fishing the puck out of the net as the referee's whistle screeched and the red light of the official score blinked on. "You're licked. It's just a question of how much!"

"We'll get that goal back!" rejoined goalie Cary. "You'll see!"

Whiz Deagen laughed. He was still laughing at the next face-off when the man whom Taber fans had picked to outshine him, got his stick on the puck and started on a lone dash. These kind of dashes were what had made him famous and Siddall who had worked out a special defense against them, massed for the attack. To the consternation of all, however, Carl did not meet the challenge but veered sharply at the last moment and tried to get past without bodily conflict.

"That's bad," said Doctor Lawrence who sat beside Coach Corcoran on the bench. "It's still got him!"

Whiz Deagen, following Carl closely, caught him as he slackened his pace, crossed sticks with him and scraped the puck away as both brought up against the sideboards with a crash, Carl pulling back instinctively to lessen the impact.

"What's eating you?" fired Lank, skating up as Whiz was off with the puck.

Carl's usual self-confident manner was gone. His face looked drawn. He was actually trembling. There was no time to question him then with Siddall once more threatening Taber's goal and goalie Frank Carey doing another magnificent job of standing the invaders off. A mix-up in front of the cage brought a face-off and once again Carl had the puck. Once again his brilliant skating took him out of the pack on a solo dash which swept past mid-rink and beyond the blue line into Siddall's end zone. Once again, however, with the crowd screaming wildly, expecting a characteristic Carl Hemmer drive through the enemy's defense, Taber's right wing swerved to avoid a collision. In doing so he lost his balance and the puck was jostled from the crook of his stick, all his effort going for naught.

"Booh!" shouted an over-zealous fan, but the razz died in his throat as the crowd hushed him.

Chagrined beyond words, Carl skated madly back into play, now chasing the Siddall men with the puck and trying to wrest it from them. Taber's idol was a hollow husk of himself and Siddall now knew it for a certainty. Whiz Deagen even took to taunting him by slapping the puck his way, confident that Taber's crack player couldn't get past Siddall's blue line.

"I dare you!" he shouted, and a fellow whose face was almost as blue as the line in the ice marking the zones, couldn't bring himself to accept the challenge.

At the end of the second period the score was—Siddall, 1; Taber, 0.

In the locker room perturbed team-mates gathered about Carl to inquire the cause of his poor play. Carl could only answer them with a hopeless shake of the head. But Lank Broderick, more sympathetic, took him by the arm and led him to one side.

"What is it, Carl? Tell me!"

Taber's right wing, always the bulwark of the team before, now clutched his running mate's arm, piteously.

"Lank, I can't explain it. All I know is ... I can't make myself go through any more. I think I can when I start out ... but when I'm right there ... I lose my nerve or something!... It's the most terrible feeling.... It feels like I'm just about to skate into *blackness*...!"

Lank, watching Carl closely, nodded understandingly.

"Listen, Lank," begged Carl, tremulously. "We've got to win this game. I used to break the defense and get through to take passes from you and shoot the goals. Can't we reverse things?... *You* go through and I'll pass to *you*!"

Lank hesitated. "I can try," he promised. "It's not so easy to get through that bunch. I don't have your form, you know. You had a system all your own...!"

"I'm sorry," Carl said. "I feel like a rotter."

"You'll snap into it," Lank encouraged. "Come on—let's go!"

Siddall skated out for the third and last period a cocky sextet headed by a carefree Whiz Deagen. True, the visitors were only leading by one goal but their defense had been impregnable and they had stopped the mighty Carl Hemmer cold even as Winston, a much lesser team, had done the week before. There was no reason why they could not add to their score or, failing in this, hold a stubbornly defensive Taber to no goals.

Lank Broderick, Taber's left wing, true to his word, tried to crack Siddall's defense but was repulsed. He tried again and again, being body-checked out of play. The crowd seemed to sense that he was attempting to make up in a measure for Carl's strange loss of form and he was cheered each time he took the puck.

"Get going, Carl!" the fans yelled, to no avail.

The much-heralded combat between Whiz Deagen and Carl Hemmer was proving a washout. Whiz was having things much his own way and would probably be credited with winning the game—most certainly should his one goal be the margin of victory.

With eight minutes left to play, Lank skated close to Carl.

"Next time I get the puck," he said in his ear, "I'm going to crash that defense or know the reason why. You follow right behind me and when I make the hole, you slip through. Watch for the puck because I'll flip it back to you just as I smack into them!"

"I got you!" Carl replied. "I'll be there!"

Lank's opportunity came two minutes later. Carl cut across the ice to join him as Lank started down the ice. He was trailing as Lank skimmed past the blue line and prepared for a body-crashing contact with Siddall's two defense men. The puck came back to him on a perfect back-handed pass. Lank, having gotten up more momentum than ever before, hit the two defense men with great force ... so much so that all were knocked off their feet. Carl, going fast himself, had to tap the puck to one side and leap their bodies to avoid entanglement. He captured the puck, with the rink a bedlam of sound, and headed for the Siddall net with the goalie crouched in its mouth, broad-bladed stick across his knees.

"There she is!" screamed Taber rooters, going mad as Carl's close-up shot sent the puck hurtling into the net for the goal which tied the score. "Carl looked like his old self on that one, eh?"

"Sure—after Lank made the way for him!" agreed an observer. "And look at Lank now—he's stretched out on the ice as cold as a Thanksgiving turkey!"

Cheers died to a breathless silence as Coach Corcoran and Doctor Lawrence hurried on the ice. Taber's left forward stirred and raised partially up, then writhed in pain.

"Sprained knee," was the verdict after he had been examined. "Breath knocked out, too ... and a nice little bump on the head!"

Carl's elation at his having scored was shortlived at seeing that the fellow who had made his score possible was 'out' on the play. He reached Lank's side as Lank was lifted up.

"Good work, Carl!" Lank complimented. "I knew—if I could get you through there...!"

Carl winced. "It's all my fault," he blamed. "You were doing what I should have done. I scored on *your nerve!*"

"You're welcome to it," proffered Lank, as they carried him toward the sidelines, Carl skating alongside. "Nerve is such a little thing compared to a fellow who can play hockey like you can!"

Taber's crack hockey player swallowed. A flash came in his eyes. Turning to fellow team members he cried: "Get me that puck, you guys! That's all you've got to do!... I'll take it down the ice!"

Whiz Deagen, noting his rival's change of attitude, turned to his team-mates. "I'll handle this baby!" he assured.

With the next facing off of the puck at center ice, an electric thrill passed through the crowd as the long-anticipated clash between the two great hockey stars arrived! It was now anybody's game and very likely that the next goal would decide the victor. Whiz, catching the puck on his stick as it slid along the ice on a pass from Siddall's center, started a dodging, twisting drive into Taber territory. Carl Hemmer, however, was on his heels, dogging every stride of his journey. The two swooped together in front of Taber's cage and went down in a heap as the puck upended and rolled to the sideboards.

"Carl prevented a sure score then!" cried a spectator.

Both stars were up in an instant and giving pursuit as team-mates dived in. And now it was Carl who stick-handled the puck out of the mêlée and broke away for a dash, with Whiz frenziedly bringing up the rear.

"Atta boy, Carl! *Down the ice!*" shouted a familiar voice from the sidelines.

Taber High's great star passed the Taber bench at mid-ice and heard Lank's shrill yell as he flashed by. A grim Siddall defense formed to meet him. This time every one in the crowd knew that there would be no flinching ... that Carl was once again the Carl of old ... that he would crash through if it was humanly possible.

Smack! The collision between opposing forces and one lone, speeding figure was violent. All went down in a struggling heap and the puck skidded clear. Carl's dash had been broken up ... and Whiz Deagen, who had trailed him fiendishly, was now in possession of the puck, spinning around toward the Taber net with Taber's defense thrown out of position!

"Stop him, somebody!" screamed Taber.

Bobbing to his feet as he slid across the ice after being joltingly bumped, Carl Hemmer put on an amazing burst of speed in an effort to overtake the fast-traveling Whiz Deagen. Siddall's hockey star evaded Taber defense men as they rushed across the ice in an attempt to cut off his path to the goal.

An instant later he was driving in on goalie Frank Carey who looked particularly helpless in the face of this inspired advance. Fifteen feet behind Whiz, and eating up distance with every frantic stroke, was Carl ... but too late to prevent Whiz's shot. The crowd shrieked its excitement as goalie Carey made a phenomenal stop of a vicious drive—blocking the puck with his chest. The stop, however, pulled him from the mouth of the cage, leaving it totally unprotected as the puck bounded directly in front with Whiz leaping in to take the rebound and finish his job. But, just as his stick was about to make contact with the puck, a figure slid swiftly across the ice and swept the puck to the side. Whiz tripped and fell on Carl and was carried along with him. A terrific mix-up followed with everyone but the goalies involved as the rink became a maelstrom of heart-palpitating, eye-bewildering action.

A minute of play was left as Carl Hemmer, who had suddenly become as a madman on the loose, emerged from a tangle near the sideboards, the puck riding smoothly ahead of his stick. This time the mighty Whiz Deagen was in front of him at center ice, and behind Deagen were Siddall's two defense men, in position.

"He'll never get through that pack!" murmured a Taber fan, nervously. "This looks like an overtime tie game!"

Whiz, preparing to dodge whichever direction Carl might dodge, crouched with stick across his knees. The two stars had managed to reduce each other's brilliant efforts practically to naught thus far.

Approaching his rival at top speed, Carl suddenly turned his skates sidewise and sent up a shower of ice. He veered to the left, then reversed his direction, shot the puck ahead and followed it like a demon. Whiz, lunging to his right, was unprepared for a double shift and a great cry rang out as Carl, outmaneuvering his rival drove on into Siddall's defense. He was crouching low as the defense men sought to body-check him. There was a resounding impact and both defense men left their feet, bumping jarringly to ice. Carl, brought to his knees, the puck jolted from his stick ahead of him, slid after it toward Siddall's goal where a wide-eyed goalie braced himself for the onslaught.

"It's a loose puck!" cried someone. "The goalie's going to bat it out!"

It seemed the only thing to do ... leaving his cage for the moment since no defense men could reach the scene in time to be of help. The Siddall goalie advanced several feet in front of the cage, jabbing out his stick. As he did so, Carl, still sliding in a half-sitting position, hooked out his stick and contacted the puck. The goalie swung at the black object but his stick landed atop Carl's and bounced off.

"Shoot!" begged Lank, from the bench.

And Taber's hockey star, without having time to regain his feet, skidding in close to the goal, punched the puck ahead of him with a sidearm swing, almost under the very feet of a goalie now out of position. The puck turned on edge and rolled into the cage where it snuggled in a corner of the net. The scorer's red light blazed almost simultaneous with the blazing of the timer's gun.

"It's all over!" yelled elated Taber supporters. "What a play!"

It took a moment after that for Taber fans to appreciate that their hockey team had completed an undefeated season ... and that one great hockey star had demonstrated his superiority over another star, almost equally great.

"Awfully sorry you had to get hurt on account of me!" a contrite Carl Hemmer was apologizing the next moment as he clasped Lank's hand.

"I'm okay now!" grinned Lank, in open admiration. "Boy, the bump I took was worth it to see you stand Siddall on their heads!"

"I felt that bump myself," said Carl, pointedly, as Taber rooters gathered hilariously about to cheer their hockey idol whose star was once more high in the heavens. "I felt it," continued Carl a bit huskily, "thanks to you—right where I needed it most!"

THE ICE CYCLONE

"You can't play hockey and you never could!"

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that's so. You're just a fancy skater but your figure eights don't do you any good in a game."

Rand Downey, right wing on the Kirkwood High six, was boiling mad. This fellow, Frederick, the *Great*, Barker, had finally gotten so on his nerves as to cause him to explode. The idea of Coach Howard putting this impossible person on the team at left wing, replacing the veteran Don Keith who was out with a sprained ankle! What did Coach want to do—throw the whole team off its stride and right before the big game with Melville?

"It's true I haven't played much hockey," the slenderly built Frederick was replying. "You must remember, old boy, I didn't come out for the team—I was ... er ... pressed into service when the ... er ... expediency arose."

Frederick was like that. Big words, stilted sentences, haughty, superior manner. He didn't have a close friend in the school; kept pretty much to himself; played a lone hand when it came to sports. Track and ice skating had seemed to be his two favorite athletic diversions. In his peculiarly aloof way he had stepped out and won the two-twenty and four-forty, setting county records for both events. On the ice, Frederick had exhibited a brand of fancy skating which had astounded the natives.

"I should be able to skate," he had said, after winning the cup with ease. "My folks spent a couple years in Canada and, you know, babies are born with skates on their feet up there."

It had been Coach Howard's idea that the conversion of Frederick, the *Great*, Barker into a hockey player, would add amazing strength to the team. Strangely enough, the newcomer to Kirkwood had not been enthusiastic about the thoughts of playing.

"Ice skating is a game of grace and beauty of movement," had been his explanation. "I just don't see anything to this rough and tumble business."

But the old appeal "for the honor and glory of the school" had won Frederick over. He had readily agreed to Coach Howard's declaration that Kirkwood High possessed few really good skaters although he was not so sure that his addition to the team would have the bolstering effect predicted.

"I'll do the best I can," had been his promise.

"You'll be a whiz," the coach had encouraged. "A man as fast on his feet as you? Why, say—when you get this hockey game in your blood, you'll burn up the ice!"

Thus far, however, Frederick's participation had only succeeded in burning up his fellow players. Rand Downey, who had to play opposite him on the other wing, had reasons to be the most upset.

"I'd like to ask," flared Rand, "how's it come you've always picked soft sports to excel in?"

"What do you mean—'soft'?" Frederick's expression was one of hurt surprise.

"No physical conflict ... no bumping up against a real opponent ... like in football or baseball or—*hockey*?"

"Competition of that sort doesn't interest me," stated Frederick frankly, a flush creeping into his cheeks.

"You mean," taunted Rand, bent on driving home his thrust, "that you'd rather not mix it with anybody ... you're afraid of getting your hair mussed or a punch in the eye or your nose rubbed in the dirt."

Fellow players glared at their new team member, obviously in support of Rand's accusation.

"I admit," answered Frederick, unblinkingly, "such things do not appeal to me."

The fellow's absolute candor was amazing. Rand had deliberately set out to antagonize him and here he was, quietly agreeing to everything. Apparently Frederick, who came by his title "the *Great*" through this air of superiority, could not be fussed nor aroused. He made no pretense of that which he was not and indicated quite plainly that he felt entitled to his views on sport.

"I suppose you know, then," fired Rand, as a last broadside, "that you play hockey like a lady!"

"Worse than that!" broke in Steve Lucas, captain and center. "It would be different, Fred, if you weren't such a good skater ... but there's no excuse for the way you're side-stepping and skating in circles and dropping the puck at the blue line instead of trying to go through the defense. There's a certain color that applies to guys who pull what you've been pulling. We wouldn't care only we'd give our skates to beat Melville this year."

"And a fat chance we've got with Don Keith out," ranted Bill Stewart, stocky right defense. "He was the spark plug of our team. All you've done is fill us up with carbon!"

"I'm sorry," was the new team member's comment as he unfastened his skates and stepped off the rink. "But why jump me about this? I suggest you take your story to the coach. Any time he wants me to leave the team, I'll be delighted."

Fellow players groaned helplessly as Frederick, the *Great*, Barker walked off, head high.

"He's a conundrum, that bird!" declared Rand. "You'd think he didn't have any fight in him."

"He doesn't when it comes to sports like this," said Bill. "You hit the nail on the head when you razzed him about not wanting to mix it. I can understand now why he's steered clear of us fellows. He's against anything boisterous."

"He's grooming himself to be one of those gentleman sportsmen," twitted Steve, "whose pictures you see in the rotogravure section of newspapers, sitting on a horse, dressed in a polo cap; or else stretched out on a country club veranda, in golf togs. The pictures look swell but most of 'em don't mean any thing."

"He's a grand guy," summed up Rand. "I have to hand it to him for one thing. He's sure satisfied with himself. If I'd bawled any of you birds out the way I did him, I'd have started a free-for-all. He's got the spunk of a caterpillar."

"Coach certainly won't leave him in the line-up after today's game," reassured goal tender Chub

Roland. "We were lucky not to lose. Fred spent about the whole time dodging collisions with the enemy. I think he only went down once. He's a fancy skater all right. He did some of the fanciest shifting I ever saw. Never used his body to block once ... tried to do it all with his stick. I yelled to him once to get in front of his man but he acted like he thought it wouldn't be the gentlemanly thing to do. Too bad he has to be such a lemon. I still think if we could get him steamed up about something—he might surprise us."

"Not that baby!" scoffed Rand. "He's got chronic cold feet. You'll never see him make a showing where he's got to swap bumps with someone else. He says himself that's not his idea of sport. Personally, I wouldn't get any kick out of running races or making fancy doodads on the ice. I'd just as soon take up crocheting."

The Kirkwood ice hockey squad laughed. It had been a hard, tense season with little opportunity to relax against an unusually high brand of competition. That Kirkwood had managed to remain a contender for the state interscholastic ice hockey championship, despite the absence of dependable spares, had been due to the heroic effort of the original six and the excellent guidance of Coach Howard. His latest move, however, in recruiting Frederick, the Great, as a hockey player, had appeared a psychological mistake, affecting as it had, the team's morale. Even sporting accounts of the game were none too complimentary.

"Fred Barker, playing his third game at left wing for Kirkwood," said the *Daily Eagle*, "still left much to be desired. Making allowance for the fact that ice hockey is new to the champion fancy skater, Barker, in the judgment of this sports writer, should be entering more into the spirit of the game and teaming up better with his mates. Time and again, on capturing the puck, he seemed at a loss as to what to do with it, taking some pretty turns about the ice which promised much but produced nothing. Coach Howard still seems of the opinion that Barker is going to fill Don Keith's skating shoes but, on the basis of his performance today, he will have to come along rapidly to even approach Don's stellar ability. Keith-to-Downey-to-Keith used to be the pass combination which brought scores for Kirkwood. Either that or the reverse: Downey-to-Keith-to-Downey with the resultant shot for goal. But Kirkwood has lost her scoring punch, temporarily at least—a punch she sorely needs in the coming battle against Melville, a sextet possessing such defensive power that not a goal has been scored against her the entire season!"

"I suppose you read the papers," was Coach Howard's greeting to Frederick, the Great, Barker on calling him aside at the next practice session.

"Yes, sir," Frederick replied, in a disinterested tone.

"That being the case, it saves me breath," said the coach. "The accounts of your playing were fairly accurate."

"I thought so myself," agreed Frederick.

"But you can do better than this. Why, man—you haven't begun to let yourself out yet! I've seen your fancy skating exhibitions and I know what you can do—your daring leaps and whirls. That airplane dive, as you call it, is one of the most hairbreadth things I've ever seen on skates."

Frederick's face spread into a slow smile.

"That isn't bad, is it?"

"Bad? It's simply great. But why can't you transmit a bit of that dash into hockey? You're doing some nice straight skating but that reckless abandon isn't there. I believe in you, Fred, or I wouldn't have urged you to play, against your own inclination."

The champion fancy skater dug the point of his skate into the ice.

"I know that," he said, with his first show of feeling, "but I can't help it, coach—I'm doing the best I can."

Coach Howard eyed the new left wing shrewdly.

"You're just kidding yourself, Fred," he said, pointedly. "There's something troubling you, boy. It's been troubling you for a long, long while and it's time you were getting it off your chest. Come clean—what is it?"

A hurt expression came into Frederick's face which he ordinarily kept well masked beneath the external attitude of indifference.

"You wouldn't understand if I told you," he returned, huskily.

"Perhaps I would."

"How could you when I don't really understand myself? All I know is that I've never had a desire for direct competitive sport. It dates back to the days when I was sickly and my parents discouraged me from taking part in the games and bucking up against the stronger fellows. I was disappointed, of course, and it sort of killed something inside me."

"You can get it back," reassured Coach Howard. "Give yourself a chance."

Frederick shook his head, sorrowfully. "Since I couldn't go in for the sports other fellows were playing, I developed the habit of staying off by myself. That hasn't helped me, either. I guess I've been too retrospective. There's such a word, isn't there?"

The coach smiled, sympathetically. "I think so—but I've been so busy with my present that I haven't had time to look backward. You shouldn't let the past have such a hold on you, Fred—snap out of this! You're missing half the fun in sport!"

Frederick nodded, ruefully. "I'd give a lot to be able to get enthused," he confessed. "When I see the kick the other fellows get out of playing, I know something must be wrong with me. All my athletic development has been individual and team play has left me cold. You want to know what hockey seems like to me? It's just a series of cracked heads and shins and so many knockdowns."

Coach Howard laughed. "It's because you haven't thrown yourself into the game ... haven't caught the spirit of it," he insisted.

"I guess I haven't," Frederick conceded. "As an individualist, I'm impressed with the fact that, in hockey, skating is secondary to the game and I get no particular thrill out of chasing a puck and banging at it with a stick. Neither can I see any necessity for letting myself be bumped to the ice if I can possibly help it. For that reason, some of the fellows are insinuating that I'm yellow. I hope you

don't think that?"

"Frankly," said Coach Howard, "you're one fellow I can't catalogue. You've got me astraddle a fence."

"Well, I feel better for talking with you," said the champion fancy skater. "I've never opened up like this before. No one's seemed to care...."

"No one's cared because you haven't seemed to care what they were doing," explained the coach. "They won't warm up to you until you warm up to them—that's only natural."

Frederick swallowed, miserably. "Then I really don't know what I can do about it," he said, hoarsely. "I'm so used to doing things by myself that I don't feel at home with other fellows. I guess you'd better call it 'quits', Coach. I wouldn't want to lose the Melville game for you ... almost anyone would be better in there than me ... no matter how good a skater I am...."

"Nonsense!" decided Coach Howard. "This game means the championship—but if it meant a chance for you to win out over yourself, I'd rather play for that. You're going to discover one of these times, Fred, that you need hockey much more than hockey needs you and when you do—well, you'll be a different fellow!"

All of Kirkwood sat on the anxious seat the day of the Melville game. It was biting cold and clear and the rink was in the fastest condition of the season. There could be no complaint of the day or of the ice. The only cause for concern was the Kirkwood team which had played uncertain hockey since the loss of Don Keith. But Coach Howard had been keeping a surprise up his sleeve for the fans. Don's sprained ankle was well enough for him to play a part of the game, properly taped. When he reported for duty before the contest and told his overjoyed comrades that he had been working out secretly for the past three days, the old morale returned. The feeling of apprehension over Frederick, the Great, Barker vanished at once; in fact, Kirkwood's new left wing was left completely out of the demonstration, sitting quietly on a bench in the corner of the locker room.

"I'm glad to see you back, Keith," he welcomed, when Kirkwood's veteran, limping slightly, came back to his locker.

"Glad to be back," Keith rejoined, eyes gleaming. "We've got to take that chesty outfit today. Can you imagine their not even being scored on all year? Have to watch out for their crack centre, Scotty Lathrom. He's the backbone of their offense and defense ... one of the best poke-checkers in the game!"

"We'll lay for him all right," promised right wing Rand Downey. "Boy, it seems like old times again. We've got the winning combination now!"

Frederick, marveling at the revival of spirit, studied the fellow who was responsible for it. Don Keith possessed, in addition to a sturdy physique, a radiant, aggressive personality. He commanded attention and inspired others to follow his leadership. Noting this, Frederick envied Don Keith sincerely.

"If you can't feel a thing," he said to himself, consolingly, "you can't be a part of it."

Coach Howard, as the team left the locker room for the rink, patted Frederick on the back.

"I'll be using you to relieve Don," he informed. "So be ready to go in there and tear loose!"

Frederick smiled, ironically. He knew he'd be regarded as doing his bit today if he merely helped hold the fort until Don should get his "breathers" and go charging back into the fray. Perhaps it was just as well. He'd only consented to play hockey as a duty to the school and, this way, whatever the outcome of the game, no one could hold him directly responsible.

Don Keith received a tremendous ovation from home town supporters as he skated on the ice. Frederick joined the secondary forward wall and practiced pass work. The Melville team flashed by, a rugged looking outfit.

"Where's this Frederick, the Great, person?" a voice suddenly shrieked.

Frederick looked about, surprised, and found himself confronted by Melville's grinning star, Scotty Lathrom.

"So you're the champion fancy skater, eh?" Scotty accosted, in a loud voice which attracted the attention of the crowd. "Well, I've been waiting to meet you, brother, because I've worked out a few gyrations I'd like to see you duplicate!"

Frederick stared at his unexpected challenger, coldly. What was this Scotty Lathrom trying to do—get his goat—or make him look foolish before the fans?

"If you thought you were so good," he replied, quietly, "why didn't you enter the fancy skating competition?"

"I'm going to next year," announced Scotty. "And I'm going to pull some stuff they never saw before. Look at this one!"

Melville's crack hockey player spun about on the sides of his skates and went into a roll.

"That's easy," said Frederick, and followed suit, reproducing the roll with an even more polished finish.

"But that's not all of it!" Scotty called, and rolled to the side, doing a surprise handspring, picking up the roll again, then going into another handspring, alternating from side to side and with a cadence that was pretty to watch. "There you are!" he cried, as the crowd applauded.

Frederick felt the competitive urge well up within him. He forgot for the moment that this meeting between Kirkwood and Melville was essentially for the playing of hockey. Here was an individual who dared meeting him on his own ground—who defied the ice skating champion! The stunt that Scotty had pulled was a new variation, one in which Frederick was not practiced, but the crowd had begun yelling for him to repeat the trick as Scotty stood by, banteringly.

"I guess that stumps you, doesn't it?" taunted Melville's crack centre.

Rand Downey, with other members of Kirkwood's team, watched the developments with great interest and no little amusement.

"Frederick, the Great's in a hotbox now," chuckled Rand. "If he refuses to try to duplicate Scotty's

stunt, he admits he's licked; and if he tries it and flops, he's just as bad off! Serves the old boy right. Scotty's hitting him in the only place where he can be hurt!"

Deadly serious and grimly determined, Frederick skated off across the ice, whirled and came back in a series of rolls. Twice it seemed as though he was about to go into a handspring but checked himself and continued on. It was obvious that the maneuver was a new one to him and that he was feeling his way before actually attempting the stunt. Scotty winked at fellow team mates.

"Stumped on the very first one," he said, in a loud voice, "and I've got plenty of others!"

But Frederick, with confidence in his own ability, was not admitting that he could not duplicate Scotty's performance. He suddenly left his feet on a lunge to the side, struck the ice on his hands and attempted the handspring. He was off balance, however, and succeeded only in throwing himself, joltingly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Scotty. "She's not as simple as she looks, is she?"

Frederick, red of face, got to his feet, painfully. He immediately tried again with similar embarrassing results.

"Here's an easier one," cried Scotty, as the crowd murmured its hilarity at the impromptu skating match.

"Look—he's written his name 'Scotty!'" exclaimed an amazed spectator as Melville's star finished his complicated twistings and turnings. "Marvelous!"

"Let's see you write *your* name!" called Scotty.

"You think you're clever!" flashed a greatly chagrined Frederick. "I'll show you...!"

But the referee's whistle screeched, announcing time for the starting of the game.

"Just a second!" Frederick pleaded as he turned toward the referee.

"Off the ice!" waved the referee, "all you fellows who aren't in the opening line-up!"

"Well, see you again some time!" razzed Scotty.

A thoroughly upset fancy skating champion found his way to the bench and slumped down upon it. He had not cared what might be thought of him as a hockey player but to be humiliated on his own rink in his own sport ... this was terrible!

It was half way through a blistering first period before Coach Howard sent Frederick in, along with two other spares, to replace Kirkwood's regular forward wall. The score was nothing to nothing and the hot pace of the battle had the crowd on edge.

"Hello—if here isn't Frederick, the Great!" kidded Scotty. "Here's hoping he's as good a hockey player as he is a fancy skater! If he is, it'll be duck soup!"

Frederick glared. This Scotty had the habit of 'riding' his opponents, all those who let themselves be 'ridden'. And Frederick was taking the bait nicely.

"You'll never get past centre ice!" Scotty predicted, as Frederick captured the puck a few seconds later.

Kirkwood's substitute left wing said nothing but skated back around his own cage and came out on the other side with a burst of speed. He put more behind his drive than he had ever displayed in a game and the crowd cheered hopefully. At mid-ice a crafty Scotty waited, grinning as he saw his own left wing force Frederick toward the centre, away from the sideboards.

"He's my meat!" muttered Melville's star, and hooked out his stick as Frederick tried desperately to pass him. The crook of the stick stole the puck so cleanly from Frederick that he did not realize it was gone for several flashing strides. When he did pull up short, it was to hear the crowd roaring as Scotty, on a scintillating dash into Kirkwood territory, had fired a shot at goal-keeper Chub Roland. Chub fended the puck off with his stick but Scotty, following up, clubbed the disc viciously and sent it flying past Chub into the net for the first goal of the game!

"There, Freddy!" taunted Scotty, as the Melville stands went crazy with joy. "That's how to play hockey!"

A hot retort was on the tip of Frederick, the Great's tongue when Coach Howard hastily threw his regular forward wall back into the game.

The first period ended with Melville leading, one to nothing, and Rand Downey, whose contempt for the fancy skater exceeded that of his team mates, had certain things to say to Frederick in the locker room.

"You let that baby talk you out of a score," he branded. "He got you so up in the air you didn't know whether you had a puck or an egg at the end of your stick."

"He won't get the puck away from me again!" Frederick replied.

"He won't have to," snapped Rand. "All that Melville bunch has to make is one goal to win their games. Here we are, playing our fool heads off and you...!"

"Oh, shut up!"

Kirkwood's right wing stared at Frederick unbelievably.

"What did you say?"

"I said shut up!" repeated Frederick, a look in his eyes that Rand had never seen before.

Fellow team mates gasped their amazement. Was Frederick actually commencing to come to life?

"How's your ankle?" the coach asked Don Keith, concernedly.

"Holding up okay," answered Kirkwood's veteran. "That Melville defense is the toughest I ever went up against. We never got a puck near their cage this period. They broke up practically every formation at mid-ice. And that guy Scotty is seemingly in every play! Fred wasn't to blame for that score.... Scotty went through the entire team...!"

The second period was a torrid repetition of the first except that neither six was able to score. Frederick twice got in the battle for three minutes each, renewing his feud with Scotty but accomplishing nothing. Instructions were to play defensive hockey while the spares were in. Should Melville jam through another goal, Kirkwood's every chance would be gone. Now there was a glimmering possibility of a tie resulting could Kirkwood get the puck past goalie Pete Hardy who was fighting to establish a season's record of not having been scored upon.

"My ankle begins to feel lame," Don admitted during the intermission between the second and last

period. "Come on, boys—let's give 'em everything we've got. I'd like to take the grin off that Scotty's face!"

"So would I!" echoed a voice, impulsively.

Team members glanced about, questioningly. The voice belonged to Don's understudy, the champion fancy skater. Frederick appeared self-conscious and a bit confused as attention focused upon him.

"You ought to feel like taking Scotty's grin off," rapped Rand, mercilessly, "you're the guy who put it on him!"

"I know it," answered Frederick, lamely, "but...!"

"Aw, razzberries!" exploded Rand. "We've had enough of you already!"

A tired but grim Kirkwood six skated out on the ice to resume hostilities in the third period. Melville, deciding to coast in on the one goal lead, threw up a stiffer defense than ever. As the minutes crawled along, the one goal advantage grew mountainous. Don Keith, handicapped as he was by the weak ankle, had played a stellar game but even his presence in the line-up had failed to penetrate the Melville goal. The visitors were just too good. Hats off to the greatest team a state high school had ever produced!

"Oh, oh—Don is out!" A sympathetic murmur went the rounds as Kirkwood's right wing was helped to the sidelines.

"Go after 'em, Freddy!" Don called to the man who was to substitute for him, as Frederick got up from the bench, peeling off his sweater. "Don't let that Scotty kid you! He'd like to make a monkey out of everybody if he could!"

"I know," Frederick shot back. "I've got a score to settle with him!"

Certain fans could not suppress a groan as Frederick, the Great, took Don Keith's place. But these certain fans had no way of knowing, at the moment, that something had snapped inside the champion fancy skater—a something that had been holding him back for years. First evidence of the change was a collision which took place at mid-ice between party of the first part and one Scotty Lathrom who became party of the second part, and quite the most worsted party, inasmuch as he did a backward somersault following the impact while the party of the first part simply rebounded and set off into Melville territory at a blazing pace.

"Yea, Frederick!" shrieked astonished Kirkwood rooters, as the fellow who had never shown any fighting spirit in a hockey match, zig-zagged through to within fifteen feet of the Melville cage and blazed away. His shot was accurate, a startled Melville goalie warding it off with his chest pad. Frederick became lost the next instant in a slashing pile-up in front of the Melville cage as he threw himself after the puck, trying madly to get his stick on it again and to drive it into the net for a score. It was the first time during the game that Kirkwood had gotten deep within Melville territory and Frederick's feat was immediately heartening to his fellow players.

"Face-off!" cried the referee, diving into the mêlée and separating Scotty and Frederick, both of whom had fallen over the puck.

"You're not mad are you?" joshed Scotty, and grinned.

As the puck was dropped between them, Scotty knocked the puck to the side. It whanged against the sideboards with Frederick again in furious pursuit. He bumped shoulders with Melville's solidly built right defense and sat down suddenly but was up in an instant and trailing the defense man who had set off down the ice. Frederick was using his speed and his natural skating wizardry now as he glided around from behind, crouched low, hooked the puck away from the defense man, sent up a shower of ice as he swerved and did an about-face. Most of the Melville team was ahead of him as he cut back toward the Melville goal amid the wildest sort of clamor. A pop-eyed Rand Downey came sliding in from nowhere, pounding his stick on the ice.

"Shoot it to me!" he yelled, "to me!"

And Frederick shot, scooting the puck across the ice on a perfect pass.

Almost at once, Rand was covered, so that he stopped short and swung to the side.

"Right back at you!" he shouted, and backhanded the puck on a sizzling drive.

"Holy cats!" screamed Kirkwood's veteran right wing, dancing about on his injured ankle. "Who said Freddy couldn't play hockey? The guy's gone goofy! He's a whiz! Look at him spear that puck, will you? And look at him dodge in there—right on top of the goalie! Oh! Oh!... A perfect feint! He's pulled the goalie out of his cage and there goes his shot!... It's IN... Man alive! Freddy's the first to put a puck inside that Melville net!!!... Oh, am I glad I had to leave the game?... Oh, this is wonderful!... Look at Scotty!... Where's that grin now, Scotty?... Tied the old score, didn't we?... How much time, somebody?... Three minutes?... You *will* kid that baby about his fancy skating, will you?... Well, how was that for a *fancy* exhibition?"

On the ice, Rand Downey put an arm around the fellow he had cussed, and cried his apology. Team members clapped a fussed Frederick on the back. He knew what team spirit meant now ... knew why fellows fought shoulder to shoulder to try to win for each other ... knew what real comradeship felt like for the first time in his life. And knew it simply because he had been wounded to the quick by an opponent who had thought to have some fun at his expense. Thwarted at answering Scotty's fancy skating challenge, Frederick's only way of getting back at him had been through direct competition. And now he was finding what a thrill actual combat really was! That backward flip-flop that Scotty had taken as a result of their meeting head-on had done Frederick a world of good!

"I'm not through with you yet!" the fancy skating champion told Melville's star centre as the puck went back to be faced off in the centre circle.

Melville team mates glumly consulted one another. It was a shock to have been scored upon since no other opponent had been able to turn the trick. But this Frederick, the whoever he was, would be a marked man from now on! They'd bottle him up and put the cork in.

The puck had scarcely been put back in play than the cyclone struck Melville. It was twisting and turning, taking a zigzag course over the ice, threatening, receding, and threatening again, as a goalie crouched in the mouth of the cage like a Kansas farmer in a storm cellar, afraid any moment that a

little round, black object might blow into the net and take the game with it! Such an exhibition of skating and stick handling had never been witnessed as Kirkwood's substitute left wing put on for the edification of the crowd and one Scotty Lathrom in particular. But Melville, fighting desperately to stand off this tempestuous one-man attack, stopped a stream of shots at the goal, fired either by Frederick or one of his team mates who had been placed in an advantageous position due to his whizzing passwork.

"Half a minute to play—looks like an overtime game!" shouted someone.

A terrific mix-up occurred at centre ice. The cyclone went down, curling up in a heap and with most of the wind taken out of it. Rand Downey grabbed a dazed Frederick up and set him on his feet. The referee's whistle screeched. It looked like someone was going to be penalized but the official called no foul as Scotty separated himself from the tangle and stood swayingly on his feet to face a rival who had shaken Melville's defense to its foundations.

"I still think you're a rotten fancy skater!" he taunted.

But it was Frederick now who did the grinning. And it was Frederick who got the puck on the next face-off, blazing it down the ice on an attempted long shot for goal. The shot was blocked, however, by the Melville left defense but he was set upon almost instantly by Rand Downey and Steve Lucas and Bill Stewart—Kirkwood sending a formation of four into Melville territory in a last second effort to score. So furious was the onslaught, players on both sides went to the ice. In the mêlée the puck was hit into the open between the struggling group and the Melville cage. Scotty and Frederick, near centre ice, set out in a race for the disc. The heaving mass of players blocked the direct path, so Scotty veered to go around it.

"Man, oh man—look at Frederick, will you?..." gasped Don Keith. "He's heading straight for that gang on the ice. He must be going to pull his airplane dive in order to beat Scotty to the puck ... hey! There he goes...!"

Leaving his feet in a spectacular dive through space, Frederick, the Great, Barker, cleared the heads and forms of mates and foemen, arms outstretched, to land on his chest and go sliding across the ice, skimming directly in front of Scotty who catapulted over him and went skidding into the sideboards. Raking out his stick as he slid along, never for one instant having taken his eyes off the puck, the champion fancy skater made connections, clipping the disc so that it upended and rolled, skimming the leg of Melville's desperate goalie as it bounced over and into a corner of the net.

Bang!

At the sound of the timer's gun, Don Keith deliriously hugged Coach Howard and Kirkwood rooters did unaccountable things. They tried mainly to get down on the ice and capture a fellow who had written hockey history with his skates and who was now jabbering about writing something else for the especial benefit of a crestfallen Scotty Lathrom who was sitting dazedly where he had fallen, propped up against the sideboards and staring unbelievably at the final score which read: Kirkwood, 2; Melville, 1.

"Stick around!" cried the champion fancy skater. "See if you can duplicate this!"

And, despite the furious pace he had just undergone, Kirkwood's substitute left wing started a series of intricate maneuvers which held spectators spellbound. Melville team members stopped to look on, Scotty crawling to his feet that he might see the better. Finishing with a flourish, the skater bowed mockingly in the direction of his opponents as he pointed to the lines he had etched into the scarred ice.

Everyone strained their eyes for a moment, then a great shout went up and Melville team members made a hurried rush for the clubhouse, Scotty leading the way. And well he might, for Melville's star centre had already seen more than enough of the figure who had left his now undisputed autograph on the ice:

Frederick, the Great...

CRABBY

Of course it was a nervy thing to do, we'll admit that, but just the same, if you'd known old Crabby Jacobs the way we knew him, you really wouldn't have blamed us. According to our figuring he had it coming to him ... and, after all—what we did wasn't any worse than sending a person a terrible comic Valentine. Besides, it had a good moral to it if Crabby could only see it, and since this was the time of year for people to turn over new leaves and swear to be better and better in every way, why shouldn't Crabby be interested in the resolutions we'd drawn up for him?

I'm not saying whose idea it was since that would be giving me away but I will say this—that all the fellows fell for it at once and Dill, who was taking a sign painting course up at high school, volunteered to fix up what was written so that old Crabby couldn't miss seeing it.

I suppose now you're wondering who Crabby was and just why we had it in for him. Well, that won't take long to tell. Crabby Jacobs was the old geezer who lived by himself in a nice-enough house right close to the bend in the Pierson's Hill road. Where he lived was just outside the limits of the town and the reason he lived there, we guessed, was because he was a good three blocks away from any neighbors. Of course the old fairground property was across the road from him but none of the rickety frame buildings had been used for years. And hardly anybody used the steep Pierson's Hill road except in the winter when it made the best sliding for miles around. At the top of the hill, a quarter of a mile above Crabby Jacobs' place, farmer Durgan and his wife and seven kids lived ... and he was sort of accustomed to boys because he was always mighty nice to us when we'd come out with our toboggans to start in coasting. Why, he even got out his horse one time and helped us level off the snow in places where it was too deep for our runners to track. But Crabby? Say ... it was at the bend, halfway down this mile long hill, that we'd be hitting it up at the greatest speed and it was right here that we'd get stuck. Crabby wasn't going to have any sliding past his place. No siree! It was a darn nuisance to begin with ... and we was always shoutin' and carryin' on and he didn't like it a little bit ... not a little bit!

"But Mr. Jacobs," we'd argue, "you don't own the road and we'll promise not to make a sound when we're going by and we don't see how we're interfering with anything you're doing!"

"I ain't goin' to argue!" he'd reply. "You boys know what's right. Besides, coastin' is dangerous. You might run into somebody comin' around that bend or tip over and hurt yourselves. I'm really doin' you boys a favor by keepin' you from riskin' your necks and this is the thanks I get. Go along now and don't let me catch you slidin' past here again!"

Well, what are you going to do with a customer like this? Old Crabby Jacobs has a good-sized temper when it's stirred up and we don't care to get in a fight with anybody. On the other hand we hate like sixty to give up the swellest coasting we'd had in years.

"Ought to be some way to get around Crabby," says Pete Bagley.

"Or else to get even with him," explodes Rod Evans.

And so we get the idea of the New Year's resolutions. And Dill Saunders, with his knack for lettering, prints what we've thought up on a big piece of cardboard to which we tie a string like we was going to hang a picture. Then we hike out to Crabby Jacobs' and while the fellows hide down around the bend, me and Pete sneak up to Crabby's door and hang the sign on the door knob and then bang on the door real loud. After that we does a different kind of coasting to get out of sight.

It isn't ten seconds later when Crabby comes out on the porch in his shirt sleeves, acting suspicious and excited. He looks all around but he can't see anything so he starts back into the house and then he sees plenty! He lets out a gasp which, on account of the cold air, turns into a puff of white and we can tell from that, he's steaming hot. There's a lot of little white puffs follows as he reads to himself what's printed on the sign.

I, Crabby Jacobs, do hereby resolve—

To get over being cranky

To smile at least once a day

To remember that I used to be young once

To let the boys coast past my house because it's the only real coasting place around and I'm the only one who's MEAN enough to spoil their fun as all the other property owners don't mind!

Sign Here _____
Crabby Jacobs

Wow! You should have seen Crabby's face when he gets through reading this! It's a fiery red and he's jumping about on the front porch, waving his arms as agitated as a kernel of pop corn that's getting ready to pop.

If Crabby could have caught us right then he'd have broken all the resolutions we'd made out for him at once. He's wise enough to know, though, that we must be peeking at him from some place, so he goes to each end of the porch and shakes his fist at the empty air, hoping he's shaking it in our direction. Then he stamps back to the door, tears the sign off and takes it inside, slamming the door after him so hard it's a wonder he don't jerk it off the hinges.

"Well," says Pete, when the eruption is over, "I guess we've fixed things now."

"Yes," says Dill, mournfully, "and just think what's going to happen to that sign I took so much pains lettering. All my beautiful art work ruined!"

"On top of that," adds Rod, "he's probably making up a resolution all his own.... 'I hereby resolve to shoot every member of the gang on sight!'"

"Maybe so," I admits, "just the same I'm not sorry we did what we did. Crabby at least knows right where we stand."

"And meanwhile," moans Pete, "we've got to sit through this swell sliding weather...."

"Which we'd have had to do anyhow," I reminds. "You guys wait a little while. Don't jump on this idea too quick. Give those resolutions time to bump around inside Crabby's head. You can't tell ... he might all of a sudden get *magnanimous*."

"If he gets anything like that word sounds," says Rod, doubtfully, "there's no hope for us."

"Go on!" I laughs. "I had to define that word and I know what it means—to raise yourself above what is low, mean and ungenerous!"

Rod shakes his head.

"Less hope than ever," he comes back. "Fellows, we might as well put up our toboggan and go in for ice skating. As long as Crabby's on this hill, we're sunk!"

It's a wise army that knows when it's defeated because then it doesn't waste time fighting for lost causes or suffering any needless casualties ... and, in our case, we don't have to do any more scouting to know that our one-man enemy will be on the warpath with double vengeance from now on. So, though we outnumber him nine to one, we decide to follow the words of the bird who said, "discretion's the better part of valor" and to steer clear of Crabby altogether.

"Only thing I wish for now," says Dill, "is a thaw!... If this good sliding weather keeps up it's going to be a heartbreaker."

But you might know the weather man would want to rub it in. Seems like somebody must have told him we couldn't use Pierson's Hill for coasting because he hands out a perfect assortment of cold, clear days and moonlight nights with just enough snow sprinkled in to make us cry for mercy.

"If that hill was only inside the city limits I'd be for taking the matter up with the town council," says Pete, "and getting them to pass an ordinance ordering the road to be closed for our use. Then old Crabby could holler his head off and it wouldn't do him any good."

But though we exercised our brains every way we knew how, we couldn't seem to hit on a plan of getting old Crabby to be a sport. He just didn't give a care what other folks did so long as they didn't irritate him. And the moment they did, he let them hear about it. After that folks would usually leave Crabby alone like we were doing ... which meant that he'd come off victorious, whether he was right or wrong.

About a week later, when we're all feeling something like Washington's soldiers that winter at Valley Forge, Rod comes running up with a piece of real news.

"What do you know, guys?" he shouts. "I just came by the depot and Crabby's leaving town!"

"Get off!"

"He never left town in his life!"

"Quit your kidding!"

"Absolute fact!" replies Rod. "I can't believe my eyes but I sneak up and speak to the ticket agent and he tells me Crabby's been called to Northport on account of the serious illness of his sister."

"Gee, that's too bad," says Pete. "I mean, in another way, it's pretty good!"

"How long do you suppose he'll be gone?" I asks.

"No idea," answers Rod, "but figure it out for yourself—if she's good and sick she won't be over it in a day. Say, if this weather only holds out...!"

"Now's when it'll probably thaw," puts in Dill, with his usual pessimism, "but let's go out and see what the slide looks like."

It's about a mile across town to Pierson's Hill from where we are but that mile disappears in a little over five minutes. Just goes to show how crazy we were about coasting.

"Say, guys, the hill's in great shape!" calls Pete, who's beaten us by half a block. "She's iced!"

Sure enough! There's walls of snow on both sides the road but the tracks in the center are worn down and frozen where farmer Durgan has driven his heavy sled into town and back. We start climbing the hill, smoothing out a few rough places as we go. It isn't long before we come in sight of Crabby's house, setting up there on the bend.

"See," points out Rod, "he's gone all right. The blinds are all down."

"Boy, oh boy!" chuckled Dill. "I'm not wishing his sister any bad luck but...!"

And then we come close to the bend and all the fellows let out a holler at once as they caught a glimpse of the hill.

"Well, what do you know about this?"

"The old skinflint!"

"Sand!"

Sand is right. Bright, yellow sand sprinkled thick all across the road up above, around and below the bend. Sand by the wheelbarrow load and a little path dug in the snow from a window in his basement to the edge of the bluff where it had been dumped off on the road. All this testifying to the fact that Crabby Jacobs had worked hard and long to keep us from having any fun while he was gone.

"Gee, looks like he'd almost undermined his house to get the sand to do this!" observes Dill, glumly. "But leave it to Crabby to put a crimp in us. It'll take us two nights to get this hill in shape for sliding...."

"And by that time he may be back," groans Pete.

"Besides," says Rod, "there's no water near here to put on the road after we clear off the sand. We'll have to carry it clear from Mr. Durgan's!"

"Just the same," I puts in, "let's show Crabby he can't stump us. We're going to coast on this hill while he's away no matter how much work it takes to fix things."

"You bet we are!" echoes Pete, and the gang chimes in.

It turns out to be some job! Even worse than we expect. We set to work with shovels to clear away the sand and then pack in some new snow and pour water over it from pails we've loaded on our toboggan and carried from Durgan's.

"Old Mr. Jacobs is mighty sore, boys," warns Mr. Durgan. "Better be sure you're not around when he comes back. I think you're taking a chance trying to slide on this hill again."

"Well, he can't do any more than chase us off," answers Dill, but Mr. Durgan shakes his head.

"You can't tell," he says. "Mr. Jacobs is a mighty queer man."

All of which doesn't help us feel any better. But the second night we've got the hill in wonderful shape and we're having such a good time that we forget all about Crabby even existing. Talk about coasting! Say, the first time down the hill we broke all long distance records. You know, Pierson's creek is at the bottom and the farthest we'd ever gone before was just to the bridge but this trip we're still traveling like the wind and go about half a block beyond ... a good mile and a quarter's slide.

"Wow!" yells Pete. "If we never take another coast, this was worth all the trouble we've been to...!"

"Yeah," kids Dill, "but remember this ... the farther we slide, the farther we've got to walk back!"

"In the snow for that wisecrack!" say Rod, and pushes Dill head first into a big drift.

You can see from this how good we're feeling. The old moon is out, a little lopsided but almost full. There's quite a stiff breeze blowing, though, which races big hunks of clouds across the sky. The kind of weather Pete says is nice enough now but which has all the earmarks of a change.

Well, we're on our way up the hill again, talking and joshing, when the wind brings us the three long toots of the night train as it's coming into town and somehow it makes us all think of a certain party.

"I wonder how Crabby's sister is?" Rod asks, kind of casual like.

"Aw, he's only been gone a little over two days," scoffs Pete. "You needn't be expecting him back yet!"

"I know ... but maybe that's all the longer his sister could stand him," Rod comes back, with a grin.

"Anyhow, I don't breathe easy till half an hour after every train comes in!"

"Especially when we've all got a sneaking hunch that Crabby, after going to all that work, isn't going to stay away any longer'n he can help!" sums up Dill.

I couldn't tell you now, as I think back, who it was that saw what we saw, right then, first. But I'm here to state that the first glimpse we all got of it sure made our blood tingle.

"Look!" we all seemed to holler at once. "The old fairgrounds!"

On fire! Yes, sir ... and all of a sudden crackling noise followed by a puff and one of the rickety frame buildings across the road from Crabby Jacobs' house bulges at the sides so that fire and smoke comes roaring through. And in no time there's a bright red reflection in the sky growing lighter all the while until the moon's not in it for illumination.

"Gee!" cries Pete. "Looks like the whole fairgrounds is going! You suppose we'll be blamed for it?"

"Why should we?" I asks, as we're running up the hill to the bend.

"Well, it had to start somehow and we seem to be the only guys around!"

"It's tramps that's done it!" hollers Rod. "I saw two dirty looking men hanging around over there about half an hour ago!"

"Sure, but how you going to prove it?" Pete wants to know. "We'd better dig out of here!"

"No use," says I. "If we're going to be blamed, we can't help it now. Our folks know where we are and...."

"Look at that fire travel!" yells Dill. "There goes the building next the road. If it wasn't for this wind!..."

"No fire protection out this far, either," says Pete. "That's why the fairgrounds was moved."

We're up close to the blaze now and it's easily the biggest fire I've ever seen. All the old barns and sheds and display buildings that have been falling to pieces on account of being out of repair make the swellest kind of kindling wood and the flames, helped out by the wind, are leaping high in the air, sucking out for new things to burn. It's a great sight.

"Some hot!" shouts Rod, backing up. "Say, it's melting the ice on our slide!"

It is for a fact! The banks of snow are disappearing along the road, too, on account of the heat.

"Old Crabby must have cast a spell over this hill!" says Pete as we all feel a kind of uncanny feeling creep over us.

Then, Dill, who's watching the flames and sparks as the wind's carrying 'em high across the road, grabs me by the arm and points toward Crabby's house. Holy smoke! There's a spot on the roof that's took fire!

"Goodbye!" calls Rod. "Now we'll be blamed sure!"

"We might beat that out," figures Pete, "if we could get inside and up on the roof."

"Yeah, but who's going to break into Crabby's house?" replies Dill. "Not me!"

The little spot on the roof begins to grow bigger.

"Good night!" yells Pete. "There's another place! In a minute she'll be a goner!"

Honest, I'm standing there, looking on, and no matter how hard I try I can't help feeling sorry for old Crabby. Somehow, it comes over me just then how awful alone he must be and how little real joy he must be getting out of life ... and then to come back and find the only place that's been any comfort to him in ashes...! Well, after thinking of this, if I've had any temptation to rejoice over his misfortune on account of the way he's treated us, it's gone in a hurry.

"Fellows!" I says, "We've got to figure some way to save that house!"

The boys look at me as though they think I'm crazy. Not that they wouldn't have been glad to have done what they could but the whole thing looks so hopeless. And then the idea comes to me!

"Quick, guys!" I calls. "This melting snow! It's great packing! We'll soak it up on the roof!"

I don't need to go any further. The fellows are diving into the snow p. d. q. and in less than a minute we've got a firing line in operation. It takes us a few seconds to get the range but pretty soon great gobs of snow are landing on top and all around the blazing spots and it isn't long before the spots send up a hissing noise, grow dim, and then go black out. But now the old fairgrounds fire is at its height and firebrands are blowing across the road and dropping on Crabby's house like hailstones. By this time folks from town have commenced arriving and some of them join us in the battle. We keep peppering Crabby's roof from all sides, aiming at every place where a blazing spark or firebrand lands and it's a merry fight to keep these places from getting beyond our control.

"If we could only get inside!" says Pete, when it looks like all we can do isn't going to be enough.

"Here's Mr. Jacobs now!" cries someone, and the next instant the most frenzied individual you ever saw comes running up. He takes in what we're doing at a glance.

"Poor old duffer!" someone else says. "He's run all the way out from town!"

"Boys!" gasps Mr. Jacobs, sinking down on the front steps, exhausted, "Here's my keys! If you'd like to get to the roof...!"

I'm nearest to old Crabby and I grab the keys and rush up to the door calling to the fellows to follow me.

"Hurry!" yells a spectator, "There's quite a blaze on the south side!"

It doesn't take us long, once we get in, to race up the stairs, into the attic and to climb out onto the roof from there where, joining hands, we lower Pete to where the worst blaze is. Pete, using his heavy woolen jacket, beats out the flames ... and the crowd cheers.

Looking down, I see the white face of old Crabby staring up and hear him shout, in a high, nervous voice: "That's the way, boys!... That's the way!"

We stick on the roof after that till the danger's all over and then, tuckered out, we slide into the attic and crawl down the ladder into the house.

"Whew!" says Dill, "I'm glad I don't have to fight fires for a living!"

"All I can say is," joshes Pete in a low voice, "it's a lucky thing for Crabby we decided to go coasting no matter how hard he tried to keep us from it. Otherwise we wouldn't have been out here and Crabby would have been minus...."

Just then, as we reach the first floor landing, we come face to face with a familiar looking something.

"Our resolutions!" cries Dill. "And look—he ... he's *signed* 'em!"

Sure enough. There's our cardboard with Dill's fancy lettering, propped up against the wall. The heading "I, Crabby Jacobs, do hereby resolve—" stands out strong and, in large but shaky handwriting, on the line we've drawn for his signature, there's the name "*Crabby Jacobs*"....

Say, you'll think we're soft ... but there's something wet comes into our eyes as we look and Dill expresses how we feel when he says, kind of embarrassed, "Gee, guys, when we wanted water we couldn't get it and now...."

Crabby?... Naw—no one calls him that any more. Resolutions? Well, the way he's lived up to the ones we made out for him has made us sort of ashamed of the resolutions we've been trying to keep!

THE SKI BATTLE

To begin with, Reed Markham of the Georgia Markhams, had never seen it snow until his *Pappy* sent him north to a finishing school. He came of what has been described as "warm Southern blood" which perhaps partially explained his feeling that northern schoolmates at Seldon Prep were "cold" to him.

"No wonder you people have to have steam radiators in your homes!" he had been reported as saying once, when provoked at Yankee coolness.

But if Reed, fresh from a land rich in the lore of good old-fashioned hospitality, had felt his sensitive nature react to the more reserved attitudes of those new to him, he had only to remain long enough for cold weather to set in to know that the climate was even icier than the people.

"Brrr!" he murmured, teeth chattering, on the first stinging day of fall. "Why did Pop ever send me to this part of the country? This is terrible! I suppose I'll have to go out and get some heavy underwear and a ... what's that word?... yes—a *winter* overcoat!"

Soft spoken, soft acting, with soft brown eyes and softer black hair, Reed Markham had slid softly into Seldon at the start of the school term. A naturally diffident youth, possessing none too much inclination to make advances, Reed had resented the failure of fellow schoolmates to approach him. On the few occasions that they had, his white teeth had shown, the soft eyes had warmed with a grateful smile and he had done his best to make friends. But a certain self-conscious something—a feeling that he was among fellows who thought differently and acted differently than himself—had always erected a barrier. Sadly, more often bewilderedly, Reed had realized, even as he was speaking to a northern schoolmate, that the youth was not opening up to him. He wondered not a little about this Mason and Dixon line business. Why should fellows be humanly different just because they lived in different parts of the country? Weren't they all Americans? Reed controlled a hot-tempered tongue with difficulty. His softness was a matter of breeding; his temper a matter of inheritance. A fellow must be the gentleman at all times—according to the best traditions of the Markham family. What Reed unfortunately could not know was that his Southern drawl and his obvious culture had been mistaken by his new acquaintances for a sense of superiority.

"Thinks he's too good for us!" Sam Hartley, star athlete of the school had declared, after sizing Reed up. "If this is a sample of Georgia crackers...!"

But Reed had merely felt, in his retiring way, that he—a stranger—should be welcomed by the residents of the north and made to feel at home. Down South, these same fellows would be greeted with unmistakable signs of hospitality, having only to reflect this warmth in return to be accepted in the community. For him, however, to make the first advances in this northern atmosphere, would be a breach of ... well ... call it 'etiquette'...!

The first snowfall Reed had ever witnessed commenced one frigid morning while he was in school. Great, crystal-shaped wet flakes began drifting down, much to his amazement and interest as he gazed from his desk out the window. Yes, he had heard of snow. He had even learned the dictionary definition for it—"ice in the form of white or transparent crystals or flakes congealed in the air from particles of water, and falling or fallen to the earth." And here it was—in the process of *falling*! A quite strange and beautiful sight, Reed thought, recalling pictures he had seen in news reels of snow-covered country, snow battles and snow slides. There was something cotton-like in the flakes which nestled on the window sill and fluffily covered it. Reed felt a twinge in his throat that he knew to be homesickness.

At recess that day, the two hundred other fellows in Seldon Prep made a mad dash for the out-of-doors, plunging into the thickly falling snow and scooping up handfuls of it to pack into snowballs. Reed, standing timidly in the shelter of the doorway, watched a merry battle being waged, numerous snowballs landing with eye-smacking accuracy. He saw Sam Hartley, who seemed to be the ringleader, single-handedly stand off a concerted attempt to roll him in the snow, tripping up his adversaries, stopping them with whizzing snowballs and dodging back and forth across the campus, laughing the while.

"It looks like real sport," Reed admitted to himself.

He was not, however, invited to take part. In fact the fellows appeared oblivious that he was even looking on, having relegated him to the sidelines in their activities weeks before. To voluntarily enter into the fun, Reed could never do. Reaching down he caught up a bit of the snow and crushed it beneath his fingers, watching it melt against the warmth of his hand.

"Funny stuff!" he said.

At that moment the boisterously engaged Sam detected him and became suddenly inspired.

"Hey, fellows!" he shouted. "Look at Reed! He's not used to snow. Let's initiate him!"

And, before the lad from the South could retreat, the Northern army was upon him. Protesting, Reed was dragged out to the center of the campus where grinning youths grabbed up the wet snow and applied it none too gently to his face.

"That's the way—give him the old face wash!" laughed Sam. "How's that snow feel, Reed? Must be pretty dull down South in the winter time, eh?"

Reed's brown eyes flashed as he renewed his struggles to get free, snow in his hair and nostrils.

"And now some down his neck!" someone cried.

Reed felt his collar roughly pulled from the neck and a chilling, spine-tingling sensation as a cold, wet lump went sliding down.

"You guys let me go!" he gasped. "I can't stand this!... Oh!"

"You'll get accustomed to it!" Sam reassured. "This snow is just a starter. It usually gets three and four feet deep here."

Reed groaned inwardly. Snow might have been nice to look at but it was far from attractive or pleasant rubbed on his face and shoved down his back. If the fellows thought this was sport ... and intended to hand out such treatment through the winter ... well, he'd pack up his duds and beat it for home. He just didn't fit in this atmosphere anyway. His father should have known better than to send

him to such a place.

"If Pop knew what I have to put up with!" Reed moaned to himself. "I'll have to write him about it. When he understands...!"

The letter of complaint to the elder Markham was dispatched special delivery that same night, after Reed had made a complete change of clothes and taken a hot bath for fear of possible consequences. To his relief, he contracted no cold, which indicated that he was hardier than he had supposed, having apparently stood the exposure to snow as well as his northern schoolmates.

"That's something, anyhow," he said, with a measure of satisfaction.

His father's reply, also by special delivery, proved disconcertingly unsatisfactory. Rather than sympathizing with his son's growing predicament and distaste for the north, the senior Markham wrote in part:

"I'm frankly ashamed of you, Reed. I spent three of the happiest years of my late boyhood in the north. Did you ever stop to think that it might not be the other fellows—but you?... Analyze yourself, my boy, and see if you can discover what's wrong.

"What's a ducking or two in the snow? Haven't I seen you dive unflinchingly into iced swimming pools? Give me a few dabs of snow every time.

"I'm afraid the fellows are apt to put you down as a poor sport. I must tell you, that is the main reason I insisted on your going north to school ... you were becoming too self-centered. Your boy friends here knew you too well. They were humoring your weaknesses. Don't write me, son, unless it's about your triumphs. After all, you know, you're a Markham ... and, while a Markham may have his faults, he doesn't quit...."

Reed read and re-read what he considered to be an amazing letter. His apparently easygoing, soft-spoken father had suddenly spit fire. No mincing of words here—straight from the shoulder stuff. Even the South, it seemed, could be cold and unfeeling on occasion. Reed bit his lips and slipped the letter in a drawer of his desk.

"I won't write Pop at all," he said, with a flare of hurt Southern pride. "But I'll stick this out, somehow ... or die trying!"

Sam Hartley, of all the fellows Reed had so much as a speaking acquaintance with, became the most detested. As the winter tightened its grip and ice and snow sports were more and more indulged in, the taunting Sam seemed to personify the aggravation of the entire school in its relation to the student from the South.

"If he doesn't leave me alone pretty soon, something's going to happen!" Reed decided one day after submitting to considerable torment. Among other things he had been caught and forced to dive head first into a five foot drift, being first compelled to climb to the top of a fence post as the diving point. Such stunts as this but increased Reed's hatred for snow and further outraged his estimate of northern fellows.

"They're nothing but a bunch of roughnecks!" Reed denounced in private, "who take most of their delight in making me miserable! How I'd like to get even with the crowd of them!"

If wishes had been the father of thoughts, Reed would have been given the power to douse each of the two hundred fellows in the ice-caked water fountain which graced the campus. He would have shouted in fiendish delight at their discomfiture, quite willingly forgetting the supposed propensities of the gentleman. Even a gentleman, Reed had about made up his mind, could give vent, under due provocation, to an expression of righteous indignation. To make the instance more concrete, his patience was being tried to the point of exasperation.

"I wonder what I might be able to do to turn the tables?" Reed commenced to ask himself.

There is an old saying that "he who asks a question must find the answer" or, with equal aptness: "the answer must find him who asks the question." In this case the answer found Reed in the form of Seldon's Annual Winter Carnival.

"As you boys all know," announced the dean in chapel one morning, "this Carnival attracts the populace of the town and surrounding countryside. It has become an occasion to be anticipated. Particularly the spectacular ski jumping event down the now famous slide of Seldon Hill. This season, Sam Hartley, our ski jumping champion has assured me that he will be out to break his former record jump of one hundred and nine feet...."

The rest of Dean Hogart's announcement suddenly meant nothing to one Reed Markham who had been listening, up to this time, with lukewarm interest. Sam Hartley!... Sam Hartley!... Sam Hartley!... There didn't appear to be an activity worthwhile in which he did not prominently figure. Reed was sick of hearing the name mentioned. It was about time that Mr. Hartley was taken down a few pegs. He had the other fellows under his thumb. A suggestion from him and they'd all but tear the school down ... or turn upon the only student from the South to perpetrate further hazings. How they loved to pick on him! And how this Sam Hartley person enjoyed his leadership!

"I've dived from a sixty foot perch and I've sailed gliders," Reed considered, quietly. "I wonder if that's anything like the sensation of shooting through the air on skis?"

With the Carnival but one month away, the majority of the two hundred students went into training for the various sporting events to be run off. The slide, thanks to abundant snow, was in excellent condition and, the first night of practice, Reed waited in the clearing below the incline to watch a group of schoolmates, led by the one and only Sam Hartley, take the jumps.

"Wow!" cried a townsman as Hartley was seen to be whizzing down the slide, first to take-off from long-established precedent. "What form that baby has! Look at his forward crouch ... watch him straighten after he leaves the incline ... there he goes—soaring like a bird! Isn't that beautiful? Oh! Oh! He spoiled his landing ... took a header...."

"Yes, I see he did!" commented Reed, with a surge of satisfaction.

But Reed's blood had tingled at the sight of this magnificently built youth skimming down the slide. Whatever he might think of Hartley personally, he was forced now to concede that the fellow had a natural athletic grace which approached perfection. This was the second sport Reed had seen him in, the first sport having been football.

"This looks like his star event," he estimated. "And it looks like something I could do if I just had a chance to get in some practice without the fellows being wise...!"

Skiing, as the boy from the land of no snow was to discover, was not the easy sport he had imagined. Old Steve Turner, recreational director of Seldon Prep, had smiled as he had listened to Reed's "confidential" proposal.

"But why do you want to learn how to ski when the other fellows aren't around?"

The Southerner's face flushed. "Because I've been laughed at enough," he retorted, and felt sorry that he had even brought himself to speak to the Coach. Northerners were all alike—old or young.

"Perhaps," suggested Old Steve, observing the youth closely, "if you learned how to laugh at yourself before you tried to learn how to ski, you'd get along better."

"I guess," was Reed's rejoinder, "you folks up here have a different sense of humor than I have."

But the upshot of Reed's request that he be taught how to ski in private, was the granting of a concession by Coach Turner wherein Reed was to be excused from his last two study hours for skiing practice on the promise that he would make them up out of school.

"Winter sports are all new to me," Reed explained, his heart warming to the Coach's unexpected kindness. "The other fellows are taking advantage of it. But I've stood just about as much as I'm going to!"

"That's the spirit!" Coach Turner encouraged.

Reed Markham had always been a conundrum to Seldon's recreational director, he was secretly glad to see the boy venturing from his shell.

"You get some skis," the Coach proposed, "and I'll meet you for an hour every day on the old ball field." Then the Coach's face widened in a grin. "But, remember, son—you're setting out to learn a strictly northern sport. You can't take this skiing knowledge back to Georgia with you and do anything with it!"

"I know that!" flashed Reed, in a revelation of pent-up feeling. "But you Northerners think you're so darn good in everything ... I'd like to show you what I can do at your own sport!"

"Go to it!" Coach Turner invited, good-naturedly. "I'll help all I can!"

Curiosity of fellow students was aroused with Reed Markham's continued absence from the study periods at school and this curiosity was intensified when it was rumored around by townspeople that the Southerner had been seen in the company of Coach Turner, both with skis under their arms, hurrying for the enclosure of the ball field. As the gates were locked, it was impossible to see what was taking place within but the inference was evident.

"So Softy's going in for skiing!" Sam Hartley taunted one day as he encountered Reed on the campus.

The Southerner glanced coldly at the fellow whom he so thoroughly detested.

"Well, what of it?" he asked, controlling his smoldering temper with difficulty. This "Softy" nom de plume was a new one.

"Doesn't Softy know that skiing is a he-man's sport?" was Sam's kidding inquiry. "Softy doesn't like snow ... he hates to be rolled in it. What's he going to do when he gets his skis crossed going down hill? Or is he just going to ski on the level?"

"None of your business!" Reed retorted.

Sam laughed and the other fellows with him laughed. The idea of a Southerner ... this Southerner, anyway, taking up the manly sport of skiing! Of course the use of the snow was free.

"When you think you're good," Sam continued, "come over on the slide some night and I'll give you a few lessons on ski jumping."

The fellows winked at one another. If they could ever get Reed Markham on the slide it would be the greatest sport ever. There was no doubt about it—he would be a riot. They could just see him now, his first time down the snow chute, speeding up the incline and floundering off into space! What a howl!

"Yes," urged Tom Carrow, one of Sam's friends and closest rival in the ski jump. "Or, better yet—perhaps you can show *us* something?"

"I doubt that," said Reed, bitingly, "you fellows know all that's to be known!"

And when he walked off, it was Sam who, looking after him, remarked: "There goes the queerest duck I've ever met. He's got spunk, though. Now what the deuce do you suppose he's taking up skiing for? With that superior attitude of his, I should think he'd consider skiing beneath him just because we go in for it!"

Efforts to discover Reed's possible intentions from Coach Turner proved unavailing.

"Reed is preparing for a climactic change which he expects is going to effect Georgia in the next half century," the recreational director explained, in all apparent seriousness. "When Georgia's first big snow comes, Reed hopes to lead his oppressed people from the wilderness...!"

"Applesauce!" branded the inquisitive group about the Coach.

"What if it is?" grinned the director. "I like *applesauce*."

Reed Markham's entry in the ski jumping contest proved the biggest sensation in the history of the school. Students just couldn't bring themselves to believe it although reports, the last week prior to the Annual Winter Carnival, told of Reed's going down the slide. While none of the school fellows were eye witnesses, some of the townspeople had paused in their day's occupations to watch Coach Turner and his lone pupil. They had seen the pupil take three successive tumbles—two at the take-off. "Nasty spills," as one townsman had characterized it. "If I'd taken any one of 'em I'd have stacked my skis

and called it quits. But this kid picks himself up and crawls back up the hill to begin all over again. He listens pretty close to what his Coach has to say and watches this man Turner take a couple of jumps. Then down he goes again. You say he's a Southerner and he's been practicing skiing less than a month? Well, you'd never know it!"

Sam Hartley, meeting Reed after his name had been posted on the bulletin board as a competitor in the feature event, could not resist a crack. He noticed as he spoke that Reed was limping.

"Well, so you took my tip and tried out jumping? How'd you like it?"

"Nothing much to it," was Reed's laconic reply.

His superior way again.

"What do you mean, there's nothing much to it?" rejoined Sam, a bit peeved.

"Not after gliding," Reed explained, "it's rather tame."

"*Gliding?*" repeated a crowd of interested fellows. "Where did you ever do gliding?"

"Where do you suppose?" Reed asked, his soft eyes burning.

Later, through Coach Turner, who had gained a degree of Reed's confidence, astounded Seldon Prep schoolmates learned that this quiet mannered, self-effacing youth, had won the Southern States Gliding Contest with a flight of six hours and fourteen minutes ... and with a glider he had built himself. Sam Hartley, when he heard this, spent some uncomfortable moments running a finger underneath a tight collar band.

"How far has this *Softy* ski jumped?" he asked the Coach, finally.

Upon this point, however, Coach Turner was non-communicative.

"You'll find out the day of the meet," he said.

Seventeen of an enrollment of two hundred were entrants in the famed ski jump which was the event responsible for the big turn-out of spectators. Seldon Prep was one of the few northern schools giving attention to ski jumping and the fact was recognized by news reel camera men who stationed themselves below the incline with cameras commanding a range of the landing area. With ice skating and bob-sled races out of the way, the course along the ski slide and beyond it was lined with a colorful winter crowd. The sky was overcast with just a suggestion of snow in the air. Newspapers, having gotten wind of the Southern boy's participation in the meet, had advertised Reed Markham as the "dark horse" so that spectators were discussing him and trying to pick him out.

Seldon's method of operating the ski jump was a system of her own. Sam Hartley, as defending champion, was entitled to jump last. The other competitors were required to draw lots for places and a sober-faced Reed winced as he found that he had drawn number "one."

"So I've got to start the meet," Reed murmured to himself. "Here's a tough break right off."

"Remember," warned Coach Turner, who was the official in charge, "for distance to be counted on your jumps, you must land clean, on your skis, and continue. What happens after that, of course, is of no consequence. But no jumps will be recognized if the jumper falls in landing. Is that clear?"

The contestants nodded and looked to their skis. All were atop the hill which provided a fine view of the surrounding country ... the Seldon Prep school buildings and grounds on the right ... straight ahead and precipitately down in the valley—the town of Seldon. The Rapid River separated the town from the school property. The clearing in which the skiers were to land was a park on the Seldon Prep end of the bridge. Skiers completing the jump successfully would carry on, passing over the bridge and coming to a stop on the other side the river. Either that or turn their skis sidewise and bring up short, risking a tumble into the banked snow on the sides around the clearing. To the left, looking from the top of the hill, was open country. The landscape today looked particularly attractive since a thin coating of additional snow had fallen the night before. The sliding lane was dotted black with humanity ... the dots merging into a blotter-like area below where the skiers were to finish.

"Suppose you're all ready to *take* us?" queried Sam as he skied over beside Reed who had knelt to be sure his feet were firmly fastened to the skis.

Reed gave no answer. In truth, his heart was pounding like mad. He did not dare venture a comment for fear his voice would quaver. This thing of demonstrating before a crowd he felt to be hostile; schoolmates waiting to ridicule, and in a sport he had attempted to master within a short, concentrated period, had all tended to affect Reed's nerves. Thousands had watched the glider contest and he had not cared. But never had he wanted so much to make good ... to give these swell-headed Northerners a Southern spanking—where it hurt the worst—in their own sport.

"Each contestant gets three qualifying jumps," announced Director Turner. "And three chances to better the marks of his opponents. If he fails he, of course, drops out. Are you ready, Reed Markham?"

"Yes, sir!" said Reed, and wondered in a flashing thought, what his father would say if he could see him now.

"Course clear!" came the shout from below and the small figure of an official, looking up, waved a green flag at him.

Conscious that every eye was on him, the fellow from down South prepared to take-off. He surveyed the incline up which he must shoot and calculated the breeze which was blowing, taking these factors into account as though he were about to leave the ground in a glider.

"Well, here goes!" he said, and caught his breath as he whizzed down the slide.

A white ribbon of snow passed him with almost express train speed; he saw a kaleidoscopic sea of faces, crazily distorted as he shot downward; heard the excited murmur of the crowd which broke into a wild "Ah!" as he crouched and took the air. Below him a rough horseshoe of humanity, blurred trees, houses, the river ... and down, down, down ... swooping low ready for the landing ... he was wavering, losing his balance ... something wasn't quite right....

"A great take-off!" breathed champion Sam Hartley, following the Southerner's flight. "But he's going to crash!... Too bad!..."

Striking on one ski, Reed desperately tried to keep his feet but was catapulted instead, landing head first in a mound of snow and narrowly missing a rim of spectators. Willing hands reached for him and

pulled him out, shaken and gasping.

"You all right?" asked the official who had waved him down.

"Yes," Reed reassured, recovering his skis.

"Too bad, kid!" sympathized an onlooker. "That first jump of yours might have been a record if you'd kept your feet."

Reed glanced at once at his landing place. He had come down beyond the hundred foot mark.

"Well," was his comment, "all I can do is try again!"

"The boy's got nerve!" somebody nearby remarked.

Champion Sam Hartley's first jump gave early evidence of his superb form when he broke his own record with a leap of one hundred and eleven feet. He mounted the hill, grinning jubilantly and eyeing the fellow from down South who was about to take off on his second try, as much as to say, "Beat that, if you can, you *beginner!*"

"He's good all right," Reed conceded. "This gliding through the air and keeping your balance without wings of any kind is no small trick. When you land it's usually harder, too."

Setting himself grimly, Reed leaned forward.

"He's off!" cried the crowd.

Hurling off the incline, body perfectly poised, the only contestant from the South carried well over the landing field and came down as gracefully as a bird. This time there was no wavering, his return to earth was as beautifully maneuvered as a pilot's three point landing. There followed a mighty cheer from the crowd!

"Holy smoke!" gasped Sam, staring. "I believe he's ... yes, sir—that Georgia riddle has topped my mark. The question is—how much?"

A few seconds later the crowd thrilled at the megaphoned announcement that Reed Markham, number one, had been credited with a jump of one hundred and thirteen feet, six inches!

"Hey, Sam!" kidded Tom Carrow who was now third with a jump of ninety-eight feet. "You've got your work cut out for you!"

"Don't I know it?" Seldon's champion returned. "I can't let that baby beat me. I'd never hear the last of it—after all the razzing I've handed him."

For the first time since he had come to Seldon Prep, Reed Markham was supremely happy as, with the plaudits of the crowd resounding in his ears, he toiled up the ice-coated hill to the starting place. Let this Sam Hartley person top this mark if he could. Now the ski was distinctly on the other foot! Sam had broken his own mark and he, Reed, who had taken up skiing but a month before, had topped that! Pretty good for a Southern boy who apparently wasn't considered much good at all!

"Great stuff!" greeted Sam, considerably to Reed's surprise. "That's the greatest jump I ever saw!"

"Thanks," said Reed, and scowled. "What else can Hartley say?" he asked himself, trying to explain the champion's gesture of sportsmanship. "But I'll bet those Northerners are really burning up!"

Trying desperately, the defending champion failed to equal even his previous distance on the next two jumps. Reed, meanwhile, reserving his right as the leading jumper, did not take his turns. And, when each of the other rivals failed in their third tries to better the mark, Reed felt his nerves tingling as the fellow he detested strapped on his skis for his last attempt.

"He can't beat it!" something told Reed. "I'm going to win! I'm just a novice ... a rank amateur ... but I'm going to beat this cocksure Northerner. They will laugh at a Southerner, will they? This'll fix 'em, and maybe I won't have something to write Dad!"

Reed was still exultant as a breathless crowd, pulling for the local favorite to come through, cheered mightily with Sam Hartley's all-important take-off. Reed followed Sam's form as it swept majestically off the incline and sailed outward over the clearing. His eyes strained with sudden concern as he noted that Sam had made a prodigious leap and was coming down close to his own record distance. Sam struck the slope, wavered, thrashed his arms violently to keep his feet, succeeded and continued on down over the bridge amid a mad tumult.

"He did it! He topped that Markham fellow's distance!" shouted a spectator. "What ski jumping! Records being broken right and left!"

Reed felt nervous perspiration ooze out upon him. Now he had it all to do over again. This was hair-raising, blood-chilling competition. Reduced now, just to the two of them, it would be a bitter fight to the finish ... a battle with no quarter asked and no quarter given ... between North and South.

A tickled Sam Hartley, accepting congratulatory pats on the back, stationed himself below to await his Southern rival's next jump. He waved his defiance at the figure on top of the hill. Reed Markham would have to surpass one hundred and fifteen feet to take the lead from the champ.

"I guess that finishes him!" Sam said in a low tone to overjoyed schoolmates. "But, boy—he's made me do some tall jumping!"

Racing down the slide, determined to best his previous jumps, Reed fairly shot out into space.

"Good night!" exclaimed Sam, face sobering. "That guy's a regular kangaroo!... Hey! Look out, kid!... Look out the way!"

It happened quickly—a couple of playful kids chasing each other across the snow and one of them directly in the path of the descending ski jumper. Reed, looking down, saw that his landing was to be fraught with peril for himself as well as the youngster. There was only one thing to do. With complete disregard for himself he twisted his body in air, hurled himself forward and, just clearing the startled kid, struck the ground on the tips of his skis, upended and rolled and slid for some feet, finally colliding with a tree, where he lay, stunned. Even so, the point of his landing was in excess of the distance Sam had made, indicating that, had he been able to come to earth without incident, Sam's record might once more have been eclipsed.

"How are you, fellow?" asked Sam, the first one to him, sitting the dazed Reed Markham up and looking him over, anxiously.

"I—I'm all right, I guess. I—I missed the kid, didn't I?"

"Yeah, that scamp's okay," Sam reassured. "That was a nervy thing you just did. Too bad it had to spoil your jump. You're too shaken up. We'd better call this a day. I'm awfully sorry—really!"

Sam helped Reed to his feet. Director Turner came hurrying up; the crowd commenced gathering around.

"Give me just a minute," Reed pleaded. "I've got two more jumps coming. I...!"

"Two more?" exclaimed Sam. "You've got *three*. We're not counting that one."

"Thanks," said Reed, and gave the fellow he detested a questioning glance. These Northerners were more chivalrous than he had thought.

"You've jumped enough," declared Coach Turner, taking Reed's arm. "You've done wonders as it is...."

"No!" insisted Reed, his soft eyes taking on a look of grim determination. "Whenever a fellow crashes, he's got to go up and take-off again. That's an old glider rule. I'm all right. Make way for me, will you please?"

"Well, I'll be dogged!" cried Sam, in sheer admiration, as the fellow he had pestered brought an ovation from the crowd by starting the long climb up the hill.

"A Markham never quits!" Reed was repeating to himself as he went toward the top.

And he was repeating it after he had failed in two more jumps, the first of which resulted in another tumble and the second falling short by half a foot.

"You've still another jump if you feel like it!" Sam offered.

"No," said Reed, extending his hand in token of surrender. "You win!"

"I'll never feel quite right about this," said Sam, as he gripped the hand of the fellow he had dubbed "Softy." "You're some guy, Reed! You made me break my own record twice to top you. I'm sorry it's taken us fellows so long to get to know you ... but I'm glad of one thing...!" He paused, grinning.

"What's that?" asked Reed, feeling his heart suddenly go out to this Northern foeman.

"I'm glad," said Sam, "that you didn't have snow in Georgia! Man—a guy who can jump like you did in a month's time...!"

Coldness—imaginary and otherwise—vanished quickly after that as fellow schoolmates gathered around for the privilege of shaking the Southerner by the hand ... and, as if to prove that the Northern warmth was to remain—the next day brought a heavy thaw!

IN WRONG RIGHT

They picked me to do the dirty work because I was a special friend of Eddie Summers and they didn't think he'd suspect me.

Eddie was the leader of the freshest bunch of Freshies that ever got fresh at Lillard High. He'd made things miserable for us Sophs all year and the worst thing about it, he'd slipped out of every trap we'd set for him. The other Freshies didn't cut so much bait with us. Eddie was the rudder to the Freshman ship ... and once we put the rudder out of commission we knew the first year boat would flounder like a fish trying to make a cross country hike.

Pete Dean, leader of our forces, had prided himself on being a commander-in-chief second only to General Pershing and a few other notables not worth mentioning. To have an insignificant mortal, wearing the green skull cap insignia of the Freshman ranks, consistently outwit and thwart his best laid plans for keeping the first year fellows in their places, was only to add fuel to the day when the Sophs should drive through to a high and mighty revenge.

"He can't get away with it every time," Pete insisted, the morning after we saw the Freshman colors of green and white rippling in the breeze from the reed-like flag-staff on top of the Lillard High belfry.

"But who's going up and get those colors down?" I asked, not caring to volunteer for reasons plainly obvious!

"If anyone'll tell me how that human fly climbed up there and tied those colors to the top of that flag pole without breaking his neck and dislocating both ears ... I'll get it down!" exploded Pete.

But he knew blamed well that nobody could tell him! And anyhow, when Principal Sawyer spotted those colors he posted a notice on the bulletin board saying that he'd expel anyone who tried to take 'em down.

Obadiah Erasmus Tucker got hot under the collar, too. The idea of any lower classman cutting such capers! As president of the Student Government League he felt called upon to declare himself against all stunts and hazing. Obadiah was a Senior now and he'd never gotten over the humiliation of having to wear a green cap his Freshman year.

I wish you could have seen Obadiah. He was the personification of dignity plus. No wonder they elected him president of the United Classes of Lillard. He never did anything improper. He was a polished example of law and order. And how he loved to enforce regulations! Obadiah looked upon "his truly" as the exalted head of a school court for the promotion of inter-class peace. The Seniors held the balance of power in this funny government which Obadiah had helped to form, because the Seniors were supposed to be the most experienced. The other classes were represented according to their place in the scheme of things. Real important decisions had to have the endorsement of the faculty but we got a lot of fun out of thinking that we governed ourselves anyway.

I guess a person has to have dignity to be looked up to ... or else they must be tall. Obadiah was both. He was the tallest fellow in school besides holding his head the highest. Eddie Summers was the only one who could come near him for altitude. Obadiah looked like a piece of pulled taffy. Everything about him was long. He had a long face, a long nose, a long neck, long arms and longer legs. Maybe that's why it was so hard for him to unbend ... lots of longitude but hardly any latitude. His face was so long that he couldn't laugh with it. Nothing ever seemed to strike him funny. I'll bet you couldn't have tickled him if you'd teased the bottoms of his feet with a straw. And if you laughed at anything yourself he acted like you'd violated half the constitution which called for a respectful attitude at all times.

Honest, Obadiah had us thinking he was a Swiss cheese and we didn't amount to anything but the holes. He was very important and superior. I guess now it was because he wore double-lensed, shell-rimmed glasses and his hair always stuck up straight on his head. The glasses used to use his nose as a toboggan slide and he was always taking a long finger and shoving them back up where they belonged. He had just about as much trouble with his pants. Every time he sat down he pulled up about a yard of the legs so's he wouldn't stretch the creases out of the knees.

But I started to tell you about the Freshies and the sweet little job I was picked to handle. You can imagine how good the Freshies felt at getting their colors up to stay. And you won't have to twist your imagination out of shape to figure what an eyesore those colors were to us, being the first thing we saw coming to school and the last on going home, as the belfry could be seen several blocks away!

The oldest landmark about Lillard High was the watering trough. It stood between the sidewalk and the road, just off the campus on James street. There weren't many horses left in Lillard to use the trough but the water was artesian and many folks used to get it to drink. The town had run a pipe up on the outside of the trough next to the sidewalk where folks could wet their whistles. The trough was about ten feet long, three feet wide and four feet high, made of concrete. There were steps leading up to the fountain from the sidewalk. The basin of the trough was about thirty inches deep and covered with specimens of moss which the botany professor said was full of *Amœbæ*.

It had been the history of Lillard High that when any fellow got too fresh he somehow got acquainted with the watering trough. The water, coming from a well, was about as cold as water could be. One plunge in the trough was usually enough to shrink swelled heads or cool anyone's ambition.

"I can't help it if it is mid-winter," declared Pete Dean at a special called meeting of the Sophs, "We've got to put a stop to Freshy rule. It's the trough for Eddie Summers...!"

"A guy with that name ought not to mind the winter," remarked one of our class wits, which was me.

"That being the case, you're elected to assist in the dousing program," delegated Pete.

"No fair! Just because I live next to that bird's no sign..."

"Oh, come on! You know him better'n we do. You've gone around together. It 'ud be a cinch to..."

"Well, what's your plan?" I asked, coming to the point. I was just as anxious to see Eddie hit the trough as anyone else. He might have been a friend of mine but class strife was class strife!

"My plan's this," outlined Pete. "Obadiah's laid down some pretty strict rules and we can't afford to get caught, so we've got to get Eddie alone when there's no one to see us or help him out. The best

time's after dark ... say, tomorrow night ... and the only way to do it is for Ralph here (pointing at me) to find some excuse for going out with Eddie and lead him by this trough. We'll be hiding and we'll pounce upon him so quick he'll be in the icy deep before he knows what's hit him!"

The fellows liked the idea fine ... all except me. I'd a lot rather have been one of the dousters because it wasn't likely Eddie would be able to figure out who they were. But I was sure to catch it in the neck as soon as the Freshies heard about it.

"Here's your chance to be the class martyr," offered Pete. "I only wish I was in your shoes!"

"So do we!" chimed in the other fellows with all sorts of enthusiasm since they knew they couldn't be.

There was no use trying to crawl out of it. I was the unanimous choice and according to Roberts' rules of order my say didn't count. The next thing was to hit upon a scheme for luring Eddie out of the house to the scene of his Waterloo. We'd occasionally gone to the movies together and it struck the bunch as a logical idea for me to date Eddie up. Doug Fairbanks was opening at the Grand theatre in "Robin Hood" and Eddie would be crazy to see that because he had always imagined he resembled Doug. The only resemblance I could see was that Doug and Eddie both belonged to the human race ... but we won't argue about that.

Well ... when I asked Eddie if he'd like to go, at noon-hour the next day, he hesitated a few moments as if thinking, then said, appreciative like, "Don't care if I do!"

"Good! I'll call for you at the house at seven-thirty tonight," I replied, my heart pounding sort of funny.

That afternoon word was passed around among the Sophs that the ducking was going to be pulled off as per schedule. James street was the shortest way down town. We lived half a block off James street on Adams street and it was a sure bet that we'd take the one and only route down past the watering trough on our walk to the Grand theatre.

It was cold enough to wear an overcoat when I set out from the house that night. I almost thought I was going to lose my nerve ... it seemed like such a shame—taking advantage of poor, innocent Eddie that way. And it made me "B-r-r-r!" to think of the sensation he'd have when he flopped into that liquid refrigerator. I remembered the time when a bunch of us fellows thought we'd imitate polar bears and jumped in the bay through a hole in the ice. Never again!

It was a dark night, too. This would be in our favor. The campus was shaded by huge pine trees and the watering trough was in the middle of the block so that the light from the arcs on either corner just barely reached. Without the moon it was almost pitch dark through that stretch.

I rang Eddie's door bell ... feeling more and more like handing in my resignation but what could I do now? After a few minutes Eddie came to the door but I saw through the glass that he didn't have his hat or coat on. His face looked grave.

"Sorry, Ralph," Eddie announced. "There's sickness in the family and I'll just have to call it off tonight. I'm sorry I couldn't let you know sooner ... but I kept thinking I could get away until the last minute."

"Oh—that's all right," I said, feeling disappointed and relieved at the same time. "I hope it's nothing serious?"

"No ... I guess not...." Eddie answered, not mentioning who was sick. "It's only serious for the time being."

Well,—here was a nice howdy do! After leaving Eddie I stopped outside his house, wondering what move to make next. The fellows would be expecting me to show up with him any minute now. I'd better go down and tell the boys it was all off ... and explain just why so's I wouldn't get the blame for not going through with my part in the proceedings.

Obadiah Erasmus Tucker lived the second house from the corner off the intersection of James and Adams streets, just a block from the school. Of course it had to be my luck to run into him as I passed the house. He was on his way down to the Chamber of Commerce to attend a civic meeting that he wanted to write up for a civics lesson.

"Why, good evening, Ralph!" Obadiah said to me. He had an old way about him that made you feel like he was doing you a favor to speak to you. "Snappy weather, eh what?"

"Yes,—pretty lively," I replied, feeling uneasy as Obadiah hit it off alongside me. I was thinking of his running into the fellows at the trough and that he'd know right away we were up to some devilment and have us called on the carpet the next day or report us to the principal.

I shifted over to the side nearest the trough so I could give the fellows the high sign at the first opportunity but when we got up close there wasn't a one in sight and I began to think they'd gotten wise and skidooed when all of a sudden there was a noise like the radio report of the democratic convention ... only worse ... and black forms swooped around from the street side of the trough and from behind every nearby tree.

For a second I couldn't figure out what it was all about ... until I heard Obadiah give a yell ... and the next thing I knew there was a flock of arms hoisting him in the air ... and before I could shout or do a thing ... Plop! he went, right into the middle of the watering trough!

There was the grandest splashing and sputtering you ever heard for the next few seconds. The air seemed full of Obadiah's arms and legs. He kicked hard enough to send him most half way across the English channel but he couldn't make any headway in the watering trough except down.

Every time Obadiah's head came to the top, Pete Dean, who was standing on the steps, shoved it under again, yelling, "Souse him good, fellows! He needs it!"

They were making such a commotion, splashing his dignitary up and down, that it was all I could do to make myself heard. I rushed up to Pete, grabbed him by the arm and hollered in his ear, "Cheese it, you big boob! It's Obadiah!"

Just then one of the fellows caught sight of Obadiah's double-lensed goggles which had sloshed over the side of the trough and he let out a whoop like he was shot in ten places at once.

"Great razzberries!" exclaimed Pete, his eyes sticking out of his head. "Beat it, guys!"

The fellows didn't wait to help Obadiah out ... they just jerked him to a sitting position in the trough

and left him sputtering and gasping and blowing water like the cross between a garden spray and a whale with two spouts.

I was too stunned to move ... and when I did begin to think of locomotion I heard some new noises around me and saw some other black forms come dashing across the alley. Then it dawned on me like a flash. Eddie had outwitted us again. He'd seen through my invitation somehow. He'd tipped off the Freshies and they had waited, in hiding, figuring on catching us Sophs flat-footed at the trough. But they'd not counted on unforeseen circumstances any more than we had ... so they were a little late in arriving.

Right here's one time where I used my head for something besides growing a hair on. I didn't have a second to lose. The Freshies were almost on me. I gritted my teeth and ran up the steps and plunged into the watering trough beside Obadiah.

Cold? Oh, boy! Cold? The minute I hit the water it felt like my backbone was one long icicle ... and when I rolled over and sat up I thought I had about a hundred sets of teeth. Poor old Obadiah! He hardly seemed to know what was going on except that he was holding down half the country of Greenland and had a chunk of the North pole in one hand.

"Now we've got you!" someone cried, close to my ear.

Hands reached in and grabbed Obadiah and me, dragging us out of the trough like a couple of wet meal bags. Obadiah was as limp as a wet bathing suit. His arms and legs were all tangled up and he was doubled into a knot so's not to expose any more of his anatomy than he could help. I wasn't exactly comfortable myself. If it hadn't been so dark I'll bet you could have seen steam coming off our clothes.

Eddie was the first one I saw when I got out. He gave me a triumphant laugh.

"Thought you'd put it over on me, didn't you?" he taunted. "No one sick at our house but the cat!"

"You'll be sick in a minute," I assured him, getting a strangle hold on my teeth.

"Who's this bird?" a Freshie asked, stooping over Obadiah who was trying to persuade his knees to hold him up.

Say—when the fellows saw who it was I thought they'd drop dead where they stood. They were the scariest bunch I ever looked at.

Obadiah couldn't talk yet but his eyes weren't frozen shut. He was using 'em to spot every boy in the crowd. A cat didn't have anything on Obadiah the way he saw in the dark.

"Why—why Mr. Tucker ... what are you doing here?" asked Eddie, in a voice that shook worse than mine.

"Th-th-that's wh-wh-what I w-w-want to know!" stuttered Obadiah, having an awful time keeping from biting his tongue. "A-A-And I'm g-g-going to f-f-find out!"

This declaration was what I'd been waiting for. I stepped over where Obadiah could see me.

"I guess they thought you were one of the Sophomores, too," I said, putting over my thunderbolt.

I could hear the Freshies gasp. But what could they say? All they could do was to break out with nervous perspiration.

It was the first time that the president of the Student Government League had taken any notice of dripping me!

"Wh-wh-what! D-d-did they th-th-throw y-y-you in, too?" he stammered. "W-w-well, up-up-upon m-m-my w-word! I'll m-m-make th-th-them p-p-pay for th-th-this!"

Here's where Eddie Summers came up for air.

"The Freshies didn't do it, Mr. Tucker! It was the Sophs ... they...." he started to explain.

"Y-y-you c-c-can't t-t-tell me th-th-that! I know a-a-all about it! And besides ... I-I'm p-p-pretty n-n-near frozen t-to d-d-death. I-I'll attend to y-y-you f-f-fellows in the m-m-morning. Th-th-there'll be a s-s-special meeting of the League t-t-to t-t-take up your cases. R-R-Ralph, h-h-hadn't y-y-you b-b-better c-c-come over t-t-to my h-h-house wh-wh-while I g-g-get a doctor?"

Obadiah's teeth were making a sound like a freight train clattering over a cattle guard at a railroad crossing. He was getting worse right along. Eddie did have presence enough of mind to offer to help him home.

"H-h-help m-m-me h-h-home?" Obadiah glowered, "S-s-such imp-p-pert-t-tinence!" He shook a shaky fist at the leader of the subdued Freshies. "G-g-get along with you, b-b-before I l-l-lose m-m-my t-t-temper!"

The boys backed off, kind of bewildered like ... as if they didn't know just what would be the proper caper,—but when they got a little ways off they broke into a run and scattered mighty quick.

I picked up Obadiah's glasses and he stood for a minute with his knees leaning together, trying to put them on ... but his hands shook so hard that he couldn't locate his nose. He finally gave up trying and took a couple of steps toward home ... peering around like he was afraid some distinguished citizen of Lillard would pass by and see him in his undisguised state. But the coast was clear.

Obadiah didn't object when I took hold of his arm. Our clothes sounded crinkly and crackly like as we walked ... but somehow I was a lot warmer than I had been. And I was just getting to the place where I could begin to see how funny everything was. When we got to the corner I couldn't hold it in any longer. I busted right out laughing.

"Wh-what's the m-m-matter?" asked Obadiah, alarmed.

"Something tickles me," I said, laughing some more as I helped him up his front steps.

"Y-y-you're h-h-hysterical ... th-th-that's what's the m-m-matter," he said, getting excited, "Y-y-your condition's s-s-serious!"

Nothing must do but that I come in while his mother calls the doctor and my folks and runs around like a Japanese coolie laying out dry clothes for both of us and pouring hot water in the tub.

When I saw the outfit Mrs. Tucker had put out for me to wear I had another fit of laughing which Obadiah thought would send me into convulsions.

A suit of flannel underwear with the shirt and drawers separate; an old pair of long pants, which

Mrs. Tucker said would warm my legs up; and a cast-off smoking jacket which had belonged to Mr. Tucker before he got a new one last Christmas—that hung around me like a lean-to tent. Maybe I didn't look like the cat's moustache!

Well—the doctor finally got there and after examining Obadiah he advised a brisk rubbing and plenty of hot drinks and hot water bottles ... but said he didn't think there'd be any ill effects as the victim had stood the shock better than the victim had expected.

"I wish you'd look after poor Ralph. He's propped up in the chair out there," I heard Obadiah say in a disappointed voice. "I think he's even worse off than I am!"

The doc came out and gave me the once over. He looked as though he couldn't believe his eyes. I was sitting with my legs stuck out over another chair so that the ends of the trousers hung empty like I didn't have any feet. I didn't have any arms either ... and the sleeves to the coat hung like they do from a hanger. Then there was nothing under my coat but the underwear which fitted around my neck as loose as a horse collar.

"I'm suffering from a complication of clothes," I whispered to the doc ... and then there was two of us laughing instead of one.

Obadiah sent his mother in to see what was up. And at the same time my folks arrived with some of my own clothes.

"The boy's all right," said the doc, after he got his second wind. "All he needed was a good laugh ... and I've just finished giving it to him!"

He winked at me as he went out the door.

I didn't get a chance to see the other fellows till school commenced next day and then it was too late to explain what had happened. There was an air of direful expectancy among the Sophs ... and the Freshies moved about in fear and trembling.

Sure enough! The bell rang for a special session of chapel the very first thing. We shuffled into the assembly room ... most of the school wondering what it was all about. Principal Sawyer was on the platform with the president of the United Classes of Lillard. It was evident right off the bat that the meeting had not been called for entertainment purposes.

"Everyone but the Freshman and Sophomore boys is excused from this chapel to attend regular classes," said the principal.

There was a murmur of curiosity and a lot of confusion as the room was cleared and the fellows who were left, gathered in two bunches up toward the front.

When things had quieted down so that every fellow was having a good time listening to his heart skip beats, Obadiah got up at a nod from Principal Sawyer and walked to the edge of the platform, glaring down at us.

Honest—I felt like snickering again! All the kink was out of his stand-up hair and he looked like he'd shrunk two good inches. He reminded me of a drooping water lily ... but mad? Say, he was the living embodiment of all the righteous indignation in the world!

"There has come to the attention of the Student Government League a very grave case of hazing," Obadiah started. "A case which, I regret to say (which he didn't) must be dealt with severely. It concerns the ducking of a Sophomore in the ... in the watering trough...!"

The Sophs glanced in my direction in dumbfounded surprise. The Freshies looked glum.

"Such an offense is bad enough in warm weather," Obadiah continued, "but in mid-winter, (he shuddered) it is absolutely and positively criminal!"

I felt like saying "Amen!" to that. Obadiah stopped to clear his throat and to tap himself on the chest like he was afraid he was going to get a cold on his lungs.

"As you all know, the League has the first power to act on matters relating to the willful misconduct of students," said Obadiah, as if he'd memorized what he was going to say. "At a meeting of the Emergency Committee this morning it was decided that, if strict measures are necessary to prevent further ... er ... further violence ... the League is prepared to take them!"

Obadiah's hair began to stand on end like a porcupine's quills. I could tell he was getting ready to shoot a broadside. So could everyone. But no one could tell where he was going to hit.

"The Freshman class this year has been a trouble breeder. Even the Freshman representative admits that...."

Time out while the Sophs all heaved a big sigh of relief!

"... and it is my understanding that this activity has largely been due to one member who, I have reason to know, was especially prominent in last night's doings...!"

All eyes went to Eddie who sat looking like there was sickness in the family and he was *it*. I just had to smile when I thought of the turn things had taken. But the smile came off the very next minute.

"It therefore pains me to report that, in consideration of past offenses and because of his continued disregard for regulations or authority, the Student Government League respectfully recommends to the faculty and Principal Sawyer that Mr. Edward Summers be expelled from Lillard High School!"

Obadiah laid a long hand against his long face and waited to observe the effect of this recommendation upon those present in the assembly room.

We were stunned all right. I really hadn't thought Obadiah would go that far. I didn't want to see Eddie get put out of school. It was easy for anyone to tell that Obadiah was trying to get around a bad situation by making an example of Eddie. But what worried me most was that Principal Sawyer looked like he was going to back up the recommend!

There wasn't a sound for about two good breaths, when suddenly Eddie jumped to his feet, eyes gleaming.

"Excuse me, sir. It was the Sophs who ducked you!"

Have you ever been some place during a storm when the air all at once seemed full of electricity? Well, you'll know how we felt then—our skin prickled!

Obadiah gave Eddie a look like he didn't have any use for a fellow who would try to shift the blame.

"Prove it!" he challenged.

"I can't," said Eddie, and sat down again.

Obadiah smiled soberly. You'd have to see him do it to appreciate how anyone could smile soberly. He was sure Eddie had been trying to spoof him.

I couldn't stay out of the rumpus any longer. It had gotten beyond a class proposition now. So up I bolted.

"If he can't prove it ... I can!" I said, in a loud voice.

Suffering fireworks, what a commotion! The fellows almost fell out of their seats. Obadiah gaped at me, mouth open clear to his wisdom teeth. Principal Sawyer jumped to his feet and came to the front of the platform.

Pete Dean, sitting right behind me, just about yanked my coat tails off.

"Shut up, you poor fish!" he whispered. "Want to get us all in dutch?"

"I'm going to speak the truth and nothing but the truth!" I said, determined to make a clean breast of everything. The Freshies acted as if they were going to applaud but the Sophs looked like they were going to use their hands for some other purpose as soon as convenient.

"If you can shed any light on this unfortunate happening we should be glad to hear from you," invited Principal Sawyer.

Obadiah didn't appear so enthusiastic.

"I can shed all the light there is to be shed," I replied, diplomatic-like, "but I want to know first ... if I prove Eddie's not guilty ... will you reinstate him?... I mean, put him back in school?"

The principal of Lillard High looked at the president of the United Classes of Lillard and the president looked at the principal. They shook their heads "yes."

"All right!" Then I explained the whole business—how we Sophs had planned to duck Eddie; how I was elected to call at his house and walk him past the trough; how Eddie got wise to our game and tipped off the Freshies who waited in the alley to waylay us; how I ran into Obadiah as I was going down to the trough to tell the fellows the plan fell through; how, in the darkness, the fellows mistook the head of the Student Government League for Eddie and flopped him in the trough before I could think of Jack Robinson, much less say it,—and how I jumped in when the Freshies came running up, to make it look like they'd ducked Obadiah and me.

"So if there's any expelling to be done—you'd better begin on us," I concluded.

It was so still for a few minutes that you could have heard a handkerchief drop. Obadiah looked like he'd been deprived of the opportunity of a life time. He and the principal went into a conference and they talked a long while ... so long that we all got restless and began to scrape our feet around on the floor.

At last Principal Sawyer stepped forward and Obadiah sank down in a chair, crestfallen.

There was a twinkle in the principal's eyes as he started to speak. I believe he'd have laughed outright—now that he had the straight of things—if he hadn't had lots of self control.

"Thanks to Ralph Duncan's explanation the recommended action against Edward Summers has been withdrawn...."

The boys started to cheer ... they just couldn't help it ... but the principal raised his hand.

"However, you are all placed on probation for the rest of the term," he said, which didn't sound so good. "Let this be a lesson to you. Report to your next hour classes!"

"You're a swell class martyr, you are!" reproved Pete, as we left the room. "Tie the Freshies up in a bow knot last night and untie them this morning!"

There wasn't anything I could say to that ... so I kept mum.

But the next morning, when Pete and I came to school, I happened to look up at the belfry.

Holy smoke! The Freshman colors were gone!

Pete beat me to expressing what popped into our heads at the same time.

"Eddie Summers ... the nery cuss ... risked his fool neck to dip his colors to us. Well, I'd like to see him get expelled for that!"

THE SKI POLICE

Snow started falling in Centerville on Friday night and continued with the aid of a forty mile gale until late Monday. "A regular old-fashioned blizzard," old settlers declared, as telephone lines were swept down and roads made impassable. For the first time in years schools were closed and inhabitants set themselves to the prodigious task of digging out.

"Greatest weather in the world for skiing!" Bill Stewart announced gleefully to his two chums.

"Yes," said Phil Black, grinning, "with snow ten and fifteen feet deep in spots. If you ever fall off your skis, you're apt to disappear for good!"

"Snowshoes would really be the thing," replied Max, "but there's seldom such a snow as this. I doubt if there's a couple pair of snowshoes in all Centerville."

"Skis will be okay if we're careful," urged Bill. "I'd like to ski up to our shack on Mountain Ridge. What do you say?"

The two chums looked at one another consultingly. The hill that was known as Mountain Ridge could be seen to the west. It towered majestically among the lesser hills which bounded the valley in which Centerville reposed.

"We might make an all day outing of it," considered Max. "Take our packs and lunch and eat in the shack. Too bad we can't just cut across country and save a couple miles but the climbing's too steep. There'll be some great natural slides coming back. I'm game to go. How about you, Phil?"

"Majority rules," smiled Phil. "Count me in. When do we start?"

"How's ten o'clock tomorrow morning?" Bill proposed.

"Suits us," Phil and Max responded.

The woods after the great snow were a gorgeous sight. Fir trees plastered white; bare trees coated limb for limb; shrubbery weighted down and all but the highest buried from view; hillsides lost in a glossy expanse; tips of telephone poles all that could be seen in drifted sections; occasionally a glimpse of old Mother Earth in windswept areas; everything in the crisp out-of-doors bearing mute or glowing testimony of the storm's handiwork.

Reaching the top of Mountain Ridge after a leisurely trip of three hours, the chums gazed about in spellbound admiration of the spectacle.

"Never saw anything like this!" Max exclaimed, finally. "It gives me the feeling of being somewhere that no one else has been before ... as though we're members of an exploring party. Look—our ski tracks are the only sign of any humans about. No one has broken a trail up through here since Thursday!"

"Naturally not," said Bill. "This is a little used road we're standing on anyway. It probably won't be cleared for several weeks yet."

"Yes, but the main road was the same," reminded Phil. "There weren't any tracks a mile after we left town."

"I guess you're right," Bill was forced to admit. "Well, then—we *are* alone! Pioneers, you might say ... blizzard trail blazers!"

The three chums laughed, directing their glances toward the town of Centerville, a black and white patch three miles below them. Their shack commanded an even better view, located as it was upon a ledge just beneath the brow of Mountain Ridge.

"Let's get on to the shack," urged Bill. "I'm cold. We could stand a good fire in that makeshift fireplace of ours."

"Hold on!" cried Max, excitedly. "Did you say a minute ago that we were standing on the road?"

"Well, I should have said we were standing some eight feet above the road," corrected Bill, "the snow's sure filled in this bank here."

"I'll say it has!" Max rejoined, scraping with his ski across a blackened surface, "and it's completely covered an automobile!"

"What?"

Unbelievably, the two chums knelt down beside Max and felt with their hands.

"Good grief!" cried Phil. "We're actually standing on the top!"

"Say—maybe this party got lost in the storm and froze to death in the car!" suggested Bill.

It was an unpleasant thought. Each chum felt his spine tingle uncomfortably.

"We'd better dig down and investigate," decided Max. "Good thing I brought this collapsible snow shovel along!"

Unslinging the shovel, Max straightened out the handle and snapped it in place.

"We'll take turns," prompted Bill. "Boy, what do you know about this? Talk about a thrill!"

"It's a sedan," Max announced, a few minutes later. "Whew! Take the shovel, Phil!"

Quickly uncovering one side, the boys soon found themselves standing on the running board and scraping the snow from the ice-glazed windows.

"I almost hate to look in," said Max. "It gives me the creeps."

"Got to do it," insisted Bill, and pressed his nose against the glass opposite the driver's seat. "Pretty hard to see anything. The snow on the other side makes it dark in here. Pass us your flashlight, Phil."

"Here you are!"

Max and Phil awaited Bill's findings.

"Huh!" he grunted, finally. "It's abandoned! Funny place to leave a car. There's not a decent shelter within several miles of this spot. I wouldn't be surprised if, when the snow disappears, some bodies will be found on old Mountain Ridge."

"We'd better uncover the license number so we can report it when we get back to town," suggested Max.

"Good idea!" approved Bill.

"It's M-617-503," Phil announced, after more digging and kicking the crusted snow off the plate. "Better make a note of it."

"That's what I'm doing," said Max, producing pencil and paper. "I'll bet this wasn't the only car that was stalled by the storm and has been buried in drifts. We'll probably hear of plenty of others when we get news from outside."

"Yeah," grinned Bill, "the farmers are probably entertaining a lot of stranded tourists along the main roads. Well, I'm glad we didn't find anybody in the car. It would have sort of put a damper on our outing."

"You said it," agreed Phil. "Well, the sooner we hit the shack now, the better I'll like it. I'm chilled through myself."

Arrived at the highest point on the ridge, the chums gazed down upon the ledge below which supported their shack. This ledge sloped off steeply as the hill descended into the valley with several smaller hills serving to diminish the sharp decline. The hillside was sparsely covered with trees and underbrush and presented a picturesque sight at the moment.

"Look!" cried Phil. "The snow's cleared away in front of our shack ... and there's smoke coming out the chimney!"

The discovery left the two chums temporarily spellbound.

"It's the automobile party without a doubt!" Bill gasped, finally. "They've found our shack and they've been snowed in. Lucky thing for them they could get under cover!"

"They must have about burned up our wood supply by now," ruminated Max.

"And I'll be surprised if they're not close to starving," added Phil. "Let's go around and down to the ledge. Careful your skis don't get away with you ... this is dangerous business along here."

Edging down with great caution, the three chums skied onto the ledge and breathlessly approached the door of their shack which had been freed of snow as well as one window.

"Maybe they won't be glad to be reached by someone!" whispered Max. "Shall I rap, Bill?"

"Sure," grinned Bill, "it's our shack but it's occupied, so we're just visitors."

Max lifted his hand and tapped lightly on the door with the backs of his knuckles. There was an immediate stir inside and muffled voices. The chums glanced at each other questioningly as the door opened a crack and the gaunt figure of a man was disclosed who covered them with a revolver. When the stranger saw who it was, he gave vent to a hollow laugh and lowered the weapon.

"It's just three kids," he said to evident companions behind him. "Hello, boys—how the devil did you find this place?"

"It happens to be our shack," replied Bill, nudging Phil and Max, warningly.

"Oh, ho! It does, eh?" said the man, eyeing them shrewdly and opening the door that his two roughly dressed comrades could see the visitors. "Well, we're much obliged for a hideaway out of the storm!"

"You said it!" echoed the short, stocky man, bluntly.

"Been skiing, eh?" observed the third of the trio, a dark-skinned, dark-eyed individual. "I wondered how you got up here. Road open yet?"

"Everything's closed," Phil reported. "Worst storm in history. Don't look like things would be really cleared for three or four days yet."

The men were seen to be exchanging meaningful glances.

"Come in, boys!" invited the man who had opened the door. "Sorry we have to mess your place up."

"We no can help," apologized the stubby stranger.

"That's all right," assured Bill, warily. "We won't come in, thanks. We just thought we'd have a look at the shack to see if it was okay before we went back to town."

"You didn't happen to bring any food with you, did you?" asked the first man.

"N-no," Bill started.

"Yes, we did!" Phil piped up, and went into his knapsack, taking out a tissue-papered package, which he tossed to the man. "Here you are."

Ravenously, the stranger tore the paper from the sandwiches and divided the food between his two companions.

"Thanks, Buddy!" he cried, amid a mouthful. "That just about saves our lives!"

"You goof!" whispered Bill, as the men attacked the food. "These birds are robbers! See those money bags in the corner?"

"Sure," returned Phil. "I just did that to give us a chance to beat it. Come on—right down over the hillside!"

Taking advantage of the trio's hunger for food, the three chums made a sudden, unexpected break for it. They whirled about on their skis, glided to the edge of the ledge and took-off down the slope, a hazardous venture.

"Hey! Stop! Come back here!" the ringleader yelled after them.

Bang! Bang! ... Bang! Bang! ... Bang!

Bullets sung past their ears, spotted tiny holes in the crusted snow, clipped branches off trees. Phil, losing his balance, toppled over and broke through the snow. Max, wavering in a wild attempt to avoid underbrush, crashed into a tree. Bill alone avoided mishap and continued on down the steep hillside.

"Go on Bill! Go on!" Max shrieked.

The men, raging mad, scrambled over the ledge and down the hillside in snow up to their armpits, endeavoring to overtake the two chums who had met with disaster.

"Don't let 'em get our skis!" Phil cried to Max. "They can get away if you do! Shove 'em down the hill!"

With almost one motion, two pairs of skis were sent sliding, riderless, down the hillside. One of them caught against a log but the other three shot on and on, too far down to retrieve.

The short, stubby man was forced to call for help, with snow too deep for him. Extricated by the tall ringleader, he floundered back to the ledge while his two companions plunged on to capture Phil and Max.

"You boys will pay for this!" gasped the bandit chief as he grabbed them savagely by the collars.

"What's the idea of running away, huh? Go to tell on us, eh?"

Back on the ledge, the short, stubby man rushed into the shack and came out with a high-powered long range rifle. He knelt on one knee and sighted it after the diminishing figure of Bill Stewart who was descending the hill at a breakneck pace and just about to rush up an incline where his body would be a good target against the white snow.

"I get him!" cried the stocky bandit.

Max, heart palpitating, made a megaphone of his hands.

"Look out, Bill!" he shouted. "Stay off that hill! Stay off!"

His voice reverberated out over the hillside before his words were cut short by his being cuffed head first into the snow. Bill, hearing, swerved his skis to the side, turned them up on edge and took a tumbling, skidding spill. As he did so a rifle spat fire ... rat-tat-tat-tat ... but he dropped down out of sight behind a snow-covered clump of bushes. The bandit's rifle shook snow from these bushes but Phil and Max, now mutely watching, saw Bill's body appear as he crawled along on hands and knees, around rather than over the hill, pushing his skis ahead of him and offering the smallest kind of a target.

"He got away!" Phil murmured. "As soon as he gets on the other side the hill he'll put his skis back on and keep right on toward town. He ought to be there in twenty minutes. What do you really think they'll do to us?"

Max shook his head and glanced solemnly at the three desperadoes.

"I don't know," he said, in an undertone, "if this isn't a swell outcome to a skiing party...!"

Reaching the outskirts of Centerville, Bill Stewart pushed forward toward the County Jail where police and sheriff offices were located. Arrived at the Jail, breathless and near exhaustion, he gasped out his story to an astounded sheriff.

"Wire service has just been resumed," the sheriff informed. "Our first report was word from Boulder, fifty miles above, that just before the storm Friday, three men robbed the State Bank there..."

"Did anyone get the license number of the car?" asked Bill.

"Yes," said the sheriff, "it's..."

"M-617-503," supplied Bill, from memory.

"That's it!" cried the sheriff. "Say!... But the roads aren't open yet. How are we going to get out to them?"

Bill thought a moment. "On skis!" he said. "There's a lot of them in Slawson's Hardware and Sporting Goods Store. Why don't you...?"

"Now there's an idea!" broke in Sheriff Marston. "You go inside and get a cup of hot coffee while I round up a posse ... because we'll need you to lead the way!"

In fifteen minutes, thirty grim-faced men, all heavily armed with rifles and revolvers, trooped from the hardware store, each bearing a pair of brand new skis. An excited crowd of townspeople saw them off as they fell in behind Bill for the five mile winding trek up through the western hills to the top of Mountain Ridge.

"If the men are still in the shack," Bill asked of Sheriff Marston, as he skied alongside, "how are you going to get at 'em without injuring Phil and Max?"

"It's going to be ticklish business," the sheriff admitted. "From all reports, these bandits will stop at nothing. But I've got a little object here that may help considerable."

"What's that?" asked Bill, curiously.

"That," said Sheriff Marston, "is a tear gas bomb!"

"Here we are," a tired Bill Stewart finally announced as he paused beside the half-buried bandit car. "See our ski tracks leading up to the ridge? The shack's just below there. Some of you can go around the ridge one way and down to the ledge, some the other. If they're still in the shack, and it looks like they are, their only chance of escape is straight down the hill and that's no chance at all unless they have skis."

"Fine!" said the Sheriff. "You men station yourselves as this lad says. He and I will go up above on the ridge and I'll call down to those eggs to surrender. Don't start firing unless I signal. We don't want to risk the lives of the two boys with 'em ... if we can help it."

"Poor Max and Phil," thought Bill. "They're in a tough spot. My part of this business is soft."

"Hello, down there!" the Sheriff shouted when his men were in place.

There was a moment of tingling silence. Fingers twitched nervously against triggers.

"Hel-lo!" the Sheriff repeated, as he and Bill peered cautiously over the ridge, down upon the snow-covered shack. There was now no sign of smoke from the chimney.

Z-z-z-ing.

The two instinctively ducked back as a bullet screamed skyward.

"Well, we got an answer!" said the Sheriff as Bill looked his concern. Then, to the barricaded bandits: "You men are surrounded. Better walk out with your hands over your heads and give up peaceable."

Another long, palpitating moment followed. Then the door to the shack was heard to open and Bill bit his lips with anxiety as Phil and Max appeared, hands over their heads, standing on the edge of the ledge overlooking the valley. They glanced up, appealingly at the sheriff and Bill.

"We're being covered," Phil informed. "Unless you beat it and leave three pair of skis for them to use, they're going to shoot us."

"They mean business," Max confirmed. "They've got lots of ammunition. We'll be killed if you don't..."

Suddenly seized with an idea, Bill raised up and motioned to his two chums, imitating a dive off the ledge. Such a dive, Bill reasoned, would take the bandits by complete surprise. The ledge was steep enough so that the chums would immediately disappear from the range of fire ... and with the guns now trained on the shack, the bandits would not dare rush out to execute their threat of murder. Phil and Max nodded to indicate that they understood, both edging backward. Bill grasped the sheriff's arm and conveyed by gestures what was about to be attempted.

"Three pair of skis," the sheriff repeated. "Where do they want them...?"

Pushing themselves simultaneously off the ledge in what closely resembled backward swan dives, Phil and Max landed squirming in the snow below. There were oaths and angry exclamations from the shack and a fusillade of shots, all too late and too misdirected to do any damage.

"Keep the shack covered!" roared the sheriff. "Don't let any of 'em out to take pot shots at the boys!"

This was the danger now as Phil and Max floundered all but helplessly in snow up to their necks.

"How good a tosser are you?" Sheriff Marston asked of Bill.

"Pretty fair," Bill rejoined, wonderingly.

"Here," said the sheriff, handing him the tear gas bomb. "See if you can toss this thing down that chimney. If you can that'll take all the fight out of those babies!"

Bill took careful aim. He had the ludicrous thought that he was back on a basketball floor, with the aperture in the chimney a basketball hoop. He let go the bomb; it skimmed over the top, struck the other side, rebounded and disappeared within the black interior.

"Good boy!" commended Sheriff Marston. "Now watch what happens!"

A vapor suddenly curled up from the chimney. There came sounds of coughing and spitting and more cursing.

"They can't stick it out in that small shack," said the sheriff, confidently. "If they do, they'll suffocate! That tear gas bomb had enough strength to clear a hall."

In less than five minutes the shack door was wrenched open and the ringleader of the bandits staggered out, tears streaming down his face, one hand to his throat, the other extended toward the grayish heavens. He was followed by two gasping, stumbling comrades who breathed in the clear, cold air sobbingly. The posse closed in with guns drawn. In another minute the three bandits were submitting to handcuffs as Bill, hurrying below, helped Phil and Max back up on the ledge.

"Quite a skiing party you brought back with you," grinned Phil.

"Talk about the thrills of winter time!" Max added.

"Thrills!" whistled Bill. "Say—who knows—maybe we've started something! You've heard of the motorcycle squad, the armored car, the mounted police and the sky patrol ... but here's a new one—the *ski police!*"

The two chums laughed.

"Ski police!" they repeated, amused. "Fine—but who'll organize 'em?"

"I will!" Bill volunteered, in a jocular mood now that the excitement was over, "and all the assistance I want from you fellows is to arrange for another snow like this one so we'll have something to work on!"

THE PENALTY BOX

"There's no use talking, if you want to win you've got to know all the tricks of the game."

Hoyt Dale, Parker High's sturdy left defense man, had been after his team mates all season. They were more in the mood to listen to him now, since they had just gone down to a stinging 5 to 2 defeat at the hands of Brinkman Prep.

"This makes three straight losses," snapped Hoyt, "and we're going to drop the big game with Hallstead as sure as shooting, unless...!"

"Unless what?" demanded Rudie Antrim, who played the other defense position.

"Unless you guys learn how to give as well as take!" Hoyt finished, defiantly. "Every team that plays us roughs us into the boards and stick handles us all over the ice. They get away with murder because Coach has never taught you fellows how to take care of yourselves. Why, where I used to play...!"

"You were brought up on dirty hockey!" accused Rudie, his face flushing. "We don't play that kind of hockey here. We'd rather lose than...!"

"Oh, yes?" cut in Hoyt, biting. "That's the trouble with this school. You've always had the idea that hockey's a parlor game when it's really one of the most rugged sports there is. It can be rough without being dirty ... but you birds can't rough it because you don't know how!"

Team members exchanged consulting glances. There was an element of truth in Hoyt Dale's accusations. Their coach, Professor Dean Hogart, had admitted that he had never played the game. His knowledge and appreciation of the sport had been developed through observation during years that he had spent in Canada. Such a background no doubt left much to be desired but Parker High had been unable to afford a special hockey coach since hockey was a new sport for the school and still lacked sufficient public support.

"Something's wrong with us, that's certain," conceded Walt Lowery, captain and centre. "Either we lack fighting spirit or...!"

"You *can't* fight," insisted Hoyt, "unless you've got the tools to fight with. That's what I've been hitting at all season."

"Something in that, too," admitted Bud Gray, goalie, glancing about cautiously and lowering his voice. "Coach Hogart means all right, gang, but there's certain inside stuff he doesn't know. I think myself we've got a much better team than we've shown so far."

"Sure we have!" declared Hoyt. "That's what burns me up. We ought to be giving each team we meet the battle of its life. If you fellows would like me to put you wise to the tricks I know...?"

"Why don't you?" urged Ed Compton, right wing. "You've played more hockey than any of us."

"Well, I-I'd be glad to if Coach wouldn't object."

"Coach wouldn't have to know," suggested Lee Burrell, left wing. "He'd be for anything that would improve the team, anyway."

"Not if it's dirty playing," countered Rudie, "and that's what Hoyt's system sounds like."

"You've got dirty playing on the brain," charged Hoyt. "You're sore because I told you that you weren't body-checking hard enough. If you want the truth, Rudie—you're one of the weakest spots on the team!"

Hoyt Dale, not long a resident in Parker, believed in speaking his mind. One would have thought, to hear him, that he was captain of the team. But Hoyt's nature was such he could not keep still for long. Team mates had to give him credit for an aggressive, unrelenting style of play. He was always diving into the midst of mêlées, slashing his stick about madly and bumping opponents right and left. Occasionally he made trips to the penalty box as the referee fouled him for tripping, hitting or illegally checking a rival but Hoyt was soon back on the ice as scrappy as ever. His willingness to mix it with the opposition had established him as the most colorful player on Parker's sextet.

"I don't see how it will hurt any for Hoyt to help us out," supported Captain Walt Lowery, with a clash between Parker's two defense men imminent. "And you could afford to listen to him, too, since three goals were scored down your side the ice today!"

"You know why?" flashed Rudie. "It's because Hoyt was grandstanding. He wasn't back in position where he should have been and I was left to guard both sides the ice."

"Aw, dry up, Rudie!" snapped Walt. "If you can't take a little criticism you don't belong on the team. Hoyt's going to teach us a few new wrinkles which may come in mighty handy against Hallstead. And you'd better pay close attention yourself."

"I'll pay attention all right," rejoined Rudie, and glowered his defiance at the fellow who had volunteered to impart his superior knowledge to the squad.

It was decidedly unpopular, Rudie knew, to oppose a player who had turned in a spectacular brand of hockey all season but he had not liked Hoyt and his methods from the start. In Rudie's estimation, Hoyt was a type who had to have the limelight at all times. If he didn't get it he would either sulk or assume an indifferent attitude, placing the burden of responsibility upon someone else. Hoyt liked winners and winning—so much so, Rudie felt, that he would be inclined, in a pinch, to sacrifice the elements of sportsmanship for it. However, if the fellows were disposed to give him their ear, it was evident that Rudie would place himself in disfavor by offering further opposition.

"I've already gotten myself in dutch with the gang," Rudie observed. "Besides, Hoyt's got it in for me and he'll try to make me look bad if he can. Only thing for me to do, from now on, is keep my mouth shut and watch my step."

Hoyt Dale's secret hockey lesson proved something of a sensation. It was Coach Hogart's practice, at the finish of the daily session on the ice, to hurry off to attend to his professorial duties, leaving the players to take their showers and change back to street togs. This particular afternoon, the squad loitered on the rink until the coach had departed when Hoyt took charge.

"First thing you guys want to learn," he snapped, importantly, "is how to guard against being spilled. You can't play good hockey flat on your back and that's where most of you are a good many times each game. If you were onto your business you could spill the other fellow instead of letting him

spill you!"

And Hoyt picked Ralph Randall, substitute wingman, to illustrate how a man could be body-checked and set down heavily upon the ice.

"If he tries this on you, give him the stick," Hoyt advised, and demonstrated by sending Randall flying through space. "You can bet your life that he won't try it a second time," Hoyt concluded, grinning.

"But that's illegal!" Rudie protested, finding it impossible to keep still.

"The referee won't call it once in a dozen times," Hoyt answered. "It's an old trick that's being used right along. You've got to use it to protect yourself or you're all out of luck."

"It sure puts a man out of play," observed Ed Compton. "I know now what's happened to me when I've done high dives. That stick between your skates...!"

"Here's another one they're apt to pull on you," said Hoyt, advancing toward Randall.

"Hey, no you don't!" said the sub. "Pick on somebody else!"

"I won't hurt you," Hoyt reassured. "Not much, anyway. See, we're in close quarters, both of us after a free puck. We're trying to jockey each other out of the way. My opponent comes in and we lock arms. He tries to give me the elbow in the pit of the stomach but I beat him to it. Result—it gets his wind and he slides out of the picture."

Randall, with a gasp, had relinquished his effort and dropped his stick to the ice.

"You couldn't even see that, could you?" Hoyt asked, of the interested team members. "Then how is a referee going to see it?... And then there's this one—where you knock a man's feet out from under him with a sidewipe of your skate."

Hoyt picked Hank Tolan, another sub to demonstrate upon. Hank did a flip-flop and struck solidly on his side, skidding along the ice.

"You get the idea?" pointed Hoyt. "These are just a few of the things that you're running into each game. You should be prepared to give your opponents the same medicine ... and to guard against these fast ones. There's an art, too, in riding a person into the boards. Come here, Hank...!"

"No, thanks!"

Hoyt's knowledge of the various methods used to upset rival players and effectively cut them out of the play was close to awe-inspiring. It was something on the order of a police lieutenant demonstrating to a bunch of rookies how to disarm a crook. Hoyt made it look very simple and very, very impressive.

"Say, I thought most of the falls I took were just the result of bumps that couldn't be avoided!" whistled Lee Burrell, "but I can see now where I've been dumped with neatness and dispatch. Do that over again, will you, Hoyt. I want to get the hang of it!"

The entire squad, a scowling Rudie Antrim included, set to work to master the various undercover maneuvers.

"This is great!" approved Captain Walt Lowery, at the end of an hour. "Now I really feel fortified for the first time. Wish we'd listened to you earlier in the season, Hoyt. We might have had a better record."

"Well, this ought to give us a chance, at least, to beat Hallstead," said Hoyt. "And if we can take that veteran outfit who think they know all there is to be known about this game, it'll be a big enough feather in our caps."

"You said it!" seconded goalie Bud Gray, with enthusiasm. "What do you think of Hoyt's stuff now, Rudie? Pretty slick, eh?"

Rudie's face flushed. He hated to give this Hoyt Dale person any credit but he had to admit that there was a science to the things he had taught. It had even given him a thrill to send fellow team mates flying through the air, knowing that he had done it intentionally, by using a certain definite system ... a stick between the legs, a knee properly placed, an elbow in the right spot, a shoulder brought into play and other sly little tricks designed to disconcert or spill the other fellow.

"It's all against the rules," Rudie replied, rather lamely, "but I'll admit it's worth knowing."

"Worth knowing and using at certain times," emphasized Hoyt. "If you have to choose between letting a man get past you and stopping him from getting through for a possible score, these little devices are worth everything! What diff does it make if you *do* get sent to the penalty box for two minutes every once in a while?... That's part of the game."

"I suppose it is," Rudie considered, "but, in this case, you're fouling on purpose ... and the question is...!"

"A foul is a foul!" barked Hoyt. "Why try to distinguish between 'em? A guy as picayunish as you would find fault with the way they played 'drop-the-handkerchief'...!"

Fellow team members laughed and Rudie held his tongue. He had broken his resolution to keep silent as it was. What these special instructions might lead to was problematical but one thing was certain—Coach Hogart was due for a surprise the next time he saw his team in action!

Rivals in every other sport, it was natural that Hallstead should place Parker High on its schedule when the latter school went in for hockey. If the truth be known, Hallstead's domain in other sports had inspired Parker to take up the game. Little hope was entertained, however, that Parker would succeed in downing Hallstead the first year. Parker had a hard enough time downing Hallstead in anything. But, since Hallstead seemed prouder of its ice hockey six than any other team, Parker High adherents impatiently awaited the day when their school might put a serious challenger in the field.

"If there's any school we enjoy beating, it's Hallstead," declared a Parker fan. "And are they tough losers? Say, they fight you to the last ditch in anything! But that's what I call real spirit. Our school ought to have more of it!"

Underdogs, and very conscious of it, Parker's hockey squad dressed for the Hallstead game. There was little talking in the locker room, each player feeling the tension too much to indulge in the usual

banter.

"Remember, fellows," whispered Hoyt, just before the team was to leave the locker room for the ice, "you're just as good as Hallstead. They can't do anything to you that you can't do to them."

Fellow players nodded, grimly. They had their hearts set on nothing short of victory. A great showing against Hallstead would do much to atone for a disappointing season and raise Parker's hockey stock to a high level for the year to follow. Perhaps school authorities would even be sufficiently impressed to hire a hockey coach who was an expert at the game.

"I know you're going to give your best," Coach Hogart told them. "You boys may not feel that you have accomplished much this season but I, personally, think you have done wonders this first year. Hallstead is primed and ready with a veteran six and years of experience behind it. I understand, too, that Hallstead is noted for a ripping, rushing sort of game. This ought to be a style well suited to you fellows because you play clean-cut hockey. If Hallstead isn't careful, some of her players are apt to be spending most of their time in the penalty box. That being the case, you boys can be counted on to make the most of your opportunities during the time that Hallstead may be forced to play short-handed."

Rudie Antrim, listening to Coach Hogart's final words before the game, glanced about uneasily at team mates. The good old professor just didn't have the power to enthuse or excite team members. His pep talks were punchless, far too much like classroom lectures. And his advice now seemed a bit out of place. No suggestion as to how Parker might cope with Hallstead's rough and tumble attack except by playing clean hockey and taking advantage of possible Hallstead penalties. In between times, however, Parker was apparently destined to absorb considerable punishment.

"Coach probably figures, along with everyone else, that we don't stand a chance," thought Rudie. "Well, I'll have to hand it to Hoyt for one thing—he's actually got the boys pepped up with the idea that they can win this game. Hallstead may have it all over us but we're not afraid of 'em!"

It was a crisply cold afternoon with a chilling breeze which swept the rink and caused a fair-sized crowd to stamp noisily in the stands.

"This'll have to be a hot game to keep us warm!" punned someone.

"It'll be hot all right," promised a Hallstead rooter. "We're going to burn up the ice with Parker!"

Chester Maltby, giant Hallstead centre, and noted as one of the state's star players, looked formidable as he moved up and down the ice in preliminary practice. Hallstead's season's record was marred only by two tie games which was scarcely any mar at all. Her players sized the Parker squad up mirthfully.

"Easy picking," the great Maltby was heard to remark.

"When we get through with 'em they'll be sorry they ever took up hockey," a fellow player rejoined, and laughed.

At the opening face-off, Hallstead took the puck into Parker territory immediately. Her forward wall advanced beautifully, brushed past Parker's wingmen and drove into the defensive zone with Hoyt Dale and Rudie Antrim crouching low to stop the onslaught. Hoyt charged in fast and gave one of Hallstead's wingmen a stiff body-check. He went down in a headlong slide across the ice and the fans cheered. Play veered away from Hoyt and swept to Rudie's side of the ice.

"Stop 'em!" Hoyt shrieked, banging his stick on the rink.

Rudie blocked, was struck, whirled around, saw the puck beneath his feet, slashed at it, felt a stick jab between his legs, lost his balance and was toppled backwards. As he went down the form of Chester Maltby leaped over him and swung at the puck, now sliding free in the zone directly in front of Parker's cage.

"A goal!" cried the crowd, as Hallstead's great centre smacked the puck past goalie Bud Gray into a corner of the net.

Hallstead had counted in the first minute of play!

"Hey!" shouted an outraged Hoyt, skating up and shaking his fist at Rudie. "What did I tell you the other day? You let them rough you right out of play. A swell defense man you are! Snap into it! You're playing too safe! Cut loose!"

Hallstead team members were grinning. They could make a shambles of the contest if they wanted. But what was the use? Parker was no opposition in this sport at all. Might as well tease their rivals along. Putting on a dazzling exhibition of pass work, Hallstead had her rooters howling with amusement as she forced Parker to chase her all over the rink, trying to gain possession of the puck. After five minutes of this superb team play, Hallstead slipped through with intentions of scoring another goal. And again the pass went to Chester Maltby who was in position for a shot. This time, however, Chester was blocked—not only blocked but bowled over by a frenzied dive on the part of Hoyt Dale.

"Off the ice!" ruled the referee and the Hallstead crowd booed.

"Hold 'em!" Hoyt cried as he got to his feet and skated to the penalty box.

It was a deliberate foul which had obviously saved almost a sure goal as Chester had been on top of the net. The puck was faced-off not far from the cage and a furious mix-up resulted. It was now five men against Hallstead's six and Parker's entire attention was devoted to the defense of its goal. Rudie, in the thick of the fight, felt an elbow thud against his stomach and wondered whether it was accidental. That was the trouble ... after Hoyt's reference to these things, a fellow was super conscious of everything that was happening to him ... trying to figure out when he was being done dirt or whether it was unintentional. Hallstead figures loomed on both sides of him and the puck was down there between a tangle of feet and smashing sticks. Why not try one or two of Hoyt's pet tricks? He was being roughed plenty. Now, if he could get his stick down ... and shove his foot, just so...!

"Yea!"

The crowd was yelling at Rudie's phenomenal recovery of the puck, emerging from a wildly

struggling group near his goal, upsetting two Hallstead men as he did so. Rudie skated around behind his own goal, heart in his mouth, afraid that the referee would call a foul on him. But the official had evidently thought developments the natural outcome of the hot skirmish. Besides he, Rudie, had the reputation of an extremely clean player.

"I got away with it!" he told himself, as he skimmed down along the sideboards.

The great Maltby cut across the ice with the idea of heading him off. Rudie saw him coming out of the corner of his eye.

"I'll try another Hoyt stunt," he thought. "Maltby's going to try to jam me into the boards. If I can only stop dead and let him shoot past, then shoulder him...!"

Rudie set his skates in the ice; Maltby almost on top of him, hurtled past, smacked up against the sideboards, rebounded and was hit jokingly by the man he had pursued. Maltby went down in a thudding heap and Rudie recaptured the puck, continuing his dash down the ice with Parker rooters going crazy.

"This is a cinch!" Rudie told himself, exultantly. "Hoyt was a hundred percent right ... this knowing how to take care of yourself ... out-roughing the other fellow ... is what counts in this game!"

Hallstead's defense men were rushing back into position, having been in Parker's territory, trying to help their team score a second goal. Rudie, seeing them almost upon him, fired a shot at the goal but the puck was caught by the broad blade of the goalie's stick and shoved to the side. Here Ed Compton and Lee Burrell, Parker wings, lunged in and did battle with the defense men for possession of the little black disc. As they did so, Hoyt's two minute penalty was up and he came flashing out of the box to aid team-mates who had been carrying the attack to an astounded Hallstead. Ed got the puck away from a Hallstead man behind the Hallstead cage, and made a perfect pass-out to Rudie who had roamed in the front area. Rudie blazed away at once and sent the puck whizzing past Hallstead's goal tender, waist high, for the goal that tied the score, 1 to 1.

"Good boy!" shouted Hoyt, skating up to slap Rudie on the back. "Now you're getting the idea! That was great stuff the way you fought your way down the ice!"

Rudie nodded as he skated back into position with the crowd cheering him. If a fellow didn't care what he did, just played with abandon, it was surprising what he could accomplish. "Cut loose!" as Hoyt had said. Rudie had done this for the first time. Result—one of the few goals he had ever made in actual play.

"A referee overlooks an awful lot," Rudie decided, "and maybe I was too strict on what I thought constituted a foul anyhow."

With things breaking one's way, it was easy to salve one's conscience. And now his team members were plunging in as the next face-off occurred at centre, using what Hoyt had taught them as the occasion demanded. A spectacular game materialized as this sort of play kept up with members of both teams crashing into the sideboards or taking dizzy spills. There were processions to the penalty box, about evenly divided up as first one individual, then another, was ruled out for two minute periods. And still Rudie led a charmed life; hurling himself into the fray at every opportunity but escaping without penalty. Several times, no less a personage that the great Maltby was sent to the sidelines for fouling Rudie who had fouled him likewise.

"You've got it wrong, umps!" Maltby had protested on the last trip. "He should have come along with me! That guy...!"

The first period ended in a tie score and the Parker team, having suddenly found itself, skated from the rink to the roars of the crowd. This might prove to be a real contest after all!

"Boys, you're simply splendid!" Coach Hogart greeted them. "A little rougher than I've ever seen you—but perfectly splendid!"

The old professor was greatly excited. He did not observe Hoyt's wise wink behind his back, nor the amused grins on several faces. But, by the end of the furiously contested second period, when Hallstead and Parker players almost came to blows over alleged bits of unnecessary roughness, Coach Hogart sensed definitely that a change had come over his boys ... a change which disturbed him not a little....

"Watch yourselves," he warned. "You've held Hallstead to a tie score thus far but you've made more trips to the penalty box than in any three other games this year. It's going to be your downfall if you keep it up ... mark my words!"

"Mark his words!" laughed Hoyt, as the team took the ice for the third and last period. "Professor Hogart means well but he's no coach! and he never will be. I guess you guys realize now how this game should be played."

Fellow players nodded.

"We've got the fighting spirit today," said Rudie. "That's what's doing more for us than anything else!"

"We've got more than that," rejoined Hoyt. "We've got what Hallstead doesn't like—an answer for everything they pull on us! We've spilled old Maltby so much that it's slowed his whole game up. The same stuff, gang—and we'll worry the life out of this outfit!"

Hallstead, surprised and miffed at the unusually stiff brand of opposition Parker was putting up, took the ice at the start of the third period resolved to go out in front and stay there. But Parker met the new attack with increased resistance and the crowd sat breathless as formation after formation was broken up by one side or the other, the puck changing hands with bewildering rapidity. Hallstead, Rudie now decided, was playing rough but fair hockey. Parker, however, was employing the practices taught by Hoyt when play came to close quarters. As the pressure of the contest grew hotter and hotter, these little devices became more obvious.

"Careful, fellows!" Rudie couldn't help warning, during a time-out. "You're going too far in a minute. I've never felt right about this ... we've got a chance for the game if...!"

"You're okay!" broke in Hoyt. "Going great guns! Keep it up!"

Hoyt looked to Captain Walt Lowery for support and got it, in an approving nod. Victory over Hallstead was the bait—an unbelievable victory! There were just six more minutes of play. The game might go into overtime...!

Mustering his forces, Chester Maltby, great Hallstead centre, sallied determinedly into Parker territory, determined to crack her defense wide open. With wingmen on either side of him and a defense man joining in the attack, forming a four-man forward wall, the advance began.

"Look out, gang!" shouted Hoyt, and braced himself for the impact.

Maltby feinted a pass as he raced down upon Hoyt with the puck riding along at the end of his stick, then veered at the last moment and attempted to get around Parker's left defense. Hoyt, thrown off guard, could not apply his usual body-check and had only time to ram his stick out. The stick caught Maltby between the legs and catapulted him.

"Booh!" roared Hallstead fans. "Take him out!"

"A major penalty for you!" shrieked the referee, skating over and pushing Hoyt to the sidelines. "Five minutes for this man!" he called to the timers.

"What for?" demanded Hoyt, registering innocence. "I only tried to get the puck. I...!"

"I've been watching you the whole game," flashed the referee. "You've pulled that stunt once too often!"

"Wow—maybe that penalty doesn't hurt!" moaned a Parker rooter, as Hoyt, still protesting, slid into the penalty box. "He's out for practically the rest of the game which shoots our defense and breaks up our attack."

Parker team members glanced concernedly at one another as a fighting Hallstead lined up close to Parker's goal for a face-off.

"You see—it doesn't pay!" cried Rudie.

"Shut up!" blazed Captain Lowery, who was on edge. "Get in there! Don't let 'em score!"

The referee dropped the puck to ice. It was lost almost at once in the mad turmoil which followed. Goalie Bud Gray did heroic work in warding off a rain of vicious shots. But still Hallstead kept battering with Parker fighting the harder to atone for the loss of their defense men. A cry went up as two Hallstead players were bumped to the ice in front of the net.

"Off the ice—you and you!" barked the referee, and slapped two Parker players on the back—Left Wing Lee Burrell and Captain Walt Lowery!

"It's three against six now!" gasped a spectator. "What's the matter with Parker? I've never seen so much fouling!"

A scowling Hoyt Dale moved over to make room for his two team-mates in the penalty box.

"This is not so good," were Captain Lowery's first words.

"The ref's got it in for us because I kicked when he put me out," Hoyt rejoined.

"You're wrong!" returned Walt, remorsefully. "He's just gotten wise to us, that's all! We put up a game like this and then have to lose it on...!"

"... fouls!" finished Lee, feelingly. "Swell advice you gave us, Hoyt!... We ought to have known better!"

"We're not licked yet," retorted Parker's left defense, hopefully, and made a megaphone of his hands. "Stay with 'em, Rudie—big boy—careful in there—don't let 'em put you in the penalty box!"

Rudie, who had been conferring with his two remaining team-mates, right wing Ed Compton and goalie Bud Gray, looked toward the three deposed players in astonishment.

"What did he say?" he asked of Ed.

"They're all shouting now," said Ed. "Telling us to play it safe so we won't make any fouls ... and hold 'em till they get back in the game!"

"Can you beat it?" exclaimed Rudie, and grinned.

But the referee was calling another face-off not far from Parker's net and Hallstead had all five men down the ice—five actually against two—in an effort to jam the puck home while Parker was so severely handicapped.

"Listen, fellows!" pleaded Rudie, of Ed and Bud. "Hoyt's had his say now and you see where it's gotten us. Here's our chance to show what can be done—on the square. Are you with me?"

"Sure we're with you!" cried Bud, crouching in the mouth of the cage.

"All the way!" seconded Ed.

And the battle was on! Rudie was knocked off his feet, stepped on, hit with sticks and swarmed over as five Hallstead men sought to get the puck from under him. He finally recovered his feet and sent the puck whizzing up the ice out of danger. Hallstead chased it, took on another formation, and came dashing back on the attack, five men abreast, with only two Parker men to face the charge. This time it was Ed who went down under flashing Hallstead heels and only Rudie was left to battle the invaders. He was shoved into the cage in a furious assault, wedged in alongside goalie Bud Gray, but—between them—they kicked the puck free.

"What hockey!" Hoyt was screaming. "That's holding 'em, you guys!"

"They can't keep this up much longer!" said Captain Lowery, nervously. "How many seconds are we out of play yet?"

"Fifty!" informed Lee, who sat next the timer, biting finger nails already chewed to the quick. "Gee, this last minute's been an hour!"

Once more, led by Chester Maltby, Hallstead rallied to the attack. And once more two valiant Parker men, fighting with a frenzy equal to five, met the rush head-on. But both went down under jolting impacts and goalie Bud Gray was left to face the onslaught alone. He was met, however, by a wave of blue-jerseyed men and was pulled to the side on blocking a shot so that the puck was whizzed past him on the rebound.

"Goal disallowed!" shrieked the referee, tearing into the mix-up in front of the net and tapping Chester Maltby on the shoulder. "Penalty box for you," he signified, "and you...!" referring to the Hallstead right defense. A great clamor went up as the two Hallstead players joined an already crowded penalty box. Out on the ice, Ed and Rudie solemnly shook hands. They were still in the thick

of the fight and now the competition was almost even again ... three against two. But Lee and Walt were due back on the ice now, any second, which would swing the advantage in Parker's favor. And less than two minutes of the regular playing time remained!

A new face-off with Rudie opposing the Hallstead right wing. He managed to get his stick on the puck and hook it away. As he skated to the side with Hallstead players in pursuit, he saw Lee and Walt tumbling out of the penalty box and rushing back into play. Changing his defensive tactics at once, Rudie suddenly raced up the ice toward Hallstead's goal, leaving two frantic Hallstead men behind him. The third, playing back on defense, took his station in front of the goalie and awaited Rudie's attack. Lee and Walt, however, were joining Rudie from the side, spanking their sticks on the ice. The puck skimmed across to them and all three swung into formation, sweeping in upon the under-guarded Hallstead goal. Ed to Rudie to Walt was the course the puck took as the trio neared the cage. Rudie was violently body-checked by the lone defense man but Walt was left free to skate in upon the goalie and sent the puck hurtling into the net.

"A goal!" scored the referee.

Hallstead sat thunderstruck; Parker supporters made the air warm with lusty shouts. In another minute a dope bucket would be violently upset. Hoyt Dale now leaned forward in the penalty box, his five minute suspension almost up. In another three seconds he was back on the ice, Parker's full strength returned, with Hallstead still shy her two regulars.

"No monkey business!" warned Captain Lowery.

"Don't worry!" a chastened Hoyt assured. "They don't get me in that penalty box again!"

And the next instant the game was over.

"Rudie, old timer!" cried the fellow who had thought he knew more than the coach. "I take back everything I ever said against you. That defense you put up was simply immense ... and it was me who put you in that hole...!"

"It's okay now," said Rudie, as he glanced at the scoreboard.

"Oh, no it's not," replied Hoyt, as guilty looking team members gathered around. "I owe all you guys an apology. All we've needed is more fight. And speaking of fair play—say, after my starting you off on the wrong foot, Rudie and Lee had me scared stiff. I was afraid they'd join us in the penalty box and leave only poor Bud out there to defend the goal! Did I suffer torture?... I threw my ideas overboard right then. They're all wet!"

"I'll say they are!" agreed Captain Walt Lowery, with a supporting chorus. "You can get by with this stuff just so long and after that—you're out of luck!"

It was here that an elated Coach Hogart burst in upon them. "Your play was magnificent!" he cried. "Everyone of you fairly outdid himself. You're all to be congratulated!"

Parker High's victorious team members grinned, looked a bit sheepishly at one another and decided to say nothing. What the old professor, who had loyally volunteered to coach them, didn't know, wouldn't hurt him, because it was never going to happen again.

CRISS-CROSSED SKIS

Skiing is loads of fun. If you don't believe it, ask Mr. Sylvester B. Turner, who owns the only hill in town worth skiing on. He'll tell you what fun it is—and if you're not hit over the head with the nearest thing at hand, you'll be lucky. But maybe Mr. Turner's cooled down some since last winter. Honest, he was hot enough that time to have melted snow!

How'd it all happen? Well, you see, we fellows used to slide and ski on Randolph Hill before Mr. Turner bought it. After that, he puts up "Don't Trespass" signs all over the place but even then we don't think he means us. The first time we put our feet on his ground, though, he raises an awful holler. And the worst of it is—Mr. Turner's one and only son, Ronald, tattles on us.

Ronnie, we call him, is a mamma's boy if there ever was one. He's thin and scared looking, if you get what I mean—the sort who wears rubbers if there's a cloud in the sky. You can't point your finger at him without his running home and telling about it. Talk about sensitive! Mack Sleder asked him "how come his hair wasn't combed?" one morning and Ronnie almost busts out crying. Perhaps he can't help it. But you know how fellows are, if a guy acts that way, they poke a lot of fun at him. Ronnie steers pretty clear of us, though. He knows what's good for him. Besides, Ronnie doesn't go in for sports. He hates to get bumped or dirtied up and then, too, there's always the chance of getting hurt.

"What's the sense in it?" he asks us one time. "I'd much rather sit in a hammock and read a good book."

"Aren't you afraid the hammock might turn over with you?" kids Tommy Fox.

"I'd never thought of that," says Ronnie, soberly. "That's worth considering, isn't it?"

And he sits on the porch steps after that.

Ronnie's Dad is as big and blustering as Ronnie is timid and quiet. And talk about dignified! Mr. Sylvester B. Turner expects everyone to bow and scrape before him since he's the richest man in town and owns the biggest factory besides the biggest hill. Everything has to be big with Mr. Turner. That's his style. The biggest house, the biggest car, the biggest noise ... and the biggest boob for a son. That's how we feel, anyhow, after Mr. Turner's high and mighty manner and Ronnie's yelling: "Dad, look what the fellahs are doing!"

Are we downhearted? You can just imagine! Being chased off old Randolph Hill is like having our sleds and skis taken away from us on account of there being no other decent place. We could understand this high hat business if Mr. Turner was using the hill for anything else but it slopes off for over a mile behind his big house, going down on one side to Mitchell Creek and down the other to a meadow that's fenced in with an old rail fence. We've been sliding and skiing straight down the hill, though, the long way, which carries us across the old Strawtown Pike and up against a bank that finally stops us. It's one grand ride, whether you take it by sled or by skis ... only, of course, it's lots more exciting on skis. We figured this year that we'd grade the bank, too, and use it for a jumping off place. Whether you know it or not, ski jumping is the real sport. You may land on your head or back or some other part of your anatomy but that's half the sport! And here Mr. Turner is so stingy that he closes his estate to the whole neighborhood!

"You must remember, James," my father says to me, "Mr. Turner has a perfect right to do this. It's his property. Old Mr. Randolph was very nice to let you boys use the hill but you shouldn't feel too hard against Mr. Turner because he refuses. After all, it can't be so enjoyable to have a mob of kids tracking all over. Maybe Mrs. Turner is very high strung. Maybe their boy is nervous and can't stand strenuous exercise or excitement. Maybe that's why Mr. Turner bought the place, so he could be off by himself with his family. You must take this all into consideration."

"I still think he's just doing it to be mean," says I. "He likes to put on airs. As for his son, if Ronnie's mother would let him be himself, we'd make a man out of him in no time!"

My Dad throws back his head and let loose a laugh.

"You fellows had better leave well enough alone," he warns. "You ought to know by this time that Ronald has a 'Don't Trespass' sign hanging on him, too. And since Mr. Turner has phoned me and complained about your being on his property, I don't care to have any further trouble with our new neighbor. You mustn't forget, either, that my company does considerable business with Mr. Turner's factory. We can't afford to have Mr. Turner down on us."

"You're right, Dad," I agrees. "I guess I'm still peeved, that's all. Made me feel like I wanted to get even. The other guys feel that way, too. Some of 'em were going to take it out on Ronnie—but I'll have a talk with 'em and fix it up. I wouldn't want to do anything that would interfere with your business."

"I know you wouldn't," Dad replies, then puts a hand on my arm. "I'm sorry about that hill. If I owned it I'd turn it over to the town for a public playground."

"Picture Mr. Turner doing a thing like that!" I explodes. "He's not interested in this community. He's just interested in what he can take out of it."

Dad nods. "The answer probably is," he says; thoughtfully, "that Mr. Turner's never learned how to play."

And, do you know—Dad's explanation all of a sudden soaks in! The more I think it over, the sorrier I commence to feel for Mr. Turner for what he's been missing all his life. And the tough part is that his son's starting out the same way.

"Maybe we could return good for evil," it occurs to me. "I'll have to get the gang together and see what they think about it."

Talk about a conference! There's just six of us fellows and each of us has more ideas than we know what to do with ... which means that there's usually six leaders and no followers. Some don't want to have anything more to do with the Turners; others claim, if we did try to be nice, it wouldn't be appreciated; and Tommy Fox asks me what I expect to gain for my trouble.

"Probably nothing," I rejoins, "except the satisfaction of playing missionary to the heathen on the hill!"

This brings a laugh.

"Okay!" seconds Mack Sleder. "It's going to be torture for us, but mamma's boy Ronnie gets invited to join our gang the next time we see him."

"And he'll turn us down flatter than a fallen cake," Eddie Hale predicts.

"Well, it's Jim's idea," says Mack. "I'm for trying anything once."

Getting ahold of Ronnie isn't so easy. Every time he sees us coming he runs around the block or cuts across lots. We're just so much poison to him and he figures, since his father's laid down the law about our using the hill, that we'll pretty near scalp him if we get the chance.

But one snowy day we get Ronnie from in front and behind. His arms are full of groceries which he wouldn't have been getting himself only the delivery truck is stuck in a drift and his mother has to have the food for dinner.

"Let me go, you guys!" he begs. "If you dare touch me, my Dad'll...!"

"Listen, you!" says Mack, with his hand on Ronnie's shoulder. "Don't cry before you're hurt. We've been trying to catch you for some time."

"Y-yes, I—I know," says Ronnie, trembling from head to foot. "D-don't make me d-drop these eggs, or you'll b-be sorry."

"Oh, he's got eggs!" says Mack, and winks at the bunch. For a minute I think he's going to change his mind and pull something.

"You don't like us, do you?" Tommy demands.

"Why—why—I certainly do."

"Then why do you try to beat it every time you see us?"

Ronnie swallows and looks the next thing to miserable.

"I—I've got to be getting home with these groceries," he says. "My mother's waiting...."

"Answer my question!" demands Tommy, looking vicious.

"I—I've forgotten it," stammers Ronnie. "It's storming harder, isn't it?"

"Yes—it'll be great weather for skiing after this snow packs down," says Eddie, pointedly.

Ronnie blinks and glances around like he's going to yell for help.

"Cut it," says I, pushing the fellows back and taking matters in my own hands. "Ronnie, old boy, this must be a pretty lonely life you're living," I begins.

"These groceries are getting heavy," Ronnie answers, shifting his packages around. "And I'm getting snow down the back of my neck."

"You shouldn't be alone so much," I keeps on. "It's bad for a guy to play by himself all the time. It makes him self-centered and mean. Besides, there's no fun in it. What you need is to get out with the gang—to be one of us!"

"*What?*" Ronnie's mouth comes wide open.

"There goes the eggs!" shouts Mack, making a grab at the sack. He picks it out of a snowbank and looks inside. "Okay—only a couple cracked—none of 'em broken."

"Yes, Ronnie," I repeats, as I help hold him up. "One of us! We'd be proud to count you as a member of our Rough and Ready Club."

"You—you *would?*" Ronnie stares at us suspiciously.

"You bet we would!" assures Mack. "We'd be tickled to initiate you!"

"Initiate?" gulps Ronnie, and tries to get away. "No, sir! I don't want to join your club. I want to go home!"

"Listen," says I, kicking Mack in the shins, "we're willing to make an extra special exception in your case—and let you join without any initiation."

"Well..." considers Ronnie, "I—I'd have to ask my Dad first. He doesn't believe much in joining things. He says a man should be able to stand alone."

"He's wrong," speaks up Tommy. "Doesn't your Dad know that 'united we stand, divided we fall'?"

Ronnie stares. "I don't believe he ever heard of that," he says. "But I'll tell him."

"Don't you tell him a thing!" I orders. "Can't you decide anything for yourself. Do you have to run home and ask papa or mamma every time you want to blow your nose?"

Ronnie's face gets red. "Not exactly," he says, faint-like. "These groceries...!"

"We'll help you carry 'em home," I volunteers, "as far as the bottom of the hill, anyway."

"Sure!" says Mack, and grabs the sack of eggs. "Oh, oh! There's another one cracked! Man—these eggs are tough—you can crack 'em but you can't break 'em."

"Mother will throw a fit," Ronnie observes, ruefully. He stares about him, badly worried, because his groceries are divided up between six fellows, and he's probably wondering if he's ever going to get 'em back.

"We're not a bad bunch—honest!" I tells him, as we walk along, keeping our heads down against the wind and the snow. "Trouble is—you and us haven't ever gotten acquainted. We think you're a real guy underneath."

Say—you ought to see Ronnie warm up! I guess he's been starved for talk like this ... someone to take an interest in him. He's still afraid we're going to take a backhanded slap at him, though.

"I—I *don't* get out much," he confesses. "There's lots of things I'd like to do if...!"

"Fine!" busts in Mack. "You come with us and you can do 'em!"

"Could I learn to ski?" Ronnie asks.

"Ski?" we cry, and now it's our turn to gasp for breath. "Ski?... Would you really like to learn to ski?"

We can't believe our ears. Can you imagine this? It just goes to show that you can't judge any fellow until you get right on the inside of him. If Ronnie was asking us to teach him how to play checkers or blindman's buff ... but—skiing! Maybe he's spoofing us.

"Skiing looks like fun," says Ronnie. "Mother thinks it's too dangerous, but you fellows don't seem to get hurt."

"Naw, of course we don't," I replies. "I tell you what you do, Ronnie! You come out with us and we'll

show you how to ski and then, after you know just how to do it, you can surprise your mother! Just imagine the look on her face when she sees you skiing up the hill to the house!"

"Y-yes, I—I can imagine!" falters Ronnie. Then his face takes on a hopeful expression. "I guess she'd feel all right about it when she saw how perfectly safe it was, wouldn't she?"

"Sure!" declares Mack, slapping Ronnie on the back and almost dropping the egg sack. "Every mother's that way! Too bad, though, that your old man—I mean—your father—kicked us off the hill." Mack nudges me and I try to stop him, but he's got what he thinks is a great idea and he goes on. "I guess you weren't so crazy to have us on the hill, either. Just the same—it's the best place around here to learn to ski."

We're just at the foot of the hill as Mack says this. It's the street side of the hill and we're looking up the steps to the big house on top. Somehow it reminds us of a fort that's almost lost in the snow. We're half expecting to hear some words fired out at us from Mr. Turner's booming voice but we evidently can't be seen from up above. Ronnie hasn't said anything yet in answer to Mack's bold crack about the hill for skiing and I'm thinking to myself that he's spoiled everything.

"I had the wrong idea about you fellows," Ronnie suddenly blurts out as we return his groceries. "That's why I told Dad. He seldom goes out on the back hill. I don't see how the tracks you'd make in the snow would hurt anything. If you'd like to meet me out there tomorrow afternoon while Dad's downtown...?"

"*Would we?*" we all shout.

"I haven't any skis," says Ronnie.

"I'll loan you mine!" I offers. "But what if your Dad should find out? He gave us strict orders...!"

"Well," considers Ronnie, starting up the steps. "I suppose the worst he could do would be to put you off again."

"He wouldn't be hard on us if Ronnie was along," encourages Tommy.

"Okay!" I decides. "We'll be there, Ronnie! From now on—you're one of the gang!"

Ronnie's face actually beams. Then he takes an anxious look up the stairs.

"If I don't get home with these groceries...!" he says, "Mother'll have the police looking for me."

"You leave it to us," I calls after him as he runs up the steps. "We'll make a skier out of you!"

And the second Ronnie's disappeared in the house, we all start to dancing jigs in the snow, with Mack patting himself on the chest and declaring: "I guess I put it over, eh ... what? Got Ronnie to take us back on the old hill! And say—maybe we were wrong. If we give this bird half a chance he may not turn out a mamma's boy after all!"

The next afternoon we don't feel quite so gay. It's stopped snowing and the skiing ought to be swell but the thoughts of what Mr. Turner might do and say if he ever got wise that we were on the hill again without his permission has made us kind of shy and nervous. We're not so sure that even Ronnie's being there will help any in case...! In fact, Eddie suggests that maybe Mr. Turner would blame us for inveigling Ronnie into skiing and using the forbidden hill. Inveigle is a terrible sounding word and, while we're crazy to ski, we're not wild to ski into any more trouble.

"Besides," points out Carl, "if Ronnie should get a bump like we all do, once in a while, we're the guys who'll have to answer for it."

"It's quite a responsibility all right," admits Mack, "but I say it's worth the risk. We certainly can run as fast as Mr. Turner."

"Not if he sees us first," I warns, "so we'd better keep our eyes peeled. My old pair of skis ought to be good enough for Ronnie to learn on, don't you think?"

"Sure," rejoins Tommy. "He'll probably break 'em anyway—hit a tree or something."

"Aren't you cheerful?" I razzes. "Well, that's not going to happen if I have to go down the hill ahead of him and bend the trees out of the way!"

There's a familiar figure sitting on a fallen log and waiting for us when we climb over the fence and sneak up the hill behind the Turner house. Ronnie jumps up when he spies us, as tickled as a kid, who's about to try something he's never done before.

"I—I thought maybe you wouldn't come."

"Ronnie—we are here!" says Mack, officially and solemnly. "Your lesson is about to begin!"

"But first," breaks in Tommy, "how many miles is your father from here?"

"He's downtown," reassures Ronnie. "He's hardly ever back before five o'clock."

"Then I guess the coast is clear," says Eddie.

"It is—straight down the hill," I replies, meaning something different. "But you got to watch out for the creek and the fence on the sides. Here's your skis, Ronnie. You shove your feet into the harness like this."

Ronnie is all eyes. He lifts up his feet and lets me fix them onto the long strips of hardwood.

"You—you're not going to send me down this steep hill first off, are you?" he asks, plenty nervous.

"No, of course not. We're going to let you ski around on top of the hill here, where it's flat ... and get used to the thing. Stand up now and see how you feel."

Ronnie straightens up and looks down at the funny contraptions on his feet. He lifts one ski up and tries to take a step forward. It turns sidewise and plops down on top of the other ski. Ronnie's legs get crossed and he sits down ker-plunk. We grin and Ronnie looks worried.

"Aren't these skis a little too long for me?" he inquires. "Are you sure they're my size?"

"Skis don't come in sizes," I informs. "You lifted your foot too high. It's a sliding motion—like this." And I demonstrates.

"It's easy, isn't it?" says Ronnie, and untangles himself.

"Sure!" encourages Mack, "when you get onto it—it's like falling off a log ... or a cliff ... or anything...."

Ronnie stares at Mack a minute and then glances toward the brink of the hill.

"I couldn't get started down hill without wanting to, could I?" he questions.

"If you did, we'd grab you," I tells him. "Now try it again. Move your right foot forward. Keep your body inclined just a bit. That's the way. You look just like a skier now! Doesn't he, fellows?"

"Exactly!" they agree.

"Don't move and spoil it!" directs Mack who can't help making sport of things.

Ronnie looks kind of bewildered.

"Go ahead," says I. "Don't mind what that boob says. He's a bum skier anyway."

"I am, am I?" challenges Mack.

And down he goes over the hill, making the first tracks in the glistening snow. It's breathless to watch him as he gains speed, whizzes across the old Strawtown Pike and up the embankment where he comes to a stop. He's a black dot to us now as he turns to wave his hands and then start the long journey back.

"That's wonderful!" breathes Ronnie. "Oh, if I could only do that!"

"You've got to creep before you can ski," I instructs. "Don't get impatient. A good skier wasn't built ... I mean—made—in a day. We'll come out again ... that is ... if your Dad doesn't stop us."

"Dad's never had any time for sports," explains Ronnie. "He's been too busy. He thinks young men should ... er ... expend their energies on more worthwhile things...."

"Well, I ... er ... don't exactly agree with him," says I. "But, of course, we can't all think the same."

"All work and no play," recites Tommy, winking at the rest of us, "makes Dad a dull boy."

"He means 'any Dad'," I hastens to explain. "Now you just ski along beside me till you get the hang of this. Then we'll try a little slope back here which I'm sure you can safely ... er ... negotiate."

"Safely—*what?*" Ronnie asks.

"Jim means," defines Tommy, getting back at me, "a slope you can safely descend without any *untoward incident*...."

"Oh!" says Ronnie.

We spend a good hour, Ronnie and me, getting him familiar with having skis on his feet. Meanwhile the rest of the guys are having a swell time skiing down the hill and I'm commencing to think that I'm the martyr to the cause, being crazy to do some real skiing myself.

"How about it?" I ask, finally, "do you feel like you can go it alone?"

"It's quite simple now," says Ronnie. "Do you mean you think I'm ready to ski down the hill?"

The question gives me a chill. Skiing on a plane surface and skiing down hill is as different as walking in broad daylight and skating in the dark with roller skates.

"You'd better stick to just what you're doing for a couple days," I advises. "You're getting along swell."

"I feel quite confident," replies Ronnie. "This is mostly a matter of balance ... something I've always been good at. I walked our clothes line once. Everything would have been all right if it hadn't busted."

"Yes," says I, "Most things would be okay if something didn't happen. But you use your own judgment, Ronnie. If you think you're ready to go down the hill, it's up to you. Only don't blame me if you suffer any ... er ... minor accident."

"How could I blame you?" Ronnie wants to know. "I'm awfully grateful for all you've taught me. This is the most fun I've had in months ... maybe years...."

"That's fine," I replies. "Here's hoping you keep on having fun."

"That's why I want to go down the hill," declares Ronnie. "I imagine that would give me a real sensation."

"It's the big thrill in skiing," Mack puts in, being eager to see Ronnie make his first attempt. "Just follow my tracks, Ronnie, if you decide to go down, and you can't go wrong!"

"I—I believe I'll do it," says Ronnie, after taking a deep breath. "It's a long ways down. I probably won't be able to ski back up the hill. That looks a lot harder."

"Aim for that embankment across the Pike," points out Mack. "See if you can beat my mark."

"Oh, I couldn't do that first off," returns Ronnie, modestly. "I'd be satisfied if I could tie it. I imagine my momentum will be about the same so I should travel about as far."

"There's no doubt about it—you'll travel!" assures Tommy.

"If this works out all right," says Ronnie, "I'll have my Dad see me do it and maybe he'll change his mind about letting you fellows use the hill. Of course he mustn't know that you've taught me. He's to think that all these tracks are mine."

"Ronnie," says I, "my hat's off to you. You're a regular sport. And what's more—I admire your nerve."

"Oh, this doesn't take nerve," disparages Ronnie. "It just takes skill."

"Well, have it your own way," says Mack, and we all stand around to watch the take-off.

"Feet together," I directs, feeling shaky inside. "Lean forward a little more. That's it!"

"Goodbye, fellows!" calls Ronnie, as he moves toward the spot where the hill slopes down, eyes glued ahead.

"Goodbye!" we shout.

It sounds to me like we're saying goodbye for a long time. There's a sickening feeling comes in the pit of my stomach as Ronnie suddenly disappears over the brow of the hill and shoots down. Say—have you ever ridden in a roller coaster? Well—you zip down a steep hill on skis and tell me which gives you the biggest heart throb. In a coaster you can at least hold onto the rod and sit tight. On skis you've got to hold yourself just so or you may find yourself flying through space and landing hard enough to jar your wisdom teeth.

"So far, so good," says Mack, when Ronnie's half way down.

"I don't care to look," I rejoins, getting panicky. "I never should have let him gone!"

"He's doing swell!" cries Tommy. "Oh—oh, no! He's not doing so good now! He's veering to the right. He's off the course. He's heading for the fence!"

"Good grief!" I exclaims, and takes a look. "Sit down, Ronnie!" I yells, making a megaphone of my hands. "Sit down—quick!"

But Ronnie doesn't hear me. He's too wrapped up in his own problem.

"Oh, my gosh!" gasps Eddie, "that tree!"

How Ronnie missed a big oak, I don't know. He just shaves it and goes on, right through a clump of underbrush and down a steep grade toward the fence, his body weaving back and forth as he's fighting to keep his balance.

"Look out!" I screams, and then it happens.

Ronnie hits the fence ker-smash and goes right on over, doing the niftiest frontward somersault you ever saw, and landing head first in a snow drift with only his skis sticking out. We're all of us so petrified that we stand there a couple seconds, not knowing what to do or say. Then we see Ronnie's feet kick and his head come out of the snow.

"I'll bet he's hurt!" I cries. "I'm going down to him!"

As I'm strapping on my skis, though, the fellows bust out laughing.

"What's so funny?" I demands.

"He's waving at us!" roars Tommy, "he thinks that's great stuff! I don't think he's hurt a bit!"

I stand up and stare and we all wave back. Ronnie starts trying to climb the fence with his skis still on but he finds this doesn't work so good, so he takes 'em off. And when I'm sure he isn't hurt, I take to laughing myself. Honest, I haven't seen such a funny spill since I can remember. Talk about innocence abroad! The way Ronnie has gone down the hill, so sure he has known all he needed to know about skiing!

"So you're laughing at my boy, eh?" says a big voice behind us.

Wow! We just about freeze in our tracks! As we turn around, there's Mr. Turner, so mad he can hardly see straight. How long he's been standing there, we don't know, but it's probably been plenty long enough. And now we're going to catch it!

"My wife thought something was up," says the man who owns the hill, "so she phoned me and I came home. This is what you do behind my back, is it?"

"It was your son's idea," explains Tommy, who's scared green. "He wanted us to teach him how to ski...."

"So this is the way you do it—start him down this big hill?"

"I told him he'd better not try it," says I.

"When I want my son to know anything, I'll teach him!" booms Mr. Turner. "You boys aren't going to make a laughing stock of him! I used to ski when I was a boy and I...."

"*You?*" Mack exclaims, unbelievably.

"Yes, *me!*" thunders Mr. Turner. "And Ronald could do what I used to do with a little practice. Loan me those skis, young man, and I'll show you a thing or two!"

Mack, open-mouthed, passes his skis over. Ronnie, meanwhile, is struggling to get back up the hill. He can't make it on skis and is in snow up to his waist. His dad kneels down and slips his feet into the straps as we gaze at him, darn near paralyzed. What can we say? Mr. Turner is boiling mad ... so mad that he gets one ski on backward. He kicks it off and turns it around.

"Excuse me, Mr. Turner," breaks in Tommy, "but hadn't you better come back here on the hill? Don't put your skis on while you're on the slope. You might start off before you're ready. You know, skis don't have any brakes...!"

"Are you telling me something about skis, young man?" is Mr. Turner's rejoinder.

"I'm trying to," replies Tommy, backing off, "but I guess it doesn't matter much. You'll find out soon enough."

Mr. Turner glowers.

"Careful, Dad!" cries Ronnie, who comes panting up the hill. "It's not so easy as it looks!"

"Stand back, son!" orders Mr. Turner, and stands up suddenly. The incline starts him moving and off he goes—before he's ready.

"Dad!" yells Ronnie, but there's none of us near enough to catch him.

Mr. Turner gives one anxious glance behind him, and almost falls over backwards as he swoops downward. What's worse—he hasn't had a chance to steer himself and he shoots off the straight-away at once, going more and more to the left.

"He's heading for the creek!" we all cry. "Sit down, Mr. Turner! Sit down!"

When you sit down it helps slow you up and you can usually manage to stop although you may roll over a few times. But it's better than running into something by a whole lot.

"Maybe he'll jump the creek!" speculates Mack. "It's only about fifteen feet across!"

"I don't think my Dad was ever on skis before!" says Ronnie, worriedly. "He thinks anything a boy does is easy."

We groan at this, though I'm willing to believe that Mr. Turner has had some experience with skis which he hasn't thought worth mentioning until this moment. It's even steeper down the left side of the hill than it is down the center where we've made our course, and Mr. Turner is going like the wind when he gets to the bottom. We can tell that he sees the creek and is trying to figure out how he can avoid it. He tries to move his skis to the side and make a turn but nearly upsets. Thirty feet from the creek he lifts one ski off the snow and desperately attempts to swing sidewise. Instead he criss-crosses his skis, tangles up his legs, sits down with a smack, and goes sliding right on, clawing and scraping until he clears the bank of the creek and sails out over the water to land ker-splash in the middle.

"Oh, boy—and is that water cold!" shivers Mack.

"He sure showed us something!" murmurs Tommy.

Say—if we were to be tanned the next minute we can't help screaming at this. It's twice as funny as Ronnie's high dive what with Mr. Turner sitting in the creek, with the water up to his neck and one ski still clamped to his foot. He doesn't stay there long, though. He flounders about till he can stand up and wades ashore, climbing up into the snow which must feel warm to him in comparison to the icy water.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughs Ronnie. "Dad didn't do as well as I did, did he?"

Man, oh man! Is *this* a surprise? Here we've just begun to feel bad for laughing outright at Ronnie's

father and Ronnie busts a rib himself. That makes us feel better ... but Mr. Turner's coming up the hill, leaving the skis behind, so mad the water almost turns to steam on him.

"We'd better beat it!" advises Mack.

"No, fellows! Stay here!" pleads Ronnie.

"We've got to stick!" I orders. "We can't run out on Ronnie now!"

So we stand our ground, expecting to get our heads taken off the minute Mr. Turner gets to us. He's a sorry looking sight as he clammers up the hill, falling down a couple times in the snow when he loses his footing. Mr. Turner's hanging onto his dignity, though, for dear life ... trying his darnedest to preserve it. He's been humiliated in the eyes of his son and before a bunch of fellows who've come from the best homes in town, if I do say it. But all I can think of is what my Dad told me about doing business with Mr. Turner, in warning me not to make him sore. And now I've gone and done it!

"Gee, Dad!" says Ronnie, when Mr. Turner, puffing hard and teeth chattering, reaches the top of the hill. "If you knew how funny you looked!"

"I'm c-c-cold!" answers Mr. Turner. "This is no l-l-laughing m-m-matter! You b-b-boys had no b-b-business...."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Turner," I apologizes, thinking of my father and hoping to straighten things out.

"S-s-sorry, n-n-nothing!" stammers Mr. Turner. "You'll b-b-be t-t-telling this all over t-t-town...!"

"Sure they will," says Ronnie. "It's too good to keep."

Mr. Turner glares furiously. "W-w-when I w-w-want your opinion, son, I'll ask f-for it!" he returns.

Have you ever been so nervous that you can't keep your face straight even when you're scared? That's the way we feel and we commence to snicker again, one fellow starting off the others. It's some comical sight, Mr. Turner, shaking like a wet rag on a clothesline.

"I've g-g-got to be g-g-getting to the h-h-house," he says. "B-b-boys, p-p-please d-d-don't s-s-say anything about this! K-k-keep m-m-mum!"

It's so funny to hear Mr. Turner trying to talk that Mack laughs right out.

"Maybe," suggests Ronnie, taking his father's arm, "if you'd let the boys use the hill...?"

"Yes!" takes up Mr. Turner, giving us an appealing glance. "If I'll l-l-let you use this h-h-hill for a s-s-slide, w-w-will you b-b-boys keep this quiet?"

We look at one another and are we happy? There's a nodding of heads and I says: "That's a bargain, Mr. Turner! Nobody hears about this if we can play on the hill!"

"M-m-my w-w-word is my b-b-bond," says Ronnie's Dad. "C-c-come on, Ronald, b-b-before I s-s-suffer from exposure!"

"Goodbye, fellows!" calls Ronnie, and winks. "I'll be seeing you soon!"

"Goodbye, Ronnie!" we shout after him, deciding right then and there that he's a regular guy in the making.

That night, when my Dad finds where I've been he says, "How come?" and my answer is: "Oh, Mr. Turner just decided, if he didn't let us use the hill, that everybody in town would think he was all *wet*...."

"I don't quite understand," my Dad replies, but that's nothing—because no one, outside of our bunch, understands to this day.

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