

# Win-Place-and Show

By ROGER TORREY



**Mike O'Dell, ex-wrestler bodyguard, sets out to square the big boss' bet**



Of course I know for a long time that Felix Mihalek is putting up the dough for a book that follows around where he has his horses racing, but it ain't until now that I know he's a horse player himself. He sits on the edge of his bed and says:

"I want you to go to Caliente for me tonight. I gave a guy the finger on a bet and I'm supposed to pay off on it right away."

It ain't any of my business but Felix is a friend of mine as well as my boss so I say: "How big a bet?"

He says: "Fifty grand, damn it. On that dog of a *Clean Baby* that come in fourth yesterday. Supposed to be right and I could have gone out and carried him in on my back and placed."

He looks sour and I don't blame him. It kind of sets me back because I always figure Felix is too smart to lose his money betting on somebody else's nags. It's no never minds to me, though, so I say:

"Okey by me. When do I start?"

He says: "Now. As long as I lose I might as well pay off now."

He gets up and goes in the other room, which is fixed up like a kind of office with a safe and all that, and comes back with a thick envelope and hands it to me and says: "Fifty G's and get a receipt. It goes to Barney Zeil . . . you know him. If you start now you can make it down there and be here by the time I get back from checking up."

This Barney Zeil has got a roadhouse between Palm City and San Ysidro, almost to the Border. It ain't quite to Caliente but it's so close there ain't much difference. I say:

"You going to make the rounds yourself, alone?" and he shakes himself and says: "Why not? I did before."

There's no reason why not. He's got a couple of roadhouses and some liquor stores and he checks on 'em all every night but there's not a reason in the world that he needs help going around them, even if I *am* hired as a cowboy.

I tell him I'll see him when I get back, and take

the dough and get in my coupé and start out and get to Barney's spot about nine, because I stop and eat once and stop and have a couple of beers at another couple of places. I go in the place and don't see Barney and ask for him and one of the bar boys points out his office and I go back there and find him.

This Zeil's a bad egg. I've known him since I first started to work for Felix and the only way I can figure he can lay fifty grand is lay it for a syndicate, because he don't look like or act like that kind of ough-day and after you work for a hustler like Felix as long as I have you get so you can pick 'em. Zeil's a big lug, in the first place, and if he didn't get his two bum ears and hiked up cheekbones as a professional he certainly has done an ungodly lot of brawling in the time he's had. He looks about forty . . . maybe forty-five. There's some guy in the office with him when I come in and he says to him:

"Beat it, keed!" and to me: "It certainly took you long enough. Felix telephoned you was on your way, about five. Gimme the ough-day." I say:

"Sure! Gimme a receipt."

He growls around about it not being needed, so I tell him Felix wants one and just wait and let him talk, and by and by he writes:

*Received from Mike O'Dell Fifty Thousand Dollars in Payment of Felix Mihalek's I.O.U.*

He dates this and shows it to me and says: "That okey?" and I tell him it is and take it and give him the envelope and he opens it and counts out fifty one-thousand-dollar bills and sticks them in the drawer of his desk and then looks up at me nasty and says:

"I hear you're a pretty tough monkey."

I say: "I get by." He says:

"Supposed to be a wrestler?" and I say: "Not supposed to be. I *am* a wrestler."

He says: "You *were* a wrestler, if you call that grunting and groaning you did wrestling. You're a shamus now and playing nurse to Felix. Just a ——— damn' wet nurse."

I say: "Get out of that chair." He says:

"Why?"

I say: "Because I don't want to smack a man that's sitting down."

I can take a joke if it's meant for one but from all the signs this big lug is trying to start something and there's a limit. I don't know him well enough to take one damn' thing from him. I should take a

Sunday cut at him but I don't do battle that way, even with a heel like him. He smarts up and says:

"Forget it. Cantcha take a rib?"

I say: "Not from you and if you want to make something out of that why get up and just do your best."

He says again: "Oh, forget it!" and I think that maybe this so-and-so is maybe a friend of Felix' and that Felix'd think I started the beef, so I do and go out to the bar and just as I get there a guy that I know comes in the front door and all drunked up. He's just got a honey. He spots me and hails me over to the bar with him and says:

"Hi, Mike. Have a little bite of joy and happiness with me."

I tell him that I don't like the place or the guy that runs it and he gets like a lot of drunks do and thinks I think I'm too good to drink with him and so I tell the barkeeper I want a beer and this guy takes whiskey straight.

Then it's my turn and I ask him and he says:

"What's three pounds more on my back when I'm already carrying a ton?" and we do it again.

This probably takes fifteen minutes. I figure I'd better be starting back, because if I have any trouble it might make me late in meeting Felix, so I untangle this bird from where he's draped on my shoulder telling me what a swell guy I am and start out to the car and open the door of it and a guy that's all squatted down in the seat straightens up and shoves a gun at me and says:

"Stand still."

He's holding the gun right close to him, the way anybody does that knows how it can be taken away from him if he don't, and the way I figure it the only thing I can do is stand still.

I do this and he holds the gun on me and another guy comes around the back of the car with another gun and the first one gets out and the two of them walk me over to where there's some brush by the edge of the lot this roadhouse is on. One stands behind me holding his gun jammed in my back and the other one starts to go through me. This is all right with me. I figure they're a pair of cheap heists looking for coffee money and I know that all they can get off me is sixteen bucks, because that's all I got. If they can find more than that they know more about what's in my pockets than I do.

I got my hands raised with one of them still holding this gun in my back and the other one goes through me and takes the sixteen and then steps

back and the one behind smacks me alongside the ear with his gun. It don't quite knock me out but it puts me down to my knees and then he does it again.

WHEN I come to I'm lying there where they left me and I don't feel good. I reach up to the side of my head and it's all sticky with blood and my ear is swollen up. I start to look at my watch to see how long I was out and find I ain't got any. Or no money. Or no receipt for the dough I just put out to Zeil.

This is where I get wise to what it's all about. The receipt does it.

I stand there and think it over and go back into the joint and to Zeil's office and tell him what's happened, just like he don't know, and he says:

"Why tell me about it?"

I say: "You can give me another receipt." He says:

"Yeah, I *can*. But I ain't going to. You're supposed to be such a tough monkey, you tough your way along without the receipt."

There ain't anything I can do but do just that. I say: "You ——!" which don't do any good but makes me feel a little better and go out to the car and start back to town with an awful headache. I can't see where I could have done any different; how in the devil could I figure a heist over a deal like that? The heist is a tip-off on Zeil, the way I figure it, because any heist guy working a joint like that'd wait until he saw some guy with a roll before going into action instead of just taking a chance. The only time a heist guy would go blind like that would be with some drunk and I ain't drunk.

I get back into town about one-thirty and instead of waiting for Felix at the hotel, like the plan is, I pick him up at the *Carioca Club*, which is one of his places out on the beach road. He's standing by the bar buying a drink for the house like he always does when he makes the rounds, and I move over to him and the minute he sees me he knows something's sour. He says:

"You get hijacked?"

I tell him what happened and he don't say a word for a minute. His face looks just the same but I can tell by his eyes that he's thinking it out. He says: "After you got this receipt how long were you around there?" so I know he's got the same angle figured on it I have. I tell him and then he says. "After you got there did you see Zeil talking to

anybody?" and I say: "Outside of the guy that was in the office when I come in, no."

He nods his head and says: "He was having this guy make sure who you was. I shouldn't have called him and given him the chance to get set but who'd think he'd work as rough as this? If I had time to get down there before he closed the spot I'd pick three or four boys and take it apart and get the dough that way, but it'll be planted by the time I could make it. It's probably already stashed."

I know better but I say: "Maybe this is all a false alarm. Maybe he won't do anything about it."

He just looks at me for a minute and then says: "Now, Mike. I'm not blaming you for running into a set-up like that . . . a frame like that'd work on anybody . . . but don't try to cheer me up over it. I laid that bet before about twenty men and I ain't got a thing to show I paid off. Zeil knows that and knows I can't have any argument about these finger bets. We'll see him all right, but let it go and let's finish and go home."

We do. Felix tries to act like nothing's happened but he's just enough quieter than usual that I know he's trying to figure out some angle. I hope he can but I don't know what it can be.

FELIX lives at the *Clayton Hotel*, where he's got a suite fixed up with one room like an office and the rest bedroom and bathroom. He's got so much stuff around town that he has to have a bookkeeper to keep things straight, but the bookkeeper works evenings, because Felix don't usually get up until five. He usually does all his business between then and nine and then starts making the rounds of his places. He's got four roadhouses and four liquor stores and two big gambling joints and the play in the roadhouses and the joints never starts until pretty late, which makes the funny hours. I go up to the hotel the next afternoon about four, because I got a hunch something's going to be doing and I'm right . . . except I'm late even at four.

I knock and Felix says:

"Come in."

I do and see Felix in bed eating breakfast out of a tray and then look across from him and see Zeil and three guys with him that you can't mistake. I suppose he calls 'em guards but I'd call them something else. Two of them could well be the two guys that heisted me the night before, but it was so dark then that I can't be sure. Felix puts down the

cup of coffee he's holding on the tray and waves his hand at me and says to Zeil:

"You know Mike?"

Zeil gives me a dirty grin and says: "Well, of course I've seen him with you." Like he never saw me last night at all.

Felix says: "But not last night?" and Zeil says: "No! I told you I didn't see him last night. That's why I'm here. . . . I wondered why this bird didn't get there with the dough like you phoned he would."

Felix moves his tray to the table by the side of the bed and swings his feet to the floor and ruffles his hair with his hand and yawns. He says:

"Hell, Zeil. I'm stuck for the dough again. Why all the baloney? I know I'm stuck without you putting on an act about it."

Zeil grins at him and tells him he's glad to see that he's sensible and Felix stretches and says: "The only thing is, it's going to take me a week to raise the other fifty. I can get it in that time but not before." Zeil starts to growl about this and Felix gets mad and, pajamas and all, goes over and taps Zeil on the chest and says:

"You'll wait and you'll keep your trap shut about it. And after you're paid . . . and you're going to be paid in front of a lot of people, because I'm going to see to that . . . then you're going to find that this business has just started. You come up here with three cheap hoods and start to tell me . . ."

He's tapping harder all the time and Zeil takes a step back. Two of these heels have their hands in their side coat pockets but one hasn't and he reaches over and grabs Felix by the shoulder and I step in fast and pick him up and throw him at one of the boyfriends that shows signs of taking his hand out of his pocket. It's easy . . . he don't weigh more'n a hundred and forty and I strip one ninety-eight to two hundred and am used to that kind of business. They both go down and I swing around and see that the other hood has got his gun out of his pocket and trained on me. I see his finger tighten on the trigger and get one leg back of me so I can dive at his legs and then Zeil says:

"No, no, Tony!" and Felix says: "Mike!"

I stop and Tony stops. Felix steps away from Zeil and says: "Take your — damn' acrobats out of my place. If I let Mike go he'd tie all three of them into one knot. I'll get in touch with you in about a week, but we pay off where I say, this time." Zeil says: "Let's go!" to his cowboys, and

the two pick themselves off the floor and all four of them go out and Felix watches them out and then says to me:

"That's that. Mike, you damn' fool, don't you know better than to fool with a man that's holding a gun?" I say:

"I thought he was going to get tough and I wanted to get in there first."

Felix says it's all right as long as it came out all right but next time to wait until there's something to do battle about. Then he swears some about losing his bet and a lot more about having to pay it twice and then a whole hell of a lot more about being fool enough to lay dough on a dog like this *Clean Baby*.

A frame as raw as this one wouldn't work on anybody but a guy like Felix. He's part Jewish and part Hungarian and part Greek and some ways he's screwy as hell. A lot of his business is done by the finger and I can see his angle about paying Zeil twice if he has to, but I can't see how he takes it so easy. The only thing is, he ain't taking it easy or any other way but just wanted time to make up his mind.

He sits on the edge of his bed and says: "By any chance, Mike, was it two of these boys that heisted you?" I tell him that I think it's the one called Tony and the one I picked up and heaved but that I ain't sure. He says:

"It's very likely. Zeil wouldn't cut any more in on the play than he could help. D'ya know either of them?"

I say: "No!" and he grins and says: "That private badge of yours is going to come in handy before we're through with this mess. I don't like to call copper and I won't, but there's ways around this. You go up to the Central Station and get Cap Geiselman"—he's a friend of both Felix and myself—"and tell him the score and tell him I want him to find out who these guys are and all about them. Where they live and all that. If Geiselman finds out he wants 'em on anything, tell him to lay off them until we get our dough back."

I do this. Geiselman finds out from me what the three of these guys look like and says he'll drop down by Zeil's place that night and see if he can place 'em. I tell him what's happened and he says that Felix is a damn' fool to pay off twice and that he shouldn't and then I say:

"Suppose he don't and Zeil broadcasts that Felix didn't pay off?"

There's no answer to that one that Geiselman can figure and he finally admits that Felix is behind the eight ball and there's nothing for him to do except pay off if he wants to keep his credit good with the sporting element.

I don't figure there's any sense in telling Geiselman that Felix is trying to angle out of it because somebody may get hurt, and, after all, he's still a copper. He says he'll try and find out all he can and let Felix know the next afternoon, so I go back and Felix and I make the rounds of the places just the same as usual and get back to the hotel about five and then I go to my own hotel and go to bed.

The next day I go out to the police range and practice a little shooting and go up to the *Clayton* at five and find Geiselman already there. He's having a drink and Felix is having breakfast . . . in bed as usual. Felix says to me: "Cap's found out nothing about those three guys. He says they must be from out of town . . . maybe from the East and just got here. All he did is find out that a man can get as stiff at Zeil's as at any place else."

Geiselman waves his drink and says: "What the hell . . . it's ninety miles from where I work. I stayed there at Zeil's almost all night trying to make these guys and can't, so they *must* be from out of town." He's just as stiff as a plank and I figure that he spent the night getting that way and that he's just keeping on with the drunk today to make sure it's a good one. He's hoarse from saying: "Here's how!" and I bet his right arm is lame from lifting up drinks. He's a big horse and can carry a lot of hooch.

He goes over to Felix and starts to tell him what a swell guy he is for paying the bet twice and starts to pat Felix on the shoulder and Felix gets out of bed and starts to put on his clothes just so he don't have to tell him to lay off. That's another of Felix' kinks . . . he can't bear to be pawed by anybody, even a good friend like Geiselman. I'd just as soon think about putting my arm around a tiger as around Felix, the way Geiselman's trying to do.

Geiselman's had plenty but he takes three more and staggers out and Felix says: "I guess it's up to you, Mike. You can get somebody to help you if you want, just as you think, but I want you to pick up these guys at Zeil's and tag 'em to where they live. I can't go into Zeil's and start a beef and I want things my way when I do. I want to get these guys one at a time and away from where it'll get

out."

I see his side on that. If he started fireworks in Zeil's place, everybody'd think he was trying to get Zeil out of the way to keep from paying off. They wouldn't believe the straight of it any more than my holdup story'd stick, and all the people that'd ordinarily take Felix' side would be against him on account of the rough stuff. Felix is doing business with a class of people that don't think a lot of shooting is a good thing . . . there's lots of people like that even among the number one hustlers. Felix'll have to work on Zeil on the quiet if he's going to do himself any good.

THAT night I ease down to Zeil's and get there about ten. I don't want to park in front so I park my car, which is a coupé and new and pretty fast, about a hundred yards from the place and in front of a house so it'll look like it belongs to somebody there, and walk down the road to Zeil's place, which is called just that, *Zeil's Place*, and look in through the window. There's only two cars out in front and only six guys at the bar that I can see besides the same two bartenders that were on shift when I was there before. I move around until I find a window that I can spot the door of Zeil's office from and watch this.

This place of his has got a lot of red and green lights and that sort of junk strung along the front of it, but there ain't much light at the sides and right next to the building where I am is all in shadow. I wait there a few minutes and by and by the office door opens and Zeil comes to the door of the office with the guy he called Tony and stands there talking to him. I can see one of the others that was with him at the hotel sitting in a chair inside the office. By and by Zeil quits and goes back inside and closes his door and this cowboy crosses the room to the bar and takes a lift and then heads for the front door.

I expect him to head for a car and I'm all set to make a run for mine and follow him, but I'm damned if he don't walk down the road towards where I left my car. I keep behind him and well over to the side of the road and he walks right along nice without looking back until he gets to my car and then stands there looking at it. Just stands there. I sneak pretty close, close enough that I hear him sing out:

"Oh, Ben!"

The door of the house opens and Ben comes out

in an undershirt and pants and that's all. I see he's the other one of the three that was with Zeil when he talked to Felix. Then the two of them talk for a minute and then open the door of my car, which I've left unlocked on account of maybe having to use it in a hurry, and I see a flash as one of them lights a match and I figure they're looking at my registration slip.

This is the kind of break I *would* get. Park the car in front of the place the very people I'm trying to spot are staying. They come out of the car and look it over for a minute and then go in the house and I get a little closer and in a patch of shadow that's plenty black. I got a hunch that they know who Mike O'Dell is from the other night and if they come looking for me I want to be hard to find. They come out in about five minutes and I see that Ben has dressed himself but instead of looking around for me they start up the road towards Zeil's very fast.

I wait until I see them go into the joint before I make a move. I figure that there's nobody in the house and that maybe I can find out something so I go around to the side away from Zeil's and hold my hat up against one of the windows and smack it with the nose of my gun and the window goes out without a hell of a lot of noise because I'm lucky enough to have picked one that's over a bed. I crawl through and find they've gone away, leaving a lot of lights on, which is a good break, for a change, and I figure I got a little time and prowl the place and see it's empty and then start to look around and see if I can get a line on anything.

I don't find anything. I don't have time. I'm in the bedroom on my knees beside a suitcase and I think I hear a little noise behind me and look around and here's Tony leaning against the door and holding a gun on me. He don't say anything for a minute and neither do I, but he waves the gun for me to stand up and I do. I think for a minute this might be a break because if I'm on my feet I got a chance for action, but the first thing he says takes any notion of starting anything out of my head. He says:

"Nose trouble, big boy?" and waves the gun so that instead of pointing at my belly it's pointing at my face. "It's too bad I caught you breaking into my house and had to shoot you."

If he wasn't hotter'n a fire cracker I don't doubt a bit he'd have turned loose without saying a word. The way it is he's trying to figure some story that'll

fit. I stand there with my hands raised level with my shoulders and afraid to breathe for a minute and then the guy he calls Ben comes up behind him. He's holding a gun too. Ben says:

"It's the big — all right. Maybe it wasn't a good hunch to hurry back here."

Tony gets lined on my head with this and I get set to try and dive under the gun and Ben says: "Whatcha going to do?"

Tony's about half drunk. He's just plenty mean, even with this Ben. He says: "You dope! What does it look like?"

Ben says: "Now, Tony!" and reaches over and shoves Tony's gun down and turns his own on me. He says to Tony: "You're the dope. If you shoot him, even if this burglar business don't go sour, there'll be an inquest and a bunch of law at it. That'd be the nuts."

**T**HIS Ben is standing at Tony's side, with one arm across Tony holding his gun down. When he says this he turns his eyes away from me for just long enough to give me the break. I take a step ahead and dive so that I just miss them but I hold my hand out so I catch a handful of knees and we *all* go down. When I hit 'em it spins me so I land sidewise against the door and this checks my fall.

I got the edge because I knew I was going to be there. I get up fast and see Ben's hand holding the gun and I kick it and the gun slides under the bed and just then, Tony, who's laying on his side, starts to reach for his, which has dropped on the floor by him and I kick him in the face. Ben gets up to his knees and I put my foot in his chest and shove him back down. He tries to catch my foot but don't make it stick and I break loose and reach down and pick him up and smack him on the chin.

Tony's out from the kick and Ben's out from the smack. I pick up Tony's gun and then try and figure what in hell to do. I figure that Zeil will get smart if these two don't show back there right quick and that the best thing I can do is beat it away from there. I know that Zeil has got another boy and maybe more than that and I can't see it'd be a smart play to do battle with the whole bunch. It's giving too much odds. Besides that, I've got what I was after. . . . I know where they hang out.

I go out to the car and get it started and just as I hit the first bend I see, in the rear-view mirror, a guy run out of the house and hightail up the road towards the joint so I figure I may get some action

on the way home.

I'm right. I get past Miramar and am about ten miles from Bernardo when I see headlights behind me and coming up fast. They come up just like I'm standing still and I remember that Zeil's got an Auburn roadster that's got just plenty of soup. They get about fifty yards behind me and I see a flash from their car and then the glass behind me jingles and I see a hole in the right-hand corner of my windshield, which means damn' good shooting from a car. There's nothing broke because I got safety glass all around. If I hadn't I'd have the back of my neck cut all to hell.

The coupé's doing eighty-two, which is its best, and the car behind ain't more'n twenty yards back when it happens. I see another flash and the coupé heads for the ditch at the same time so I know a back tire's gone. I'm all over the road and am afraid to put the brakes on for fear it'll throw me even worse so I just hold it the best I can in the center.

The best ain't good enough. About the time I'm down to fifty I make the ditch and the crash throws me against the wheel hard enough to knock me out and when I come to Ben and Tony are there. Tony says:

"You ain't hurt none. I don't know whether that's a break for you or not."

Ben says: "Now, Tony!" and to me: "Get over here in our car."

They take me over to their car and open the door and I start to climb in and get clouted over the back of the head and when I wake up I'm in the same bedroom I was in when they came in the house and caught me. Ben is sitting there watching me. He sees I'm come to and goes out in the kitchen and wets a towel and comes back and lays it over my head and says:

"You just lay still and you'll feel better. I thought Tony hit you too hard for a while. I don't want you to get knocked off."

I ask him why, and he looks kind of vague and says that he don't believe in killing anybody if there's a way out and why don't I be sensible and lay off them. He explains, very reasonable, that he and Tony and this other hood with them that he calls Buzz, why I don't know, come out West to sort of retire from active murder and are satisfied with little jobs and don't really want to get in trouble. The way he tells it a little job is anything where they don't have to kill a lot of people. He

says that if worse comes to worse and it's a question of eating or going to jail they'll have to kill somebody but he don't want it. He acts like the whole thing ain't his fault but that he's being driven into this life of crime. He's blond and sort of egg headed . . . his head is too big for the rest of him and sticks out behind in a sort of a point. His voice is very low and tired and he sounds like the world's wrong in picking on him and that he's sorry about the whole thing.

It don't take long to size him up and I don't like what I see. I figure him as worse than Tony because he's the kind of guy that'd make up his mind to kill somebody and go ahead with it, where Tony would if he lost his temper and only then. I don't figure Tony as having the guts for murder unless he was screwy or high but this Ben'd cut a throat in a second if he thought it would pay him. I say:

"Where's Tony?" and he says, "He's over in Zeil's. He's about half mad at you dumping him and kicking him in the face. You hadn't ought to have done that."

I grin at this and he says: "I had quite a time with Tony. Quite a time."

I stop grinning and try to figure an out. My hands are behind me, tied with tape, and my feet are fixed up the same way at the ankles and there's no chance of breaking loose with that stuff. I stretch my hands sort of, to try and see how tight I'm fixed up, and he sees me and says:

"That don't do no good. That tape holds." Then he sighs and says:

"It'd be different if you was an escape artist. I seen 'em in vaudeville. Once I saw a man that was locked up in a trunk and. . ." He goes on with a yarn about how he saw a guy get out of a trunk that was locked and I think hard and finally say:

"D'ya mind wetting this towel for me again?" He says he don't but I notice he watches me plenty close when he takes the towel off my head and when he brings it back so I don't make an off move. He ain't got a gun in sight but one coat pocket is loaded down with the one he took off me and under his arm shows a bulge where he carries his own, and I got him figured as the kind of a bird that could go into action mighty damn' fast and I don't want any more smacks on the head with guns.

He lays this new towel on my head and backs away and sits down and starts telling me some more about how this guy that got out of the trunk

could do a lot more stuff than that and how he got out of handcuffs, but this last don't seem to mean much to him because he says that he can beat a set of cuffs himself with a toothpick. I say: "Where'd you learn *that*?" and he says: "Jackson, Michigan. I did five there for a bank job," which means I'm right in sizing him up as bad. People that stick up banks in Michigan or any other state are poor people to play games with.

He drones on and on about this bird that does escapes and finally he says:

"I'll wet that towel again," and comes over to the bed, which is what I'm waiting for. I never made any play before and I guess he thinks I'm harmless or else he's thinking about his escape yarns because he takes the towel off my head and then, instead of backing away like he should so's he could watch me, he half turns. He's about three feet from the edge of the bed and I pull my feet up and pivot on my shoulders and reach out and kick. I get him right behind the ear with my heels, which is what I want. It's no trick for a wrestler to hit a mark like that, as big as this bird's head is, but it *is* a trick to hit him hard enough to knock him cold and still not hit him hard enough to kill him, because when you're on your back like that you got the whole spring in your legs and when a guy ain't set for it and seeing it coming you can break a neck too easy.

He slams across the room until he comes into the wall and goes down alongside of it and I end up on the floor because the kick takes me over the side of the bed and there's no way of catching myself. I land hard enough to shake me up but I snap out of it and start to untangle myself.

**T**HAT'S one thing about being tied with tape. You don't always have to cut it to get it off like you do with a rope when you can't reach the knot. I see a nail in the wall and I get up and hop over there and back up to it and wiggle around until I get the point under the outside layer of tape and pull and get this wrap free and do it with the next one the same way and by and by I'm free. It takes me about twenty minutes though, where it should only have taken half that, but I'm worried about Tony and this Buzz maybe coming back and am nervous. They don't show though and Ben just lays on the floor like he's through for the night.

I untape my feet and get my gun and put it away under my arm, I still got my harness on, and then

take Ben's gun and look him over and see that he's coming to so I take the tape they used on me and fix him up. I don't worry any about him breaking clear, because it takes either a wrestler or a contortionist to get out of it the way I did. So I sneak into the front room and peek out the window towards *Zeil's Place* and don't see anybody coming so I go to the phone and get long distance and start to locate Felix and finally get him at *El Nido*, which is a roadhouse he owns. It takes about an hour because I got to stop between each call and see that Ben's all right and that nobody's coming.

I finally get Felix and tell him what's happened and he says he'll pick Big Mike, who's the bouncer at *El Nido*, and start down and for me to hold tight and wait for him. He says that it'll take him a couple of hours and for me to get out of the house and wait for him and that he'll let the whole thing go to hell and quarrel it out with Zeil.

About this time I hear a sort of click on the line and ask Felix if he hears anything and he says he don't and for me to watch for him. I don't see any sense in getting out of the house so soon because from where I am in the front room I can watch the road, so I take another look at Ben and finally drag him into the front room and keep watching out of the window. Nothing happens and I wait about half an hour and do a lot of thinking.

From what Felix said over the phone I figure that he's going to forget his idea of getting one of these hoods to one side and working on him and getting the guy to cross up Zeil and is planning on just barging in on Zeil and taking what he can get . . . which will be nothing but trouble. I get thinking that Felix depended on me to get the dope for him, after I'd messed the detail in the first place, and that all I do is mess things up more, and I get thinking about the way I been pushed around and the whole thing don't add up to much of a score. The more I think about it the more I get sore about the whole deal.

I take another look at the way Ben is tied up and see that he's put away good and solid so I put a little lemon that I find in the kitchen in his puss and tape it there and put him in a closet that's in the bedroom and go out the back way and ease up to the roadhouse. I figure that instead of waiting for Felix to put on an act I'll put one on first and then all he's got to do is pick up the pieces and put them back together and that he won't be blamed for what he's picked up.

I walk in the barroom and both the bar boys stare at me like they're seeing things which prove they're smart to the deal. There's about a dozen guys standing at the bar and two couples sitting at tables in the booths but they don't know anything's wrong. I go down to the end of the bar where one of the boys is making a fizz and say:

"Call your partner down here. I got something to say and I don't want to say it twice."

He starts to crack something and looks at me and calls his partner, who's named Bunny, and I say to 'em: "Now listen close. There's going to be a beef and if you boys want any part of it now's the right time to speak up." The first one's a big red-faced duck and this Bunny is a mild-looking little shrimp. Which proves you can't tell how far a frog'll jump by how he croaks. The big guy says: "Your business is *your* business, Mister," but the little guy, this Bunny, says:

"Who in hell are you to start to tell. . . ."

He gets this far with his beef and I reach across the bar and get him by his bar jacket with both hands and pull him across the bar and smack him and pick him up and shove him back over the bar at the big guy, who runs down back of the bar like a bat out of hell and around the edge of it and out the front door. I admire the little guy's nerve but I can't take any chances on having somebody on the other side behind me when I go into the office as I figure on doing.

I don't have to go into the office.

Some guy that's just loop-legged drunk staggers down the bar to me and says:

"Wha's. . . ."

I shove him in the chest with my open hand, plenty hard, and he sits down on the floor and skids back into the legs of some other drunk that's standing out a little way from the bar, and the other drunk falls on top of him and they start to battle each other. They're both so drunk they couldn't fight their way out of a paper bag. Some other guy starts to separate them and takes one on the lug, just the same as anybody should that butts into a private argument, and he gets sore and pops one of the drunks and some guy that's standing by takes *him* and somebody else picks a bottle off the bar and clunks this last guy on the top of the head with it. In about ten seconds more there's a free-for-all with everybody taking a cut at everybody else, excepting only three guys that are smart enough to follow the bartender out the front door.

I see this brawl is going really bang up but I'm so damn' mad I can't see anything funny about it at the time. I start over to the door of Zeil's office and just about get there and hear somebody start to open it so I step to one side and flatten out against the wall. Zeil and Tony come out. They don't see me at all because they're looking at the fight. Zeil says:

"What in hell . . ." and starts to go over and straighten out the mess and Tony sings back over his shoulder:

"Hey, Buzz! Oscar!" and follows him. I see him lug a sap out of his pocket as he does.

Buzz and Oscar come out together and *they* don't see me either. Buzz is first and is barehanded but is feeling under his coat for his gun. I figure him as the kind of duck that'd rather hit somebody with a gun instead of a sap, because there's more chance to break their head with it, and decide not to take chances with the business end of the gun when I tie with him.

I let Buzz go and when this Oscar, who's some bird I never saw before, gets even with me I smack him on the side of the puss and put all I got into it.

He's a pretty good-sized man but I'm all set and I get my timing just right. He goes off the floor about a foot and Buzz hears the crash he makes when he lands even above the noise of the *big* battle and turns towards him and I see he's got his gun clear. I start for Buzz and I'm within reaching distance of him before he hears me and spins and sees me.

He's got his gun just as he pulled it from under his coat, held right in front of his chest and level with his stomach with the muzzle pointed up across his left shoulder the way a gun comes out of a spring-holster when you yank down on the butt. It's a good thing for me it *is* that way. I'm too close to him for him to swing his arm out to point the gun at me but he tries to do it just using his wrist and I crowd him before he gets it into line and put a bear hug on him.

A bear hug is where you get your arms around another guy and straddle your legs and shove him backwards by bending the upper part of your body forward. If the other guy hasn't strength enough in his back muscles to hold you it works, because you've got the small of his back held close to you and the bend strains hell out of his back there. This guy hasn't got it. His gun is shoved back against him where it don't do him any good at all and I see

his face go white and then see him start to sweat as I put on pressure and then he sags and I let him down. He looks like he's out and like a damn' fool I don't make sure of it.

**A**LL this don't take half a minute but I'm too busy to see what Zeil and Tony are doing during it. I look over at the brawl just in time to see Tony lower the boom on some poor guy with his sap and to see Zeil in there slugging left and right with his bare fists and just then Zeil looks up and sees *me*. He shouts something, I don't know what it is, and quits his fighting.

The fight's about thirty feet from me and Zeil's on the outside edge of it and Tony's on the inside next to the bar. There's about six men besides Zeil and Tony, left on their feet and the two girls that were with the two guys in the booths have got together and are standing with their arms around each other and screaming at the top of their voices. I don't see anything of the two guys so they must be some of the battlers. Or maybe they were smart and went out the door. There's at least half a dozen guys laid out on the floor, it looks like.

Zeil sees me start towards him and backs away from the fight until he's standing by himself, between the battle royal and the girls, and I go for him as fast as I can. It don't take long to make a distance like that but, even in that time, I see Tony drop his sap and grab for his gun and so I make even better time than I was doing before. I got only about twenty, twenty-five feet to go but even during the time it takes me to make the three or four jumps Tony gets into action. Zeil's standing there, like he was waiting for me, and when I'm about ten feet from him I take a dive at him and pray to the Lord he don't know enough about wrestling to duck under it because if I miss him I'd go almost to the front door with the power I put into the tackle.

He starts to duck but he don't make it in time. I aimed to catch him in the belly with my head but he drops just low enough that I catch him high in the chest and just knock the wind out of him.

Tony shoots but when he does I'm in the air and he ain't worth a damn as a wing shot. It's a good thing he let go when he did because when I land it knocks the wind out of *me* and I'd been cold meat if he'd been ready.

It only takes me a second to snap out of it and I get to my knees and Tony shoots again and misses

again and *this* time I get what I want. Zeil, when I hit him, fell on his back and this leaves his feet sticking towards me and I get hold of one of them and twist it as hard as I can. If he'd been a wrestler he'd have rolled out of it but he braces himself instead and I raise hell with his leg before he kicks himself loose with his other foot. He finally lands his heel down the side of my head and along my ear and I let go his foot and heave myself up alongside of him and get a wristlock on his right arm and roll him so that he's between Tony and me so that Tony can't do any more shooting.

The first shot has stopped the big battle. I look over Zeil and see the guys that was in it sort of lined up alongside the bar and watching us and watching Tony, who's a couple feet in front of them and between us and them. Tony's watching close and when he sees my head he gets all set to shoot but I duck back. I got Zeil laying on his left side and I'm laying the same way and I've got his right arm in this lock sort of between and over us. If I lift my head I can see over the top of Zeil's head. I put more pressure on the hold and, even in the middle of this, think of what Zeil said about me being a grunting and groaning wrestler and say to him:

"You do the groaning and I'll grunt."

He don't answer it but he *does* groan plenty.

I keep thinking there's something wrong besides all there is wrong but I can't figure *what* it is. There's something missing that was going on a while ago. I wish that Tony was missing because what I want to do is change my wristlock into a hammerlock and break this punk's arm but I know to do that I got to block him and to do that would give Tony his Sunday cut. You can break a man's arm every time if you got him blocked so he can't slide ahead to ease the pressure but to keep him from sliding ahead you got to be above and in front of him or behind and on top of him and either puts me in the open. I put all I can into the wristlock though and it hurts him plenty. Then I take a peek at Tony to see what he's doing and see him take a step towards us, which is what I'm afraid of.

Then I get a break.

One of the guys behind Tony reaches back on the bar and gets himself one of these funny shaped charged water bottles and pops Tony on the head with it and Tony goes down. I see the guy's face when Tony falls out of the way and think how mad he looks. I think maybe Tony lammed him with the

sap and that the guy is sore about it. I don't know whether Tony's out or not but I can't wait. If he *is* out I'm all right and if he *ain't*, I got to make my play before he can get to his feet because once he comes close enough to see over Zeil he's got me foul. So I do it. Zeil's kicking plenty and not getting any place at all with it so I twist quick and throw him on his face and let go one hand on my wristlock and heave his arm up back of him and slide up fast so's I'm in front of him.

It's crude and wouldn't work on anybody that knows anything but it works on Zeil. He was all braced against the strain on his arm and wasn't expecting the strain to change direction like that and it's a cinch for me and too bad for him.

I put my other hand on his wrist and tighten up and his arm lets go all holds and I hear it pop at the shoulder joint.

I let go him then because he's out. Any man that has his arm broken that way *is* out and can't be anything else. I climb off him and go over to Tony and see the guy that smacked him with the bottle standing there kicking him in the face and one of the other guys says:

"Look!" and points, and I look and see one of the two girls laying on the floor with the other one bending over her. This is the first time I realize that what I been missing is the screaming that was going on during the fight. The guy says:

"He shot at you and hit the lady!" and starts to help the other guy kick Tony to death, only this one works on Tony's ribs.

I let 'em go. I walk over towards the girls and just then a gun blasts out from the side and I feel something hit me in the leg and it gives way and I go down to the floor but sort of easy. I turn as I go down and see this mugg of a Buzz standing by the office door with his gun raised all ready to shoot again.

I remember my own gun and reach for it and Buzz shoots again and misses and before he gets another chance I take my turn. During the time I've worked for Felix I've put in a lot of time on the police range and I'm glad of it. I hold on where his bottom vest button ought to be if he wore a vest and squeeze the trigger and Buzz bends over right now. He doubles up like a jackknife, and drops his gun and takes a couple of steps towards me and then falls down and lays on his side and draws his knees up to his stomach and holds on to it with both hands and I know he's *really* through *this*

time.

THEN I twist and see what the girls are doing and see the one that's laying on the floor move and squirm around and know that at least she's not dead *yet* and shout at the guys that are standing watching the show to move and see if they can help her and the guy that's kicking Tony in the puss runs to her and another of them comes to me and says:

"What's it all about, Mister?"

I show him my badge and tell him to make sure that the first guy I hit in the jaw hasn't come to and he does this. I don't want any more of these heels waking up and taking potshots at me. He calls back and says that he's still out and I tell him to drag him front and center so's we can watch him and he does it.

About this time the guy and the gal discover that there's nothing wrong with the gal on the floor except that she fainted. She starts to come to and take up her screaming right where she left off and just as she gets going good in come two State coppers.

What they see sets 'em back on their heels. Buzz isn't dead yet but he ain't going to live very long with a .45 in his belly. Tony's got a fractured skull where the bottle hit him and the guy that I hit in the jaw has got it broken in three different places. This is the one I first laid out, the one called Oscar. Two of the five guys that got knocked out during the battle are hurt bad enough to have to go to the hospital for a stay and damn' near everybody in the place is cut and bruised and bloody. I got a slug through the fleshy part of my left leg but it don't hurt as much as I always thought being shot would. I don't know any better though, when I think that.

One cop takes control and the other telephones for the sheriff and the doctor and the ambulance. About this time I remember the little barkeep I smacked and I tell the coppers about him and they look behind the bar and find the little devil laying there still colder than a wedge. He even advertises it. I hear the cop start to laugh and a couple of the guys look over and start to laugh along with him and I ask what's the idea and the cop comes out from behind and holds up a beer sign that says:

"*It's cold.*"

He says: "And ain't it or he or what you call it! It was laying on his stomach."

They add him to the rest of the bunch and look

him over and decide he's just knocked out and about that time in comes all the local law and the doctor. He looks over Buzz and says that he ain't going to more'n last till they get him to a hospital and over the rest and *then* comes over to me. The sheriff comes with him. They both look down at me and the sheriff curses a little and says:

"This is the private copper that started this ruckus, doctor. Patch him up enough that I can put him in where he belongs." He's a sour-looking monkey if I ever see one. The doc looks at my leg and takes off the bandage that the State cop put on it and says:

"He ought to go to a hospital." The sheriff says:

"He ought to hang and maybe he will! Start a thing like this!"

One of the State cops comes over in time to hear this and says:

"It *is* just before election, ain't it, Sheriff?"

The sheriff gives him a dirty look and says: "I wasn't thinking of *that*."

The State law smiles at him very pretty and says: "Oh, I *know* you wasn't. If this man should go to a hospital, want to bet me he don't?"

I get a kick out of this even if my leg if beginning to hurt quite a bit. Lots of times the State boys and the local boys fight among themselves like billy hell.

Then Felix comes in. The State copper looks at him and says: "Why hello, Mr. Mihalek!" and I know everything's all right, county law or not. I ain't told anybody who I was working for but if this State law knows Felix I'm all right on the shooting. The doctor starts to work on my leg and it hurts like hell and he fixes up a hypo and I ask him how long before it'll put me out and he says I'll go to sleep in about ten minutes with the dose he's fixing.

I start to talk to Felix right then. I figure it'll take me ten minutes to tell the yarn. I get to where I tie Ben up and remember he's still there and tell the State man about him and he goes down the road after him and about the time I'm through with the yarn back comes the copper and Ben.

Ben looks very quiet and sees me on the floor and shakes his head like he's sorry about the whole

thing and had nothing to do with it. The copper has somebody else look after him and he and Felix go to one side and talk and by and by call the sheriff over and just as I go to sleep I see the three of them shaking hands all the way around.

THE next I know I wake up in a hospital and see a nurse. She tells me I'm in the Good Samaritan Hospital in the city and that Felix had me brought up in an ambulance that had an escort of State troopers in front of it. A doctor comes in then and looks at me and I go to sleep again and the next time I wake up Felix is there. He says:

"I thought you might like to know how it came out."

I tell him I would and he tells me that he and the State copper found the dough in the house down the road from the joint, after Ben had told them where to look for it. I say:

"I didn't think Ben'd talk!"

He says: "Well, that State man's a pretty good friend of mine. Those boys learn ways of *making* people talk."

I asked him about the sheriff and whether I'm jammed over the shooting and he says: "Hell, no! Just as soon as he found out who you were and what you were doing he was aces. You get a fifty-dollar bill for knocking off Buzz and a hundred for Ben and another fifty for Tony. They were wanted." I ask him about the one called Oscar and he says:

"He's just one of the local boys. No bounty."

I tell him that this reward business sounds good and he says: "I put five grand into your bank for you this morning. Ben told the law and me that Zeil had the whole play doped out and touted me into it and that the dough was Zeil's. I'd have paid off again so's you really save me a hundred G's. It's just the same as finding it for me. . . . I figured it gone."

I thank him for the dough. It don't make any difference but I ask him: "How did you lay it? Win . . . place . . . or show? You certainly didn't put that much on his nose." He says:

"I bet him to show."