

## THUMB A RIDE TO HELL

THE boys in the *Freedom* office ribbed me about it plenty when it started, but before the first week was out you should have felt the awed silence that fell over the city room whenever I walked in. I did it in a series of parlays that lasted three weeks and took in meets from coast to coast. It all began with a five-dollar double at Jamaica. I'd never even seen the nags that carried my finnik, and I don't know what made me pick them. Anyway, between the two I got half a grand back for my five-spot.

When the second result came through on the ticker the boys howled for drinks. I staved them off. No, I said, this is where Steve Harragan makes his fortune—or busts back to where he started. I let it ride. The whole five hundred bucks on the nose the next day, and the gee shoved his nose out in front. That made my five C's into sixteen hundred. I sweated plenty. But I left it with the bookmaker for the next afternoon. By four p.m. that day I was worth ten grand, and my hands were shaking. The boys only stared at me, didn't rib me any more. That night I didn't sleep—just laid awake counting racehorses. Ten grand! I could quit my job and—and what? That's too much scratch for fun and not enough for security. Buy an annuity, and worry myself to death scared I'd die soon? Buy a business, a little store or gas station? That was the way it went all night. I got into the office in the morning feeling kinda bloodshot, and the distant welcome I got didn't help any. I said the hell with it, and phoned the bookmaker. I put it all to win on Frisco Fog. The bookie sounded worried and said it was a lot of dough; he'd have to farm it out. I said go ahead, and a little later he called me back and told me he'd got me six to one. The boys had been listening. The office went frigid when I sat down in the slot. Some of the boys went to make bets on other horses. They figured my luck couldn't last.

It did. Frisco Fog beat the field. I scribbled. Seventy grand, it figured to. That was where I piked. I called the bookie and hauled off fifty grand for keeps, and left the rest ride on a haybag called California Popeye for next day. Well, they must have been feeding that nag spinach. He brought my dough back home at 8 to 1. A hundred and eighty grand for my twenty, and fifty grand in the sack! Damned near a quarter of a million! I broke out in a cold