

PECK'S BAD BOY

BY
GEORGE W. PECK.

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CHAPTER I THE BOY WITH A LAMB BACK.

A young fellow who is pretty smart on general principles and who is always in good humor went into a store the other morning looking and seemed to be brooding. The proprietor asked him if he wouldn't sit down, and he said he couldn't very well, as his back was lame. He seemed discouraged, and the proprietor asked him what was the matter. "Well," said he as he put his hand on his pistol pocket and groaned, "there is no encouragement for a boy to have any fun nowadays. If a boy tries to play an innocent joke, he gets kicked all over the house." The storekeeper asked him what had happened to disturb his hilarity. He said he had played a joke on his father the other day, and he had been kicked ever since. "On your side," thought the old man, was a little spry. You know he is no spring chicken yourself, and though his eyes are not what they used to be yet he can see a pretty girl further than I can. The other day I wrote a note in a fine hand and addressed it to him, asking him to meet me on the corner of Wisconsin and Milwaukee streets at 7:30 on Saturday evening," and signed the name "Daisy."

At 7:30 I went down town, and he was standing there in the parlor at the corner in his black place. I went by him and said, "Hello, Pa, what are you doing there?" He said he was waiting for a man. I went down street, and pretty soon I went up on the other corner by Chapman's, and he was standing there. You see, he didn't know what corner "Daisy" was going to be on and had to cover all four corners.

"He gave me a dollar." I saluted him and asked him if he hadn't found his man yet, and he said no, the man was a little late. It is a mean boy that won't speak to his Pa when he sees him standing on a corner. I went up street, and saw Pa cross over by the drug store in a sort of a hurry, and I couldn't get going with a waterproof on, but she skirted right along, and Pa looked kind of solemn, the way he does when I ask him for new clothes. I turned and came back, and he was standing there in the doorway, and I said, "Pa, you will catch cold if you stand around waiting for a man. You go down to the constabulary and let me lay for the man." Pa said, "Never you mind; you go about your business, and I will attend to the man."

"Well, when a boy's Pa tells him to never you mind and looks spunky, my experience is that a boy wants to go right away from there, and I went down street. I thought I would cross over by the other side and see how long he would stay. There was a girl or two going up ahead of me, and I saw a man hurrying across from the drug store to Van Peit's corner. It was Pa, and as the girls went along and never looked around Pa looked mad and stepped into the doorway. It was about 8 o'clock then, and Pa was tired, and I felt sorry for him, and I went up to him and asked him for half a dollar to go to the Academy. I never knew Pa to shirk out so freely and so quick. He gave me a dollar, and I told him I would get it and get it changed and bring him back the half a dollar, but he said I needn't mind the change. It is awful mean of a boy that has always treated well to play it on his Pa that way, and I felt ashamed.

"As I turned the corner and saw him standing there alone, waiting for the man, my conscience troubled me, and I told a policeman to go and tell Pa that 'Daisy' had been suddenly taken with worms and would not be there that evening. I peeked around the corner, and Pa and the policeman went off to get a drink. I was glad they did, 'cause Pa needed it after standing around so long. Well, when I went home, the joke was so good I told Ma about it, and she was mad. Guess she was mad at me for treating Pa that way. I heard Pa come home about 11 o'clock, and Ma was real kind to her. She told him to warm his feet, they were just like chunks of ice. The policeman asked him how many they insisted in the constabulary, and he said six, and then she asked him if they initiated 'Daisy' in the constabulary, and pretty soon I heard Pa talking. In the morning he took me into the basement and gave me the best talking to that I ever had with a bed slat. He said he knew that I wrote that note all the time, and he thought he would pretend that he was looking for 'Daisy' just to fool me.

"It don't look reasonable that a man would catch epilepsy and rheumatism just to fool his boy, does it? What did he give me the dollar for? Ma and Pa don't seem to call each other pet any more, and as for me they both look at me as though I was a hard citizen. I am going to Missouri to take Jesse James' place. There is no encouragement for a boy here. Well, good morning. If Pa comes in here asking for me, tell him that you saw an express wagon going to the morgue with the remains of a pretty boy who acted as though he died from concussion of a bed slat on the pistol pocket. That will make Pa feel sorry. Oh, he has got the awfulest cold, though."

And the boy slipped out to separate a couple of dogs that were fighting.

CHAPTER II
THE BAD BOY AT WORK AGAIN.

Of course all boys are not full of tricks, but the best of them are. That is, those who are the readiest to play innocent jokes and who are continually looking for chances to make Rome howl are the most apt to turn out to be first class business men. There is a boy in the Seventh ward who is so full of fun that sometimes it makes me ache. He is the same boy who not long since wrote a note to

leave his sight forever, and I leave, too, quick. You see, he is afraid I will get hurt every Fourth of July, and he told me if I wouldn't fire a firecracker all day he would let me get \$4 worth of nice fireworks, and he would fire them off for me in the evening in the back yard. I promised, and he gave me the money, and I bought a dandy lot of fireworks, and don't you forget it. I had a lot of rockets and roman candles, and six pin-wheels, and a lot of nigger chasers, and some of these cannon firecrackers, and torpedoes, and a box of parlor matches. I took them home and put the package in our big stuffed chair and put a newspaper over them.



"Pa always takes a nap in that stuffed chair after dinner, and he went into the sitting room, and I heard him driving our poodle dog out of the chair and heard him ask the dog what he was chewing, and just then the explosion took place, and all we rushed in there. I tell you what I honestly think. I think that dog was chewing that box of parlor matches—this kind that pop so when you step on them. Pa was just going to set down when the whole air was filled with dog and Pa and rockets and everything. When I got in there, Pa had a sofa pillow trying to put the dog out, and in the meantime Pa's linen pants were afire. I grabbed a pall of this indigo water that they had been rinsing clothes with and threw it on Pa, or there wouldn't have been a place on him bigger'n a sixpence that wasn't burnt, and then he threw a camp chair at me and told me to go to Gehenna. Ma says that's the new hell they have got up in the revised edition of the Bible, and boys. When Pa's pants were out, his coat flared up, and a roman candle was firing blue and red balls at his legs, and a rocket got into his white vest. The scene beggared description, like the Racine fire.

"A nigger chaser got after Ma and treed her on top of the sofa, and another one took after a girl that Ma invited to dinner and burnt one of her stockings so she had to wear one of Ma's stockings, a good deal too big for her. Ma had a good deal to say for her. She had a little quilt, and we opened the doors and windows to let out the smoke and the smell of burnt dog hair and Pa's whiskers, and a policeman came to the door and asked what was the matter, and Pa told him to go along with me to Gehenna, but I don't want to go with a policeman. It would give me dead away. Well, there was nobody hurt much but the dog and Pa. I felt awful sorry for the dog. He hasn't got his hair cut, and he covers himself. Pa didn't have much hair cut away, except by the ears, but he thought a good deal of his whiskers, 'cause they was a very gray. Say, couldn't you send this snazzy top to the house? If I go up there, Pa will say I am the damnest fool on record. This is the last Fourth of July you catch me celebrating. I am going to work in a glue factory where nobody will ever come to see me."

And the boy went out to pick up some squib firecrackers that had failed to explode in front of the drug store.

CHAPTER IV
THE BAD BOY'S MA COMES HOME.

"When your Ma comes back," asked the grocery man of the bad boy as he found him standing on the sidewalk when the grocery was opened in the morning, taking some pieces of brick out of his coat pocket.

"Oh, she got back at midnight last night," said the boy as he sat a few benches out of a case. "That's what makes me up so early. Pa has been kicking at these pieces of brick with his bare feet, and when I came away he had his toes in his hand and was trying to go back up stairs on one foot. Pa haant got no sense."

"I am afraid you are a terror," said the grocery man as he looked at the innocent face of the boy. "You are always making your parents some trouble, and it is a wonder to me they don't send you to some reform school. What devilry were you up to last night to get kicked this morning?"

"No devilry, just a little fun. You see, Ma went to Chicago to stay a week, and she got tired and telegraphed she would be home last night, and Pa was down town, and I forgot to give him the dispatch, and after he went to bed, and a chum of mine thought we would have a Fourth of July.

"He tried to stab me with his big toe nail." "You see, my chum has got a sister about as big as Ma, and we hooked some of her clothes, and after Pa got to snoring we put them in Pa's room. Oh, you'd 'a' laughed. We put a pair of No. 1 slippers with blue stockings down in front of the rocking chair beside Pa's boots, and a red corset on a chair, and my chum's sister's best black silk dress on another chair, and a hat with a white feather on the bureau, and some frizzes on the gas bracket, and every thing we could find that belonged to a girl in my chum's sister's room. Oh, we got a red parasol, too, and left it right in the middle of the floor.

"Well, when I looked at the layout and heard Pa snoring, I thought I should die. You see, Ma knows Pa is a darn good fellow, but she is easily excited. My chum slept with me that night, and when we heard the door-bell ring I stuffed a pillow in my mouth. There was nobody to meet Ma at the depot, and she hired a hack and came right up. Nobody heard the bell but me, and I had to go down and let Ma in. She was pretty hot, now, you bet, at not being met at the depot.

"Where's your father?" said she as she began to go up stairs.

"I took Pa's meerscham pipe case and tied a little piece of ice over the end, and the stem goes in, and after Pa and Ma was asleep we went in the room, and I put the cold muzzle of the revolver to Ma's temple, and when he woke up I told him if he moved a muscle or said a word I would spatter the wall and the counterpane with his brains. He closed his eyes and began to pray. Then I stood off and told him to hold up his hands and tell me where the valuables was. He held up his hands and sat up in bed and sweat and trembled and told us the change was in his left hand pants pocket and that Ma's money purse was in the bureau drawer in the cuff box, and my chum went and got them.

"Pa shook so the bed fairly squeaked, and I told him I was a good notion to shoot a few holes in him just for fun, and he cried and said, 'Please, Mr. Burglar, take all I have got, but spare a poor old man's life, who never did any harm.' Then I told him to lay down on his stomach and pull the clothes over his head, and sit his feet over the footboard, and he did it, and I took a shawl strap and was strapping his feet together, and he was scared, I tell you. It would have been all right if Ma hadn't woke up. Pa trembled so Ma woke up and thought he had the ager, and my chum turned the light to see how much there was in Ma's purse, and Ma see me and asked me so much sand. 'She is brave as a lion, and Pa is a regular squaw. Pa sent for me to come to his room this morning, but I ain't well and am going out to Peewaukee to camp out till the burglar scare is over. If Pa comes around here talking about war times and how he faced the enemy on many a well fought field, you ask him if he ever threw any burglars down a banister. He is a fool, Pa, but Ma would make a good chief of police, and don't you let it escape you."

And the boy took his canned ham and lobster, and tucked some crackers inside the bosom of his blue flannel shirt started for Peewaukee, while the grocer looked at him as though he was a hard citizen.

CHAPTER V
HE IS TOO HEALTHY.

"There is a man you would get into trouble," said the grocery man to the bad boy as a policeman came along leading him by the ear, the boy having an empty champagne bottle in one hand and a black eye. "What has he been doing, Mr. Policeman?" asked the grocery man as the policeman halted the boy in front of the store.

"Well, I was going by a house up here when this kid opened the door with a quart bottle of champagne, and he cut the wire and fired the cork at another boy, and the champagne went all over the sidewalk, and some of it went on me, and I knew there was something wrong, 'cause champagne is too expensive to waste that way, and he said he was running the shebang and if I would bring him here you would say he was all right. If you say so, I will let him go."

"The grocery man told him his Pa would cure it when he got home. 'What do you think your Pa's object was in making me get off for a single man at Peewaukee?' asked the grocery man as he charged up 'a cucumber to the boy's father."

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The grocery man said he had better let the boy go, as his parents would not like to have their little pet locked up. So the policeman let go his ear, and he threw the empty bottle at a coal wagon, and after the policeman had brushed the champagne off his coat and smoothed his fingers and started off the grocery man turned to the boy, who was peeling a cucumber, and said:

"Now, what kind of a circus have you been having, and what do you mean by destroying wine that way, and where are your folks?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Ma she has got the hay fever and has gone to Lake Superior to see if she can't stop sneezing, and Saturday Pa said he and me would go out to Ocon mow and stay over Sunday and try and recuperate our health. Pa said it would be a good joke for me not to call him Pa, but to act as though I was his younger brother, and we would have a real nice time.

"I knowed what he wanted. He is an old masher, that's what's the matter with him, and he was going to play himself for a bachelor. Oh, thunder, I got into his racket in a minute. He was introduced to some of the girls, and Saturday evening he danced till the cows come home. At home he is awful 'fraid of rheumatism, and he never sweats or sits in a draft, but the water just poured off'n him, and he stood in the door and let a girl fan him till I was afraid he would freeze, and just as he was telling a girl from Tennessee, who was joking him about being a nold bach, that he was not sure as he could always hold out a woman hater if he was to be thrown into contact with the charming ladies of the sunny south I pulled his coat and said: 'Pa, how do you s'pose Ma's hay fever is tonight? I'll bet she is just sneezing the top of her head off.' Well, sir, you just oughtn't to see that girl and Pa. Pa looked at me as if I was a total stranger and told the porter if that freckled faced bootblack belonged around the house he had better be fired out of the ballroom, and the girl said the disgustin thing, and just before they fired me I told Pa he had better look out or he would sweat through his liver pad.

"I went to bed, and Pa staid up till the lights went out. He was mad when he went to bed, but he didn't lick me 'cause the people in the next room would hear him, but the next morning he talked to me. He said I might go back home Sunday night, and he would stay a day or two. He sat around on the veranda all the afternoon talking with the girls, and then he would see me coming along he 'bald look cross. He took a girl out boating, and when I asked him if I couldn't see that girl and Pa. Pa looked at me as if I was a total stranger and told the porter if that freckled faced bootblack belonged around the house he had better be fired out of the ballroom, and the girl said the disgustin thing, and just before they fired me I told Pa he had better look out or he would sweat through his liver pad.

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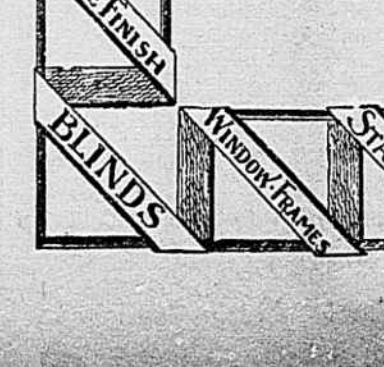
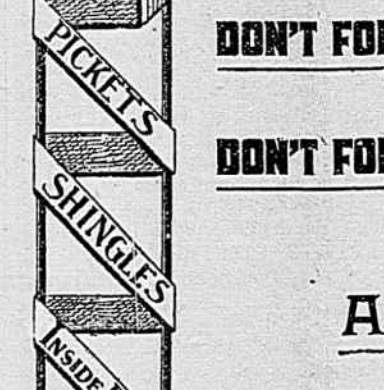
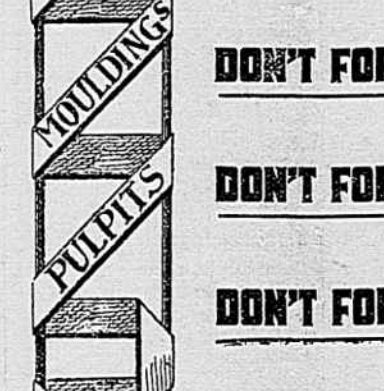
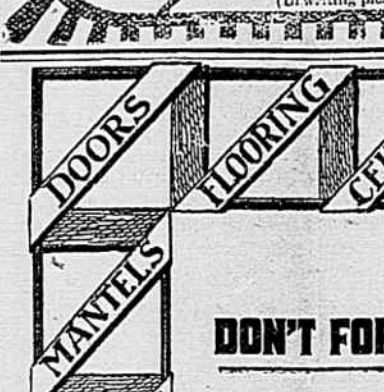
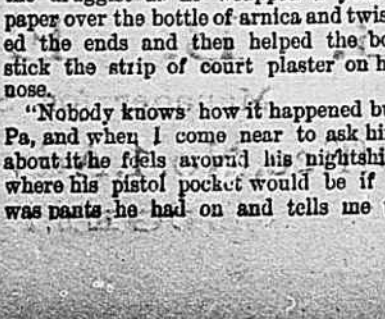
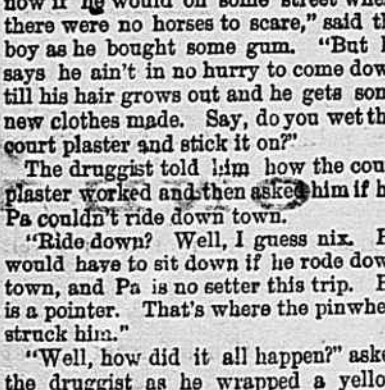
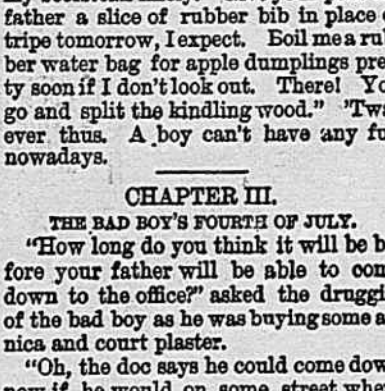
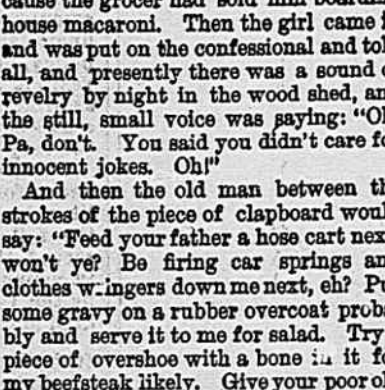
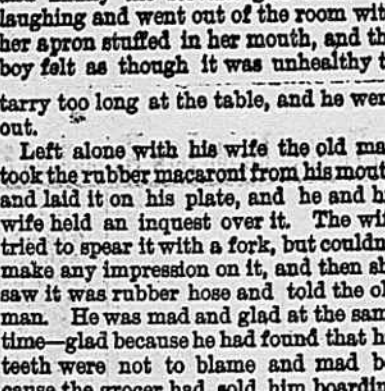
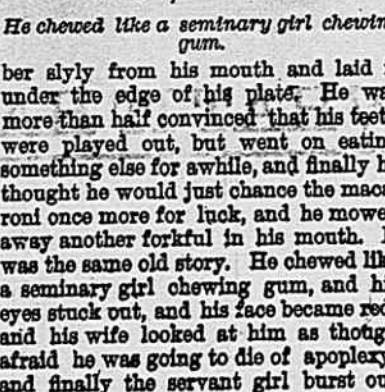
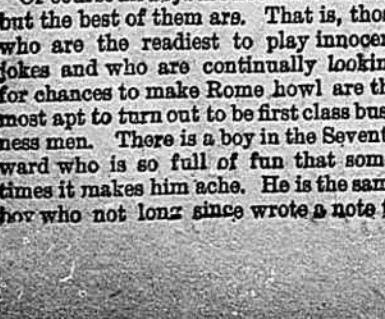
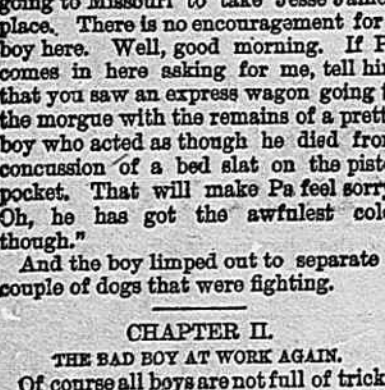
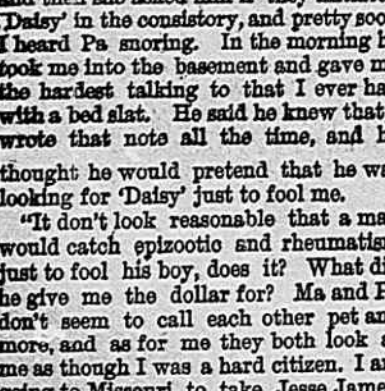
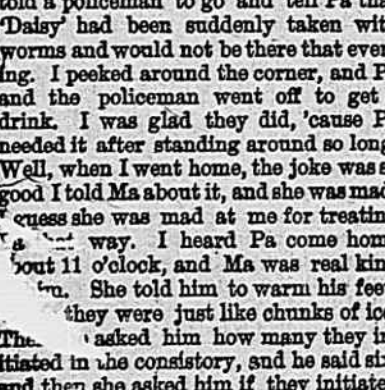
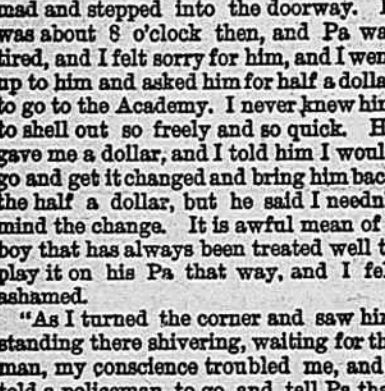
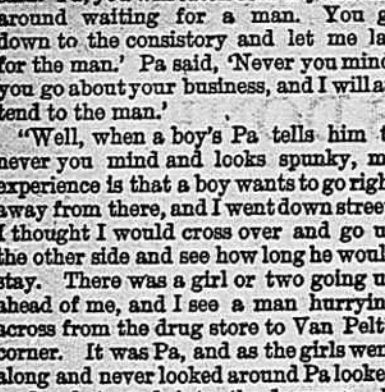
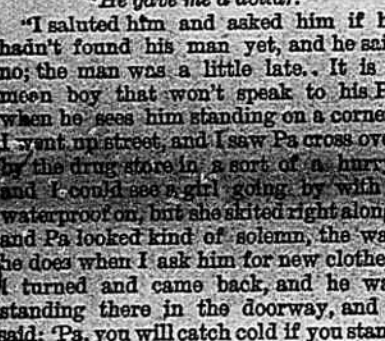
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