



Samson hit the man and knocked him backward

SAMSON'S VULNERABLE HEEL

By ARTHUR T. HARRIS

*This Veterans Protective League sure charged for service—but
a visiting vet supplied a payoff that certainly surprised 'em!*

SAM SAMSON went over to a little canteen next to the piano. A vet with a scar drawn through the corners of his mouth was dispensing coffee, at five cents a cup, and sandwiches at fifteen and twenty cents.

"Coffee?" said the vet, his grin lopsided but friendly.

"Sure," Samson replied. "I'll take a ham on rye, too. Kind of missed my

breakfast this morning."

"Never miss breakfast," the counterman advised. "That's a bad habit. May give you ulcers—and I should know."

Samson stirred sugar in his cup. "Gee, that's too bad."

"Well," said the vet, slapping lettuce against the bread, "Mr. Smythe let me have this concession when he opened up.

Not a lot of dough, but steady. Better than France, anyway.”

Samson nodded sympathetically, forked over twenty cents, and picked up a magazine. Minutes later a muted loudspeaker paged him. Samson got up and went back to the receptionist’s desk. She handed him a typed version of his registration card and told him to report to Room Five.

The sign on the door said:

MR. C. EDWARD SMYTHE
CHIEF CONSULTANT
VETERANS PROTECTIVE
LEAGUE

“Good morning,” came the greeting as Samson knocked somewhat timidly on the paneled door and went in.

Smythe got up with outstretched hand, shook Samson’s warmly, closed the door, and pushed forward cigarettes and an ashtray.

“ ‘Morning,” Samson replied, accepting a light from the monogrammed match book. “I guess I should—”

“Right!” Smythe nodded crisply as he took the proffered registration card. He sat there then, studying the man before him.

Samson for all his apparent uncertainty, did not feel ill at ease under the other man’s appraisal. C. Edward Smythe was a stocky, dapper executive, with a pin-stripe blue serge, white broadcloth shirt and a blue silk cravat. His gaze was shrewd but not prying, and the diamond ring on his right hand bespoke success but not ostentation.

“Just get out?” Smythe said presently, after glancing over the card.

Sam Samson flushed. “Well, I guess I’ve been through a bit in the last four years. Got a little money saved up, but don’t know what I want to do.”

“Of course, of course,” Smythe said

understandingly. “Well, let’s see your discharge certificate. We deal only with bona fide veterans, you know.” He fingered his own discharge button in his lapel as he spoke.

SAMSON got out his wallet and withdrew a photostat. Smythe studied it carefully, made a couple of notations on the registration card, and handed it back with a deprecating smile.

“Now then, old man,” he began, “here’s our proposition. If you need advice on your insurance, Army or civilian, we charge you five dollars and give you exact verbal instructions. If your mustering out pay hasn’t come in, we write a letter of inquiry to the proper channels. If you wish to buy a business, we make a survey, report the potentialities, and charge a fee based on our time spent in investigation.”

Samson nodded slowly.

“On the other hand,” Smythe went on, puffing on his pipe, “if you’re not interested in a business, we give you psychological and manual dexterity tests, to determine your individual aptitude. We charge for everything we do—we’re not in business for our health—but on the other hand, this is the sole agency in town fully equipped to help veterans find their way back into civilian life.

“Some cities do this service without cost. Bridgeport, Connecticut, for example: That’s fine. But we’re in business here—legitimate business. Everything about my organization”—Smythe pounded his desk for emphasis—“is strictly legal. We don’t sell stock in blue-sky oil wells; we don’t finance business enterprises; we don’t even sell chicken farms. You come in for consultation, and we advise. We charge, yes. But if you feel this interview isn’t helpful, all it cost you was one dollar, and that doesn’t even begin to pay the rent

here, confidentially.”

Sam Samson shook his head apologetically.

“Oh no, sir. I didn’t come here to waste your time.”

Smythe offered him another cigarette.

“I didn’t think so. Well, according to your card, you were a master machinist. Precision work on airplane parts. Maybe you don’t feel quite up to precision stuff at this time?” Samson nodded. “Okay, well we’ll put you through the mill, see what you’re now adapted to do. The charge is ten dollars, and it’s worth it. . . .”

For the next three hours that morning, Sam Samson went through so many manual and psychological tests that his head swam. Pencil in sweaty fingers, he raced a clock as he jotted down answers to a simplified version of the Army General Classification Test.

In another room, he forced dexterity into once-skilled fingers, as he worked with blocks and slots to complete a manual puzzle. There was a brief session with a personnel man, who elicited the information that Samson had been hospitalized three months with battle fatigue.

He was told to return the next day.

Sam Samson slept well that night in his room at the local “Y.” The tests had been mentally tiring. Besides, he thought the next morning, as he showed up at the offices of the Veterans Protective League, being a civilian again was a certain strain on a fellow’s mind.

Samson barely had time for a cup of coffee at the little canteen before the loudspeaker paged him. Once again he was summoned to Room Five.

“Hello, there,” said C. Edward Smythe as Samson entered. “Sit down. Have a cigarette.” Samson took one. “Ah . . . Well, frankly, Mr. Samson, I don’t quite know how to begin.” Smythe seemed

embarrassed.

Sam Samson blew out smoke slowly.

“The tests,” he said. “Not so good?”

Smythe appraised him with his shrewd brown eyes, then glanced through a sheaf of reports, mentioning several percentage figures here and there.

“Well—yes and no. That old dexterity of yours—” He shrugged sympathetically and left the words unsaid. “As for the psychological tests, I don’t think you should attempt anything at this time which would involve any great mental exertion. Of course you’re intelligent—don’t get me wrong. And that’s what I’m driving at. What you want is a little business, started with a small capital. Something in which you can find yourself again. Open up at ten, take a leisurely lunch, stay open at nights only Friday and Saturday, and then not late.”

Samson’s forehead frowned in thought.

“I think I know what you mean. Something like a little gift shop—perhaps a small stationery and greeting card store. Maybe with a side line of books. Or phonograph records, classical and popular.”

Smythe was so pleased that he bounced up from his chair and clapped Samson’s rather stooped back with an enthusiastic hand.

“Man,” he said, “you took the words right out of my mouth! Y’know, I thought maybe I’d have to send you over to the post office, to apply for a civil service job. Doorkeeper, janitor, something like that. After all, that Purple Heart also gives you ten points preference with Uncle Sam. Instead, I want you to hang around town a couple of days, while I see if I can put you in touch with a good thing. I won’t promise anything, but confidentially”—Smythe smiled expansively—“the Veterans Protective League has some

pretty good contacts in this little burg.

"If we can't find an interesting proposition, I'll let you know in two-three days. I guarantee we'll get you placed. Meanwhile, old man"—Smythe shook the applicant's hand cordially—"just sit tight and keep your fingers crossed. The Veterans Protective League never fails!"

TWENTY-FOUR hours passed, and then twenty-four more. Sam Samson was beginning to have visions of running an elevator in some Government office building when the buzzer in his Y.M.C.A. room sounded.

Samson went out into the hall, picked up the house phone. Presently he left the Y.M.C.A., and in a short while was holding an animated conversation with an attorney in his private office two blocks down the street.

"As sure as I'm named Mike O'Hara," said the lawyer, nodding to his legal license on the wall, "I'm telling you this is really a buy. It's so good that you probably think I'm a liar and that I'm putting on an act."

Samson was the picture of discomfort.

"Not that," he protested nervously. "Certainly not that."

"Well," said O'Hara, mollified, "now that we understand each other, maybe we can do business."

He got up, went over to a filing cabinet, and came back with a sheaf of papers. Samson studied him with almost casual eyes. O'Hara was a big, husky man, but he carried his bulk well in gray tweeds. Probably a football man in his college days, Samson decided.

"This is it," O'Hara said, spreading out a portfolio of photographs.

They showed the exterior and inside appointments of a neat and attractively furnished stationery store in a suburban neighborhood. The stock on the tables

seemed ample, the decorating scheme in surprisingly good taste.

"Cost you five grand," O'Hara declared, "and I hope you don't come out and look at it. My wife has time on her hands, and we were saying just last night that she might as well take it over herself. Belongs to a client of mine who bought a hotel in Florida and told me to sell the business for him."

Samson studied his fingertips.

"But I've only got fifteen hundred bucks saved up."

The attorney frowned, replaced the pictures in the portfolio.

"That's not so good. You'd have to finance. Ought to have more working capital to get by on. Well—" He got up, and put the file back in the cabinet. "Frankly, Mr. Samson, I feel a responsibility toward you. In fact, I feel the same way toward war vets in general."

"I don't doubt it." Sam Samson nodded.

"Right." O'Hara pursed his lips. "Well, of course, this store could be financed. On the other hand, there's no point in rushing into this proposition."

Samson sat there, not saying anything. It was apparent that he was weighing the deal from every angle. He got to his feet, then, with apparent decision in his manner.

"Let's take a look at the place," he said. . . .

The store was just as good as its photographs. A young woman of about twenty-five was waiting on several customers.

"This is the missus," O'Hara said, with a grin. "My dear, meet Mr. Samuel Samson. He's interested in the place. Think you'd like to work for him?"

The girl gave O'Hara an arch look.

"A friend of yours is a friend of mine, Mike," she retorted, and favored Sam Samson with a big smile.

Samson blushed. "Oh sure. Sure."

O'Hara showed him about. The store certainly looked like a good thing. Samson noted that the location seemed somewhat apart from the rather sprawling community, but from the people inside it was apparent that business was exceedingly good; almost booming.

"I guess I could raise a loan from a local bank," Samson said tentatively, as Attorney O'Hara drove him back to town.

O'Hara frowned. "Well—yes and no. If you're really interested, I think that my client might be willing to accept part in cash, part in a note, and the balance you could raise through a chattel mortgage. Once you get the banks on your head, mister, you've really got something."

They drove in silence that lasted several minutes.

"Tell you what I'll do," Samson said. "I'll think this proposition over carefully, and let you know in the morning. My savings are in bonds—I guess I'd have to cash them in. And I sure appreciate your generous terms, Mr. O'Hara. Believe me, I appreciate your time and advice."

"That's all right, old man," O'Hara nodded, with a grin. He parked by a corner bar. "Let's go in and have a quick one. Always a pleasure to treat a real war hero."

Next morning, after a sound sleep, Sam Samson had breakfast at the "Y" lunch counter, put on his gabardine coat and his battered fedora and strode purposefully down the street. But his visit was to the offices of the Veterans Protective League—not the law suite of Attorney Michael O'Hara.

"Like to see Mr. Smythe, if he can spare a moment," Samson told the receptionist.

Five minutes later he was knocking on the door of Office Number Five.

"Well, well," said C. Edward Smythe,

a faint perplexity on his smooth face, as he extended his hand. "I thought you had an appointment with Mr. O'Hara. Want a little more advice, eh?"

"Not from you," declared Sam Samson.

SMYTHE started at the other's tone. This was no beat-up war veteran now, he saw quickly. Samson had straightened up. The light in his eyes was hard; the line of his mouth was tense, contemptuous.

Sam Samson extended his own hand—and slapped C. Edward Smythe hard across the face, once, twice, three times. Then he hit him and knocked him back.

"You dirty, miserable heel," Samson snapped. "I think I will beat you up."

Smythe backed away, snarling, and grabbed for something in his desk drawer. Sam Samson was much too quick for him. He leaped forward, smashed his fist down on the other man's fingers.

Smythe yelped with pain and rage, as his fingers were caught in the desk drawer. His face flushed purple, he began to pant, and his eyes took on the desperate coloration of a cornered rat's.

"Shut up!" Sam Samson ordered. With a great effort, he got a grip on his own inner rage, casually withdrew a nickel-plated .38 revolver and began turning it over in his hands. "Sit down, C. Edward Smythe—or whatever your name is. I'll do all the talking now."

Shaking with fear and frustration, the frightened promoter slumped into his desk chair, nervously fingering his smarting face. A small trickle of blood oozed over cut lips.

"You are a very smart apple," Sam Samson conceded, settling his tough, rangy body on the desk top.

The gun moved back and forth in his hand, pointing nowhere and everywhere. Smythe could not keep his eyes off the

weapon.

"You are a smart boy," Samson repeated, "and you have the best racket in town. It is, as you said, almost foolproof. We might have a tough time getting a court conviction to stand up."

Smythe stared at him with enraged fascination.

"When I say 'we', I mean the local Chamber of Commerce, the Better Business Bureau, the Bankers' Association and the Real Estate Board. I'm representing them in this matter. Like to see my identification cards?"

Smythe swore a livid oath. Samson grinned.

"Okay. In case you're curious, I am a war veteran, I was wounded and hospitalized, and some years ago I was a master machinist. You see, rat, after I got out of the hospital they transferred me to noncombatant work. Ever hear of the C.I.D.—the Army's Criminal Investigation Division? They broke the Army black market in France. Remember?"

C. Edward Smythe's reaction was a profane work of art.

"However"—Samson fumbled with cigarette pack and his own lighter, never loosening the grip on his gun—"however, I find civilian investigations even more intriguing. In the first place, Smythe, your 'manual dexterity' test is a complete phony. My actual score is fifty-five points higher than what your stooges credited me with. My Army I.Q. was one-forty-five—not a genius, as I see it, but way above the average. You scored me one hundred three.

"As for that stationery store, it was a lovely plant, and so in particular is your side kick, Attorney Michael O'Hara. He isn't married to that girl in the store. She used to work at the Fourth National Bank

here, until they found her fooling around with the books and a married teller."

C. Edward Smythe mopped his sweating face with a silk handkerchief. If looks could kill, Sam Samson was in a concentration camp for life.

"Now, then," Samson continued, "your husky friend O'Hara is an attorney, but he doesn't come from this state. He was admitted to practise on motion of another attorney upstate. Wonder how many deals you and O'Hara have been mixed up in, say in Texas—or California—or Tennessee."

"Wouldn't you like to know!" Smythe snarled, and then gasped at his stupid indiscretion.

Sam Samson grinned hugely. "Well, well—the truth will out, won't it? Now as for that store, it isn't worth a nickel. Took you two days to fix it up, didn't it? Ten bucks to a doughnut that O'Hara's 'client' is a dummy—the little man that wasn't there."

Smythe choked on his own curses.

"And such a location! You know, I have an idea I saw some of the 'customers' around town before. Maybe in this very office. How about that?"

Smythe was now literally speechless. His hands opened and clenched, but did nothing. His mouth opened, his jaw flexed, but no words came forth. Sam Samson moved slowly toward the door, the gun still making slow arcs in his hand.

"So ends our little tableau," Samson was saying. "A minor tragedy in the history of sin."

His enemy's hand moved fast. Smythe snatched up a desk clock, threw it and ducked behind his desk, all in one motion, yelling frantically. Samson jerked his head aside as the clock went smashing through the glass door panel.

THERE was a scurry of feet outside. Excited shouts, confusion, and the scurry of nervous little feet. Like a bunch of rats deserting a foundered ship, or converging on a helpless victim.

"Get him! He's a blackmailer! He'll put us out of business!" Smythe was shrieking as his employees poured in.

Samson retreated against a far wall, his gun a threatening shield. One man got too close. Samson lashed out with the gun-butt, expertly shifting the weapon with a dexterous flick, and split the fellow's scalp from temple to temple.

Then he aimed at the ceiling fixture and fired three shots.

"Come and get it, boys and girls!" Sam Samson challenged.

No one took the dare. C. Edward Smythe, glancing at Samson's winged light bulbs and then at the writhing stooge with the bloody head, began to edge toward the shattered door.

Employees shuffled about uncertainly, looking for an out. And at that moment, the town's Racket Squad crashed into the offices of the Veterans Protective League.

"Where's your warrant?" Smythe began to screech.

He was drowned out in a frantic mill of slugging employees, slugging police arms, curses, kicks and bellows. The fight raged all over the place. When it was over, handcuffs had been clapped on shrinking wrists, several police were nursing sore knuckles, and C. Edward Smythe was stretched out flat on his desk top, eyes black, lips cut and nose decidedly askew.

Smythe himself was in somewhat of a mild coma.

On the way to the police station, Sam Samson, private investigator, delivered himself of a few choice nouns, verbs and adjectives.

"Your racket was lovely and almost legal," he told C. Edward Smythe. "Unfortunately, there is a little matter of fraud. Those 'psychological and manual dexterity tests' were phonies, as I've said. They were deliberately phony—and that's fraud. That stationery store you tried to palm off was also a fake. The figures in the ledger accounts were purely imaginary. You and that shyster lawyer, O'Hara, rigged that store up in forty-eight hours."

Smythe, mopping at his bleeding face with a silk handkerchief, mumbled something uncouth. Samson dug him sharply in the ribs. Smythe gasped, doubled over and subsided.

"I have an idea Brother O'Hara will turn State's evidence against you," Samson went on, a sardonic grin on his face as the police wagon clanged to a stop in front of Police Headquarters. "The gentle O'Hara and his girl friend are hardly on speaking terms now—so they tell me."

Smythe's face was a study in purple frustration.

"As for your employees, a little attempted assault and battery, perhaps one or two minor charges. But as for you, big boy, this time it's curtains."

After charges had been filed on the police blotter, Sam Samson told the police he was going out for a quick one. One snifter led to two or three more, and Samson was in a mellow mood as he headed back toward the station.

On the way he passed the late offices of the Veterans Protective League. There wasn't a light in the place. Someone—probably the janitor—had hung up a hastily scrawled sign in the window. It said:

CLOSED FOR ALTERATIONS