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FIGHT STORIES

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Editor

A FULL-LENGTH BOOK NOVEL

FIGHTING MAN ............... Bill Fay 2
The story of the making of a world’s heavyweight champion—Johnny Gallagher, who beat the rap hung on him by Manhattan’s Gambling Mob and fought his way to the top!

TWO RINGSIDE FIGHT FEATURES

PUNCHES ON PARADE .............. Doc McGee 100
Ring-dopester Doc McGee shoots the last-minute lowdown on the World of Slug.

JOHNSON VS. WILLARD ............ Jack Kofoid 103
Willard was bewildered, but youth and the hot Havana sun were on his side...

TWO STAND-OUT NOVELETS OF THE RING

SAMSON HAD A SOFT SPOT ........ Mark Adam 90
Shed a sentimental tear for brawling Steve Costigan—who had THREE soft spots!

STAND-IN FOR THE CHAMP ........ Barney Barnett 110
Pop Donlan, one-time Tenth Avenue Terror, plays out a Hibernian hunch!

THREE PUNCH-PACKED SHORT STORIES

“WE WUZ ROBBED!” ............... C. A. Osier 73
In which Hafey, peerless master of the double-X, gets the works!

DIVE BOMBER ..................... Tom O’Neill 82
It was fist skill against gun magic in the toughest town in the oil-fields.

THE SOCK-ABSORBER .............. Pat Stagg 120
Trial-horse Butch Hogan suddenly learns the “cosmic” secret of champions.

Spring Issue, 1942
Volume VI, No. 11

20c per copy

THIS IS A FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINE

FIGHT STORIES: Published quarterly by FIGHT STORIES, INC., 401 Eighth Ave., New York, N. Y. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted 1941 by Fight Stories, Inc. All rights reserved. This issue dated January 1, 1942. Entered as second-class matter June 4, 1936, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under Act of March 3, 1879. Subscription rate for U. S. A. is 80 cents yearly. For advertising rates address: THE NEWSSTAND FICTION UNIT, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

Printed in U. S. A.
FIGHTING

THE BEST RING NOVEL IN TEN YEARS!
FIGHTING MAN

A Booklength Novel

By

William Fay

The story of the making of a world's heavyweight champion—Johnny Gallagher, who beat the rap hung on him by Manhattan's Gambling Mob and fought his way to the top! There's the ten-second warning buzzer... the bell! And here's Johnny Gallagher, 1942's Champ, coming out to knock the Old King into your lap!

HARRY FLETCHER had been the heavyweight champion for three years now, and he wore the regal purple with a careful, terrible pride. The Pennsylvania training camp, like the champ, was big and dressed up and designed to please the eye—with the acres over which a man could run the rugged hills and strengthen his legs. The farmhouses were washed and painted and ably renovated for this occasion with available space for the sports writers from the cities, just down the road at the Old Oaks Inn.

Dixie, the champ's manager, told the newspapermen, "It's a nice joint, ain't it? I planned it myself. I got all my boys down here an' I want my Harry to get that mountain air. Just smell that air. Don't tell me it ain't different. We'll murder this Jensen."

"The Gunnar's a tough boy," said the Times expert.

"He's a bum," maintained Dixie. "I'm bettin' thirty grand myself."

"Yeah, I know, Dixie. As long as you don't mean real money. Who's that big kid over there? The good-looking guy."


The sports writers turned to stare.

"That's Gallagher? I couldn't place him with the head gear," one said. "You've got Gallagher? No kidding."

"Why the hell shouldn't I have Gallagher?" Dixie asked. "I picked him up last week in Philly. He worked a three-round exhibition with Harry, an' I liked the way he looked. Hey, Johnny!"

Johnny Gallagher came over—a big, friendly looking kid. He offered a bandaged hand to each of them, grinning under the headguard that covered his ears and which would protect his brows when the punches began.

Up in the ring, the champion looked pretty much the same as Johnny, but not at all like Breakwater Maloney, his Negro sparring partner, whose dark cabbage-skull was bouncing regularly at the end of Fletcher's left. The champ looked pretty good; he had a knack of moving
around. He was smooth and thrifty in his efforts and punched like a house falling down. He threw a short right hand into Breakwater’s features and the colored man dropped.

Fletcher picked the giant up and let him shake his head for a second or so before the punishment began to rain again.

“There oughta be a law about kicking Breakwater around,” the Times man said. “You’re gonna have a wrench on your hands, Dixie.”

“The bum loves it,” said Dixie, almost affectionately. “He gets paid, don’t he? It’s his job.”

Trainer Mushky Thomas came over with the big gloves in his hands and drew Johnny Gallagher aside. Mushky had one ear that was very picturesque and a slightly flattened nose. The scar tissue around his eyes did not obscure the vibrant warmth that was in them, and Johnny Gallagher had learned that the expert hands of this veteran were wise and gentle and knew their work. He was never annoyed by the way in which Mushky would follow him around. He was merely perplexed that a guy like Mushky would work for Dixie Maybaum. “Dixie pays good,” Mushky had once explained, so Johnny let it go at that.

Now Mushky said, “You work the next two rounds, kid. Watch yourself in there. Keep your hands high. Make ‘im move.”

“It’s not the Golden Gloves when you’re in there with Fletcher,” Joe Farley, a sports writer, called to them.

“This kid will do okay,” said Mushky. “Gallagher is a good kid. He was a sensation in the Gloves. He ain’t been beat yet.”

JOHNNY GALLAGHER grinned tightly, rubbed his soft shoes against the grass and tapped the ends of his big gloves together. He was confident that he could use his hands in any company. He had done it three dozen times in amateur rings and against the best of the Italian, English and Argentine teams—all of whom had failed to mess him up. He didn’t expect that Fletcher would try to kill him, anyhow. He was doing Fletcher a favor. He wasn’t getting paid any ten bucks a round. Johnny had always wanted to be a fighter—and this was another step on the way up.

He went up the three steps of the ring and through the ropes. Fletcher was walking around in there, as fighters do between training rounds—letting the sweat run in little rivers and breathing deeply, throwing short punches through the atmosphere. Fletcher looked apt and dangerous and the dollar customers were waiting for more sensational entertainment than Breakwater had been able to provide. Doris, the pretty hired camp hostess, was standing by a table, looking up at Johnny. She appeared worried.

Johnny was thinking... the guy can’t kill me, anyhow. He was batting foul balls with me in Philadelphia in that ex-
hition bout. The guy hasn't caught me yet. But maybe he'd like to; maybe he's sore. Keep your eyes open, Johnny, and your hands up high. You ought to get paid for what you're doing.

The bell rang and Johnny came out to meet the champion.

Fletcher fished with his long left arm and brushed it nicely to Johnny's nose. He hooked a left that Johnny caught on his forearm, then received the straight jab that Johnny put into his face. They moved around. Johnny liked it in here with Fletcher and was only slightly apprehensive. It was great to be on the Big Time, and there was a thrill in matching your talents with the very best to be had. Fletcher's feet wove a deliberate pattern on the canvas, and his left hook slipped under Johnny's ribs. It just dropped in there, dull and sickening, like a ten-pound weight. It was intended to destroy.

Johnny opened the throttle on his own right hand but was high to the head. He took the brakes off his feet and began to move. He was fast for a guy who weighed 182. He slipped away from the hook that Fletcher curved like a ball bat. Then he came back, placing two lefts on the champion's mouth. He hooked a hard left to the head and didn't have trouble until Fletcher eased inside, ripping holes

Johnny moved a little faster than Fletcher, because he was younger and had twenty pounds less to carry around.
with heavy hands that Johnny could not control. Finally he tied the champion up, shoving the leather of his glove tips in the hinges of Fletcher’s arms.

They broke and stepped around. The champion looked anxious, Johnny could see. He wanted to break Johnny in half. Johnny knew that the trouble was coming. He confidently decided he could go two three-minute rounds with Fletcher or an Army. The champ was too eager with that right hand of his. Johnny stepped in with a blistering hook to the head. They stood and threw leather until Johnny’s mouth was full of blood. Then the bell took them away from each other and the crowd was standing up, buzzing. Fletcher’s nose was red.

Mushky took the rubber out of Johnny’s mouth, jammed a wet sponge in there. Johnny rinsed his mouth and began to walk around the ring. He felt fine.

“C’mere,” Mushky said, and Johnny went back. “You wanna get kilt?”

“I’m doin’ all right,” Johnny mumbled.

“You’re doin’ too good,” growled the trainer. “It ain’t the smart thing to do—not with the champ.”

The bell sent Johnny back to work. He was moving fast, in swell shape. He’d been fighting steadily for months. He pecked a tentative left hand at Fletcher and received a leather barrage in return. He moved in and out of the storm and cracked with both hands at the advancing champion. He felt his hands go home, felt the strain on his knuckles. He knew that Fletcher’s response would be vicious.

A right hand exploded on the side of Johnny’s head and a curtain seemed to pass through the daylight. But he was still up there. He saw a piece of the champ’s chin and punched down the middle. He drove Fletcher back, hooked a left to the body and then really knew what trouble was when the champ delivered a hundred hands into his body.

They stood together and the storm passed back and forth and it was wonderful to see. Johnny was foolish, but brave and very deft with the fighting gloves on his hands. He moved a little faster than Fletcher, because he was younger and had twenty less pounds to carry around. He speared big Harry with left hands and saw the champ’s coolness go sailing over the hills.

Johnny was smart enough to know the prescription. He moved around and inside and away from the erratic punishment. He fed long left hands, grinning tightly at, the leather murder that wound around his ears. But it found no solid flesh on which to explode. He was joyfully willing to gamble and only moderately scared. He burned a right hand to the champion’s jaw. Then the bell clanged and the day’s work was over for Johnny. A round-heel named Danny Pacini was climbing through the ropes and upon his weary carcass Fletcher would most certainly redeem himself.

Johnny climbed down the steps of the ring, happy. A lot of people crowded about, all talking at once. Mushky took the big gloves off his hands.

Miss Doris Danube, very adoring, brought her sandwiches and beverages in cigarette-girl fashion, upon a wide tray suspended from red cords that ran around her neck. She was extremely pretty in the summer dress she wore and growing pretty interested in Johnny. She held the sandwiches out to him.

Mushky shouted at her, “You wanna kill the guy! If he et one of them sandwiches he’d die. He don’t eat till six o’clock. He’s a fighter.”

“Stop screaming, you monkey,” Doris said graciously. “You’ve eaten nineteen of these yourself. You’ve eaten everything but the tray.”

Johnny stood there while Mushky ran a big towel over his face and shoulders. Then obediently he stretched himself out on the exercise mat at the side of the arena.

II

Johnny stood up when the ordeal was over and now there was a circle of young men about him that caused him to rub his eyes. Their faces were alive with interest, and most of them were browned with sun. He thought they looked greatly like a vaudeville group that ought to break into a dance routine at the first beat of a piano. An older man among them said,
"You fellows think you work? How would you like Gallagher's job?"

"He gets paid for it," said one of them, "but I'd rather jump in a cement mixer."

"Anytime at all," said the older man and Johnny was sure he had seen this face many times in the papers.

Mushky said, "This is Tipper Regan, Johnny. The football coach. They're just down the road a little ways at Brandon College. They ain't got trouble enough down there—they had to bring the whole team over here."

"I'm glad they did," Johnny said. "I saw them play Fordham last year."

"That was a great waste of time," said Mushky. "Me and the Tipper was at the last Olympics. He was with the athletics an' I was with the fighters."

Johnny was embarrassed when a young man about his own age produced an autograph book. "Put your name after Fletcher's, will you?" he asked.

Johnny said, "Cut it out, pal. Who ever heard of me?"

"Fletcher did," the collegian said. "You just stabbed his ears off in there."

So Johnny signed the book and borrowed a piece of paper and asked for the combined signatures of the Brandon football people, merely to be nice, and remembered he had not sought an autograph since he was twelve years old, when his actress mother, in a big moment, had introduced him to Dempsey and Charlie Chaplin. "They all got corduroy pants," said Mushky. "Is this a college or is it a orphanage?"

Regan pantomimed a left hook at Mushky's chin. "You're still punchy as an electric fan," the football coach said. "Don't forget I want to see you tonight."

"I was never meant to be a perisser," said Mushky. "Now get inside, Johnny. Don't let that sweat get dry. 'Bye, girls."

Johnny sang in the showers and wondered about young men who went to college and played football and wore corduroy pants and doubtless danced with pretty girls and got something inside of their heads besides the punches.

DIXIE MAYBAUM was waiting when Johnny was dressed. The champ's manager had something on his mind. "I want to talk to you, kid," he said. They sat in two rockers out on a deserted bit of the porch. There was a tonic in the early evening air.

"Okay, Dixie. Tell me all about it." Johnny waited.

Dixie Maybaum was a tidy little man in yellow polo shirt and fancy checked pants and smoked a large cigar. He had pink cheeks and no particular hair on top of his head, except for the kind of fuzz you can scrape off a woolen sweater. Dixie was smart at the horses and exceedingly wise with the boxing promoters. Prosperity generally came to him in heavy abundance. Nobody trusted Dixie, not even the police—and certainly Johnny Gallagher didn't as he sat here now on the porch.

"Confidentially, kid, and between you and me, I'm telling you Fletcher ain't got too many years ahead of him."

"He's only twenty-six, Dixie," Johnny said. "He's a great fighter. You should get hit by Fletcher—then you'd know."

"I ain't supposed to get hit, son, an' he's a great fighter because I made 'im one. But he's gal crazy. He's built big like you, kid—only you got more brains. When you are gal crazy you're heading for a fall."

"What's that got to do with me?" Johnny asked.

Dixie picked the long ash off his cigar with the sole of a white shoe. "I can do with you what I done with Fletcher," he said. "I can make you a champ."

"You've got a magic formula?"

"I got somethin' the rest o' them sandbags ain't got, Johnny," and Dixie employed a manicured finger to tap the top of his barren pate. "I don't take no chances with that heavyweight title, sonny. I ain't giving it to the Salvation Army."

"I suppose you'd like to give it to me," Johnny asked coolly.

"If you are sensible, mister wise guy. If you will stop clownin' around. If you will stop being mister willow-the-wisp."

"Throwing punches at Fletcher isn't clowning around, Dixie," Johnny answered. "That's a job, and I'm not getting paid. How about that exhibition in Philly? I went three rounds with your gorilla. What'd I get?"

"You're lucky you didn't get kilt. You're an amachur, friend." Dixie thought that
was funny. He had acquired the free benefits of Johnny’s talents, after watching him stiffen the amateur pride of Philadelphia.

“T’ain a amateur, but it don’t make me rich,” Johnny said. “If I hadn’t hit the horses yesterday I wouldn’t have a quarter.”

“You put your name on a contract an’ you will be eatin’ turkey?”

“I’m not ready to sign a contract.” Johnny frowned.

“You’re a smart kid.”

“I’m not Humpty-Dumpty,” Johnny said. “I can take care of myself. I can always eat and get a place to sleep. I can go back jerking sodas or racking pool balls.”

“You got no folks?”

“You know that as well as I do, Dixie,” Johnny told him. “But I’ve got some brains. I can do my own thinking.”

“Punks like you just get in trouble when you think,” Dixie argued. “That’s what you got me for. Put your patsy on the line, sonny, an’ you won’t make any mistake.”

“We’ll wait until Fletcher dumps the Gunnar, Dixie. I’ve got three hundred bucks. I’m in no hurry. And don’t gimme that stuff that Fletcher’s washed up. The guy’s got five years ahead of him. You just don’t want to miss a few extra bucks.”

“Now wait a minute,” Dixie said and placed his tidy feet on the floor. “You wanna get off the snow, Johnny. I don’t do no waitin’. I don’t wait for amachurs. With me it’s sign on the dotted line or else. It’s—”

“Or what, Dixie? You’re talking pretty loud. And here comes Fletcher. He won’t like your plans for me. He didn’t like those three rounds in Philadelphia. He didn’t like it because I made ‘im miss.”

Fletcher stayed on the porch only long enough to look around, and to spit his chewing gum onto the grass. “He’s lookin’ for that girl from the Apollo show,” Dixie mourned. “He is crazy for that girl—that Doris kid.”

“Me, too,” said Johnny and moved off.

“See you again.”

“You’re a fresh kid,” the manager growled after him.

JOHNNY walked off the porch, down the driveway toward the road. He sat there on the field-stone fence and watched the shadows grow long over the hills. He breathed in the night and wondered about a lot of things. Doris found him, as he had expected she would. In the shadows her hair was not so blonde, but her eyes were big and alive with promise, her lips inviting. He had seen her several times in New York—after the Apollo show was out.

“Fletcher is always following me,” she said. “He doesn’t know where I am. That’s my good luck.”

“Gimme a cigarette, Doris.”

She gave him a cigarette and he enjoyed this sacrilege against Dixie’s training rules. She stood close beside him at the fence. Her body was warm against his leg. He said, “Go away, Doris. You’ll get in trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“You know the kind. The usual kind. I’ll buy you a soda,” he said. “Let’s go to that place down the road.”

“I don’t care about a soda,” she said. “Who cares about an old soda?” She put her arms back around him, and her head against his chest. She clung there. “I just never met anybody like you before, Johnny. I just don’t wanna make a dope of myself. I’m not on the make. Not like a cheap dame, Johnny.”

He knew that, too. She was like a little girl when her head was against his chest. His strong arms tightened. For a moment he held her close and her mouth was hot against his. Then he let her go. It wasn’t fair. He was just playing. She was not. “You were crazy about sodas yesterday,” he said.

“All right,” she said. “All right. Just let me get organized an’ we’ll have an old soda.” He let her get organized, still with her head against his shoulder, leaving him with the problem of what to do with his hands. They walked along the road and they didn’t say much. The Old Oaks Inn was about a half mile from the camp. It wasn’t quite eight o’clock and even prize fighters in training may be up at such a modest hour.

The Old Oaks Inn was new, but nevertheless designed to look quaint and older than Benjamin Franklin. Its thatched
roof was a phony, Johnny figured, set atop some modern composition. But it looked mighty fine to the passerby, and the casement windows were small and crooked upstairs, thrust like popeyes through the slanting roof.

Downstairs they were big and ruddy with firelight, and there was a horse trough, but not any horses. There were a lot of cars and it was a popular place, with a Brandon College pennant limp against the ivy on the side of the structure. It would be full of college kids in a few weeks, when the autumn semester began at Brandon.

They went inside and all the sports writers were there, sitting around drinking beer. Most of them were assigned to cover Harry Fletcher's daily homicide, the balance to acquire a pre-season glimpse of Tipper Regan's football team, a matter very important to the sporting public.

A nickle phonograph made pleasant music and there was an ice cream counter, plus a bar, a lot of booths and scattered tables. There were college pennants all over the place and a big piece of beef that smelled fine, turning over on a spit.

"There's Mushky," Doris said. "Hey, Mushky!"

Johnny detected Mushky in a booth on the other side, sitting with Tipper Regan and talking with his hands. "Hey, Mushky!" Doris could be loud, and Mushky, turning, saw them and waved, along with Regan, then returned to his gymnastic conversation.

"Nice guy, Mushky," Doris said.

"Best in the world," said Johnny. "You want to go to Mushky if you get in trouble. He likes you."

"He likes me? He told you he likes me?"

"'Course he did. Everybody likes you, you know that."

"I didn't think anybody did," she said. "But I wish they did. I wish a lot of people would like me," and she looked at him.

The soda and the melted arrived and Johnny watched her consume the soda slowly and with childish pleasure, scraping the suds from the sides of the glass with her spoon, keeping one pinky heroically and perhaps painfully extended. He sensed this occupation was coupled with her thoughts, and could only guess what she was thinking. He was sorry Doris liked him so much—when he couldn't feel the same way right now. He worried how she would make out when next she returned to the Bronx Apollo.

A girl came in with a tall young man and sat close by. The waitress who seated the couple seemed happy they had arrived. They were pretty nice people, or Johnny would eat a handful of napkins.

"Wonder who they are," Doris said. "She's pretty."

Johnny wondered, too, and found that his eyes were locked upon the girl. This girl was more than pretty. She was young and wore a soft and checkered suit of tweed, and her hair was softly brown and attractively bundled in back of her neck. Her hands were the most graceful things that Johnny had ever seen, and her laughter was merry music, joining without effort the laughter of the boy who had brought her.

"It's "ude to stare like that," said Doris, and he consciously took his eyes away, then found them returning.

"I'm not staring," Johnny said. "You just said she was pretty. I was making up my mind."

"You don't have to try so hard, you dope. Of course, she's pretty. Maybe I should fix my hair like that." Doris was getting jealous.

"Guess they're from the college," Johnny said.

"He looks like a professor," said Doris. "Only he's young."

The young man was good looking and thin, and he looked better with his glasses on than he would look without them.

After a while Mushky approached Johnny's table with Tipper Regan and he wondered how a guy with a muffin ear could go so collegiate all of a sudden. He was about to stand up when Regan and Mushky stopped beside the girl and boy he had been watching. He listened earnestly, but their names were jumbled in the noise that Mushky made while shaking the young people's hand.

"Listen to Mushky," said Doris. "He acts like he met people like that all the time. They don't look sore,"
"Why should they be sore? Mushky's a public figure. He's famous."

"Hey, Johnny!" It was Mushky. "C'mover! I want you should meet some friends."

Doris said quickly but softly to Johnny, "We're doing all right here."

"That's not like you, Doris," he muttered. "You don't want to be rude." He was watching the other girl's smile and was already out of his seat. "Mushky's a pal," he persuaded Doris quietly, trusting she would be loyal.

The girl's name was Linda—Linda Drury, "Assistant editor of the Brandon Tattler," Tipper Regan said, enlarging his introduction. "We're very proud of Linda."

"I'm an industrious sophomore," the girl explained, "and undoubtedly in everybody's hair. We have to put out an issue by the opening of class, or I wouldn't be such a nuisance."

The tall lad was George Cummings, a senior, and also introduced with Mr. Regan's enthusiasm: "President of the Student Council; manager of the football team; president of the Senior Class. Quite a boy."

"That's America for you," Doris said. "It's a wonderful place to live. Anybody's baby can grow up to be a president."

But Johnny's eyes were held by Linda Drury.

He didn't think he would ever take them away, because he realized that this was the kind of a girl he had always thought about and seen pictures of, occasionally in a magazine but never close enough to touch.

She said, "You were the unannounced young man who pushed the champion around. I saw you."

"You were there, this afternoon?"

"Uh-huh," Linda shook her lovely head and kept her eyes level with his own, riveted with curiosity.

"I didn't see you there. If I had, I would've remembered," Johnny said. He was hypnotized—and forgot Doris.

"You were very busy," she told him, "but you were doing an able job."

"You saw my face, didn't you?"

"I didn't want to look, really," she told him. "But I saw his, too. Yours wasn't any worse."

"I'm just tough," Johnny said, and wondered what she thought of people who were tough.

Somebody had turned on the nickel phonograph and there were two kids dancing in a slow, wide-spread contortion and Doris suddenly said, "Let's dance, Johnny."

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933, OF FIGHT STORIES, PUBLISHED QUARTERLY AT NEW YORK, N. Y., FOR OCTOBER 1, 1934:

STATE OF NEW YORK:
COUNTY OF NEW YORK:

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared T. T. Scott, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the FIGHT STORIES and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

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2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Fight Stories, Inc., 461 Eighth Avenue, New York City; J. G. Scott, 461 Eighth Avenue, New York City.

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T. T. SCOTT,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1941.

GEORGE G. SCHWENKER,
Notary Public.

(My commission expires March 30, 1942.)
Johnny didn’t want to dance with Doris—not with everybody looking.

He said, “Not now, Doris, I did a tough afternoon’s work at the camp. Ask Mushky.”

Doris looked down uncomfortably at her violently colored fingernails. He felt worse when the professional senior, the boy named George, asked, “May I?” and Doris arose, with the color crimson in her cheeks.

Mushky, looking over Tipper Regan’s shoulder, said, “Oh, oh—here comes the champ!”

Harry Fletcher and Dixie Maybaum had entered together, with Dixie talking loudly. Fletcher was saying nothing, but looking big and conspicuous in an original wrapping of white summer serge.

“You wanna be on your toes, Johnny,” Mushky said. “It don’t smell good to me. I mean Harry don’t.”

FLETCHER purchased chewing gum at the cashier’s desk, carefully un-raveled the package and selected a stick which he did not crumble, but slowly accepted at its full length into his mouth—as a man is supposed to swallow a sword. Meanwhile the champion looked around the place, at Doris, dancing with George Cummings, and then with a wide grin at the table where Johnny sat with Linda and Mushky and Regan.

“The bum stole a couple drinks somewhere,” Mushky said. “He’s been doin’ that lately. I can always tell, just lookin’ at his foolish grin. It’s gonna put ‘im in the ashcan an’ Dixie will murder the bum.”

Fletcher was an enormous man, constructed on the lines of Dempsey. His rugged features had not been badly rearranged, inasmuch as Fletcher was always pretty good at his craft. His hair was curly and wet, as Maxie Baer’s is apt to be, his head intelligent looking, nicely formed.

He was a great man with the women-folk—you could read about it in the papers. The champ was as vain about this state of his face and body as a monkey with a straw hat. But now his cheeks were flushed with color, which might be from punches—or whiskey.

The sports writers made a circle about him, only to be discouraged by Dixie who said, “The champ just wanted chewin’ gum. He’s crazy for chewin’ gum. He’s crazy about a lotta things, but he’s gotta get back in bed. The guy’s fightin’ in three weeks, ain’t he?”

One of the reporters said, “That’s powerful linement you rub Harry with, Dixie. It almost smells like rye.”

“You mean liquor? You tryin’ to be a smart guy? Come on, Harry. You got the gum you was lookin’ for.”

Fletcher said, “Get lost, Dixie. Don’t follow me around like I’m a bag full of diamonds. I’m tired of being followed around.”

He walked toward the table to which Doris had returned with George Cummings. Johnny could see him coming and wondered just when the thing would explode. He knew, somehow, that something was going to. The table was silent. They were watching Fletcher, and witnessing the disturbance of Dixie who trailed his champion.

Dixie said to Johnny, “It’s bedtime, Gallagher. Get under way.”

Fletcher said to Doris, “I was lookin’ for you, baby. We didn’t bring you here to get you educated.”

“I get educated every time you open your face, chump,” Doris said. “We are having a nice sociable evening.”

“That wasn’t the idea,” Fletcher said. “You was brought here to keep the camp lively.”

Dixie felt the tension, knew the eyes of the press were all around them and feared for what they might see. He said, “Get back in your shirt, Harry. You said you just wanted gum. Well, you got gum.”

Fletcher continued to survey the table before him and uttered his displeasure by saying, “Rah-rah.”

Johnny turned around and faced Fletcher directly. “You’re not being nice, Harry,” he said. “You’re not being your nice charming self, pal.”

Linda said calmly, “We can leave. Or we might call the fire engines. Come on, George. Come on, Tipper.”


Johnny said, quietly, “Speak to
Fighting Man

When Johnny awoke, pain filled his head, pressed even back of his eyes. His uncertain hand located the lump in back of his skull. He mumbled, "Don't anybody tell me. It's a baseball." He could see Linda through the cellophone of confusion that clouded his sight. Then Doris, and Mushky. "Guess I'm still an amateur," he said. I didn't think Fletcher could hit like that."
Doris said, "Johnny, I thought you were dead."
She knelt and put her hands on his face. It was embarrassing, but her hands were soft and kindly. Linda just stood above him, watching sympathetically, Johnny thought.
"Was it a right hand or a left hook?" he asked Mushky.
"A right hand, pally. But it was Dixie's right hand. He had it loaded with that ten-dollar roll of quarters he always carries in his pants. He hit you good."
"I'm glad it wasn't Fletcher," Johnny grunted. "That would tickle him too much."
Rising unsteadily, Johnny was able to look about now. There was a comfortable chair provided for Tipper Regan whose temporary slumber had been replaced by the groggy look upon his face. He said, "Gallagher, does Fletcher always hit like that?"
"If you don't see it coming," Johnny said. "What happened to him, anyway?"
"I am the new champion," Mushky explained. "I slapped 'im with a chair. I broke the chair."
Johnny learned that the sports writers had received their statements from those present and departed to the Fletcher training camp, toward which the champion had been borne on the broad shoulders of Breakwater Maloney.
"We don't work for Dixie any more," Doris explained. "Mushky doesn't work for Dixie either," she added. "Dixie made up Mushky's mind. We've all been fired."
Tipper Regan had his head supported by his hands. You could tell that it hurt, but Tipper was loyal and grateful. He said, "Mushky works for Brandon University from now on. We hired him."
"Can ya beat it?" asked Mushky. "In a college. I'm gonna keep away from them race horses an' save my dough. I'm gonna buy some store teeth an' improve me speech."

The Regan household, to which they went, was quiet and private and it was possible to lock its doors against the curiosity of the newspapermen and possibly of the police, who surprisingly had not arrived.

Johnny was gazing across the room at Linda Drury and ignoring the pain in his head. George Cummings sat down on the ottoman in front of Johnny's chair. The Brandon Senior and President of the Student Council seemed a celebrity to Johnny. It was all wrapped up in George's appearance and his direct and kindly eyes. Here was a gent as clean as wind, with a sensitive quality to his mouth that Johnny had not perceived in other men.

"What happens next, Johnny?" Cummings wanted to know. "I mean to yourself. And the fight game. Have you any plans?"

Johnny said, "You'll have to tell me, pal. My head hurts. Guess I've got to find another manager. Dixie doesn't love me."

"Do you like the fight game, Johnny?" asked George.

"I think I do," he said. "I always did. I always loved it, I guess. I like the crowds, the lights, the punches, the danger—the whole thing I guess. Except sometimes it's pretty dirty."

"How many professional fights have you had?"

"I haven't had any," Johnny explained. "Dixie was going to fix that."

Cummings put out his cigarette. "We were pretty sure," he said, "Mushky said he didn't think you'd had any professional fights. I hoped you hadn't, at any rate. Did you ever go to high school, Johnny?" He didn't present his question as one might ask, "Can you read and write?"—he merely wanted to know. Johnny could tell this Cummings was a regular guy.

Johnny said, "Yup," and suspected for the first time what was coming. The realization was like a twenty-cent piece of ice inside of him, freezing his thoughts and his tongue.

"Graduate?"

Johnny shook his head, indicating that he had, said, "About two and a half years ago. From Henry Clay High School on Eighty-fourth Street. It's a fine joint. Why, George? What's the difference?"

"We were wondering if you'd like to go to college, Johnny. We couldn't think of anyone we'd rather have—for many reasons. How about it?"

"You mean here, at Brandon?" Johnny asked wonderingly. "Like you and Linda?"

"Exactly. That's one of the Student Council's privileges. We can pick out a likely Brandon man once a year. We're picking—you."

Johnny laughed a phony laugh and the perspiration was a puddle between his folded hands. He opened them, then tightened them on the flesh above his knees. He searched the faces watching him, none of which said a thing.

He said, "Nothing doing. I've got work to do. But it was nice of you. It was the nicest thing that ever happened to me."

That morning, when he was running on the road, as fighters are supposed to do, he had seen a part of Brandon, made of old red bricks against the hills, and the campus spreading greenly and fragrantly away in the sun, and in the shadows of the trees . . .

"College is great stuff if you can afford the money or the time," he said. "But I couldn't lick Fletcher with one of those mortar boards on top of my head. It would only get in my eyes. There must be a million guys with hats like that, but there's only one heavyweight champ. It might be me."

He turned and heard Tipper Regan talking, "Certainly. And it might be somebody else. Think it over, son."

And Johnny was thinking . . . how it must be to live in a world of people who are young and smart and going on to a dignified profession, sometimes together . . . such a world as he had never known, where Linda was, and Tipper Regan was, plus this wonderful guy, George.

"I'd be a dead herring on your hands!" Johnny told them. "I don't have any
money, besides the dough that's in my pockets. You can't eat for four years on that." He heard his own voice rising, sounding desperate. He shut it off.

"Money problems are sometimes solved," George said. "Tipper is an expert about those things. There are athletic scholarships, you know. They take care of board and tuition. And frequently there are a few jobs around waiting for choice candidates."

"But where do I rate that kind of stuff?" Johnny demanded. "I'm not a football player. I'm not Red Grange."

"We thought about that," Cummings continued. "We couldn't figure that one out for sure. But we have a boxing team. We even have a good one."

Mushky interrupted, "This kid don't fight college guys. We don't want a murder. I am a boxin' coach an' not a embalmer."

"But he could certainly help with the coaching," Cummings persisted. "He could get the squad in shape. It would be rather novel, wouldn't it? Having a freshman coach the varsity?"

It was agreed that this would be the solution, and it came suddenly to Johnny like a flood of sunlight and as if it were the only thing he had ever wanted. It was great while it was new in his mind—wonderful and warming.

Mushky complained to those present, "You mean to tell me this kid can't play football? You mean to tell me Johnny Gallagher couldn't knock them schoolboys all over a ball park?"

"I wouldn't dare say that he couldn't," Tipper offered in quiet judgment. "I believe it's something you should think about, Johnny. You'll take more from Brandon than you will from your pals in the fight game."

JOHNNY thought about it. He went through the motions of thinking about it, but he had known what he wanted before the Brandon coach had spoken. He had almost forgotten Doris, and when he looked at her, he knew her eyes were watching him thoughtfully.

"I went to high school once," Doris said. "For three weeks. I couldn't get that long division."

There was a midnight train that stopped at Brandon, and they could see it turn like a black snake around a distant hill, with its headlight breaking the night apart, and its whistle loud and lonely at a crossing. Doris was clinging to his arm now and he knew that she didn't want to go. She vigorously protested the fifty dollars he had crowded into her fist.

"You'll need it yourself, Johnny," she told him. "You'll need it for dances and things like that, for clothes and things. I don't want it, Johnny. I can get along."

But he tightened her fingers about the money with the pressure of his hand. She cried while the train was coming, growing in the night. And now that it was here and the steam made clouds like ghosts all about them, she put her arms about him and kissed Johnny just once and then went up the steps of the car . . . and the train pulled away in the night. Johnny stood there for minutes, watching. Then he walked back and could see, not far away, the spires of the college, reaching above the trees—the buildings old and wise and quiet and full of peace and restful promise. And he was thinking, too, of Linda . . .

III

WHEN you are a sophomore you are quite a guy around the campus—as Johnny found it. He found that the college song, like Mother Machree, could bring tears to his eyes. He had not gone home when his summer vacation arrived. There was a job around the college grounds for him that gave him money until the football time arrived again to claim the energies he did not spend on books.

Outside there was a November wind, wild and whistling, and Johnny could feel the cold inside the buildings. There was a radiator in the room, but when the steam was up he could sit on the radiator and read a book and not even singe his pants. But there was a little stove that smelled of kerosene, and not even a Hindu would sit upon this stove. Johnny and Benny Jagradski hung around it, keeping warm.

Benny Jagradski looked astoundingly
the way a baked potato would look if it weighed an eighth of a ton. Twenty years of unretarded growth had failed to provide a neck for Benny, and he would be a power on the football team this year—if classroom marks didn't throw him. Tipper Regan had raided Coal City High School to steal this varsity tackle from beneath the astounded noses of twenty rival coaches and their scouts.

"I bet it's beautiful in California," Benny said and shivered as the wind whistled. "If we go to California, Johnny, will you lend me those flannel pants?"

"We'll see, pal," Johnny said. "If and when we go. We've gotta beat Pitt first—then Fordham. They don't invite you out there to kiss Rita Hayworth a Happy New Year. You gotta play football."

Benny grinned reflectively. "I'd be satisfied just to hold hands with Rita. Whatta you readin', Johnny?"


"You bet it's not easy. I just read the numbers on the pages, friend. You like it, don't you?"

"I didn't say I liked it."

"You was battin' it out with Prof Cummings," Benny said. "You was arguin' for two hours. I thought you were brainy, honest. It sounded like that. Or was it Cummings?"

"He's a smart gent," Johnny said and put his feet on a trunk upended near his chair. "I can't let him catch me with a hole in my head." His eyes returned to the open pages. "Be good, Benny," he requested. "Go play with the mice."

Johnny was tired from study and work—weary of effort so long sustained through so many football weeks, with the burdens of the season multiplied and piled upon his head. Benny understood this.

"That's what you get for bein' so tough, Johnny," he said. "Tipper won't play anybody else in there. He don't have anybody else."

"I'm not kicking. I like football," Johnny said. "It's fun in there. It's just that you get so tired nights. There's no time for the books. You don't want to study—you wanna sleep, or sit like a dope and talk. Football's tough."

"Tougher than fightin', Johnny?"

"Easier'n fighting," Johnny explained.

"Fighting is being in there all alone. Fighting is two guys up in a ring for three minutes at a time, and I mean all alone. You don't have ten guys helping you. You can die in there an' nobody blows a whistle."

"You can die on a football field, too," Benny said.

"Not the same way," Johnny pointed out. "You keep getting knocked down playin' football. You gotta get knocked down. And when you're knocked down you're on your pants. You get a rest. If you get knocked down fighting it's because you're groggy or you're a bum. You don't get many chances. Fighting is tougher. You're on your own."

"You talk of fightin' like you loved it. You love it, don't ya, Johnny?"

"I like it all right. What do you think?"

Big Benny thought thoughts of his own, and considered Johnny Gallagher who had become his pal in the year or more that had passed since their first meeting. He thought of Johnny on Saturday afternoons, with his energy wrapped in a football suit, squandering his speed and strength on college grass—playing sixty minutes every game, breaking the enemy and himself as well, bringing big things to dear old Brandon. When Benny thought of Johnny he was inclined to tip his hat. Except that he didn't wear a hat and reverence was a thing that embarrassed Benny.

"You gonna lend me those flannel pants when we go to the Rose Bowl, Johnny?"

"Did I lend you a tuxedo when you asked me?"

"Yep, you lent it to me," Benny admitted.

"And you bent over twice, didn't you, and the seat popped out of the pants, didn't it?"

"They weren't the good pants," Benny argued. "They were the ones you got from that trombone player in Philly."

"Sure you can have the flannels, Johnny said. "If we beat Pitt and Fordham, you can have electric trains. Go to sleep, pal."

LINDA was on the train that went to Pittsburgh Friday—Linda and the band and the students who had the price, plus most of the faculty and all of the
football squad. Johnny could hear the singing and the noise in the other cars—the excitement in tune with the click of the wheels on the rails beneath them.

He knew what Tipper Regan was saying. He had heard it many times before—a drone of plays and facts and considered possibilities and emergencies, with all the essential arithmetic of the Regan System. But the thrill of football was the clash and contact and the open field and the noise that went with it—the thousands of efforts, shared by the players and the collegians who sat in the stands.

Johnny listened with dead-panned sobriety, not caring to offend Regan who was going over the plays. He knew it was important to Tipper and to the school and to himself.

Regan came over and sat with Johnny. "There's just this time and then Fordham, Johnny," he said. "You brought us this far and we want to go the rest of the way."

"We'll get there, Tipper," Johnny said quietly.

"Sixty minutes against these boys isn't fun, Johnny," Regan said. "It's a long way to go. Don't think I'm not grateful, son."

"Cut it out, will ya, Tipper?" Johnny said. "I love it. I'm a sucker for kicks in the head. It makes me think of my old pals. And I don't play this game by myself, you know. There's always ten guys to help me."

"We know that, Johnny," Regan answered. "They know it, too. But the burden's with you. You're the whole damn' attack. But don't get hurt in there. I've warned you about taking care of yourself. I don't want you to get hurt."

Johnny sometimes wondered if Tipper's fear for the safety of his neck were as great as his panic at the loss of an unbeaten season. He kicked away the thought and remembered there was nearly always one back who carried the heavy freight for a winning ball club—as Marshall Goldberg had done for Pitt, Cagle for Army, as Dutch Clark always did for the pros. He was it—for Brandon.

His journey through the cars in search of Linda was not simple. He had to stop and say "hello" to a hundred boys and girls he knew from meetings on the campus. They considered him a strange and wonderful animal, held captive in the magic bag of Tipper's scouting enterprise. Johnny knew that they liked him.

Linda was not alone, of course. The undergraduate revelry and nonsense was communal and loud and he had to steer her to a platform next to the baggage car. "You're not supposed to break up a party like a paper bag," she told him. "Not even Galloping Gallagher."

"Gallagher's a bum," he said. "I'm a weary collegian. Who sold me this racket, Linda?"

"Nobody sold it to you. You were all for it, Johnny. You've done a splendid job. You're certainly not sorry, are you?"

"Sorry? No, buttercup. I was only fooling. I'm never sorry when I look at you. Tipper says I can look at you five minutes before each game. But George Cummings is on my mind," he said frankly. "I feel like a sneak thief—talking to you behind his back. He's a great guy, George is."

"I don't know anyone who has thought differently," he could see the injury and defense coming quietly alive in her face when the subject of George was introduced. And it made Johnny realize that it would take money or brains to win Linda. They had a good time together—but George Cummings, the brilliant young prof, always seemed to come between them.

"You should make up our minds," Johnny told her—and waited.

She said, "I should? I didn't know it was like that, Johnny ... with you and me." She turned her eyes away from him.

"You know how it is with you and me," Johnny persisted. "And how it is with you and George. Which one of us is it?"

But she didn't say a word.

Traffic developed between the cars and it did not look so well for them to be standing there. College boys and girls make a lot of light-headed noise over people caught conspicuously by themselves. So Johnny and Linda looked as innocent as they knew how to look and fell into the merry nonsense of marching with the group through the long line of cars. Johnny felt ridiculous there and out of place, as though marching in honor of himself, and
Johnny's stiff arm, in the exigency of the moment, was a tidy left hook, turning Bergenstein upside-down.
accordingly kept on going until he was deposited where he belonged—opposite Benny Jagradski and looking out the window.

The train went over the miles to Pittsburgh.

Benny said, "I'll play you tic-tac-toe."
Johnny took the proffered pencil and the white space in a magazine discovered by Benny. He was awakened from his personal thoughts by the miracle of Benny winning the first game. It was nice that Benny could be so happy.

The stadium was dressed with the twenty flags that were sometimes limp and sometimes lifted with the wind, and it was dressed with the people in the stands and the colors of their clothes, with the green of the grass and the white stripes five yards apart.

It was exciting. The music was loud; it was martial and vibrantly alive and good, as the men of Pittsburgh always serve their music. Their bands are more populous than their football teams that overrun the grass; the band spreads and marches and the music grows bigger, and the people yell high above the music.

There is a very silly panther that is stuffed with a student, and is therefore a two-legged panther, waggling its pants, then falling down and charging and tripping—the clumsiest panther in the world. They do it every time that Pittsburgh plays. The Brandon crowd was in the lower stand and full of voice, as loud as they could be, excited, but with their fingers crossed and afraid of Pitt.

Johnny knew what it meant to them and how they looked at him and there was sweat on his hands and a sick chill in his stomach as there always had been when he walked through the ropes of a prize ring.

This was it. This was the game for which they'd been waiting.

He saw Benny pull the helmet over his head and tighten the strap. He thought that Benny looked less like a wrestler when his haircut was concealed. Two hundred and forty-six are a lot of pounds, he thought, but Benny carried them well. Benny was a great guy to have on your side.

Everybody's face was a little bit pale, and they were jogging with excitement now, lifting their knees, jittery for the action about to begin.

Tipper didn't say anything except, "This one really counts, boys."

Pitt won the toss and elected to kick, defending the west end of the ball park. A light wind that would assist the kick ran over their heads. They poised and waited for the whistle; they heard the whistle; they saw Bergenstein, the Pittsburgh center, put a big foot into the ball. It went to Ernie Brodski on Johnny's right, deep to the three-yard mark where Ernie took it, then started up the field. Johnny moved over and ran tandem with Brodski. He picked an open patch of green and led the way to the fifteen yard line where he sliced his body into Pittsburgh legs and went down himself. The play piled up on the twenty. He spat on his hands and they went into the huddle.

Joe Harris was the quarterback, calling the plays for Brandon. He gave it to Sands, the fullback. They lined up and the signals were barked out. The ball came back and Sands made two—only two.

Johnny hit the tackle for three, his mad drive smothered by the heavy strength of the Pittsburgh line and the secondaries moving it. So the idea was to kick, and Harris kicked well, booting outside at the Pittsburgh thirty-five. Pitt threw power at the tackles but broke themselves on Benny Jagradski. Benny stood like a monument and he was as brave as a monument, feeling no pain. His big hands were strong and they slapped people over.

Pittsburgh kicked. It was tough, a tight ball game, very cautious, no fooling around. They waited for the breaks—for an explosion that did not come, not for a while. Johnny labored and backed up the line on the defense. He plugged all the holes with his body and absorbed the shocks like a fleshy sponge. Somebody punched him in the nose and he felt at home. Tipper sent men in and out of the game, but no substitute for Johnny and none for Benny, none for Murphy, the magnificent guard, none for Delaney who was valiant at an end. He couldn't afford to take them out.
FEELEY kicked badly for Pitt, late in the second period. It was a miserable, almost lateral dribble to the sidelines that gave the ball to Brandon in the middle of the field. The groans were louder than the cheers, because there were more in the stands to groan for Pitt than were present to cheer for Brandon.

Johnny carried it on a delayed smash to the weak side and felt something give before the wild momentum of his churning cleats. He kept on going until his legs were cut off at the knees. It was first down on the thirty-eight. It was twelve yards, a beautiful slice of ground. He got up and his nose was bleeding and the blood ran down and was salty in his mouth. It was nobody’s fault, no reason to get mad, just a routine belt in the snout—a careless fist or an errant knee. He had yet to slug a guy on a football field, although the thought was often in his mind.

Brodski went for no yards on a spinner, and then Harris pulled the cork out, carried to the end, with Sands blocking cleanly and Brodski doing the same, the Brandon guards running ahead of the play and Johnny taking the lateral as he turned the end. He moved down the sideline, moving fast, his eyes alert and watching, with one arm swinging free. Bergenstein was there but left his feet too early, and Johnny’s stiff arm, in the exigency—of the moment was a tidy left hook, turning Bergenstein upside-down. The play stopped on the seventeen, with Johnny thrown outside and three guys on top of him, an elbow in his mouth.

Pitt called time out and the Brandon band blew loudly into their instruments. Johnny knew the time was now, if ever the time would arrive. He could see it in the faces of his pals. Their strength was still intact. It was now they would score, he suddenly perceived—or they wouldn’t score at all!

Play was resumed and the Pitt secondaries were close. Harris faked to the right, then flipped a flat pass down the middle. It missed the clawing fingertips of Delaney. Johnny ran wide with the next one. He ran like a horse and shed the opposing end from the taut silk of his football pants. He spun when he was hit but he didn’t go down. He swung his left arm into an advancing head, then stumbled to the ten-yard stripe. He was hit by several bodies and went down in a lump. He came up groggy but shook his head, and most of the confusion passed away.

The next play was to the right. It was no news to anyone, not to Brandon and not to Pitt. The line sagged when he smashed it and he followed through to the two-yard line. He got up and tried again. He hit the middle but nothing gave. He heard Harris calling them again. He ran wide, then followed Brodski into the mass. It gave a little, but there were inches between the ball and the last white stripe.

“One more, Johnny, boy!” was what his pals were saying, in the stands and on the field, and what Pitt was hoping wouldn’t happen. But it happened.

Johnny went over, standing up, then fell on his face from the momentum of his drive, and was happy lying there, with Benny beating his back too heavily in muscular congratulation. He was satisfied with the effort he had spent. He blocked for Harris who coolly placed the ball between the uprights, acquiring the extra point.

During the half Johnny rested and did not try to think. He’d know what to do while he was on his feet, while the ball game was alive. He needed rest. He knew and Tipper knew about the Pitt reserves. They were like the Russian Army; they always had more. They played with three teams, not with one; there was a fabulous array of talent and of power that finally broke you to little pieces. It would come.

PITT began to roll. It was in the fourth period now, when the sun was down behind the stands and the flags on their masts were starched with the cold wind that remained. There was vitality in the air and in Pitt, but little in Brandon—not much in Johnny, not any in Benny. Those tackle plays—the sum of them was very great. At first they only shocked, but sufficiently repeated they numbed, and now finally they were out to destroy.

Pitt’s first team was back in the game and Tramulis got loose for twenty-two
yards, a play that Johnny observed while flat on his back. The explosion seemed dangerously near. Johnny cursed himself for being carved out of the play; he climbed aboard his feet. He threw himself into the next one, piled it up, but then Feeley flipped a fifteen-yard pass to Tramulis who galloped to the twenty.

The shocks were repeated. They were good for two yards, for three yards, for eight yards. They moved the ball all the way to the five and there seemed no desperate striving that could stop them. Brandon stiffened, holding for two downs, then fell victim to a Pitt reverse that shoved Tramulis over for the score. There was nothing that Johnny or his comrades might have done. The physical wave ran over them, crushed them, pinned them flat to the grass, and now Feeley was swinging a free foot back there where all of them could see him, and Tramulis was going to hold the ball.

Feeley wouldn’t miss, Johnny believed; he wouldn’t miss unless the kick was blocked or unless he was dumped in his tracks before his foot could execute its purpose. When the ball snapped back, the lines crashed and Johnny strove and knew that Benny was spreading bodies all about. But the ball didn’t mind. The ball didn’t care how they sweated or how they tried. The ball kept going where Feeley’s foot had told it to go, up and over, right through the middle, and no wishing could call it back.

Tied up.

The minutes moved along and the tension was like a blanket all over the stadium. The score remained in a knot. But Pittsburgh was moving, now and again, a few yards here, a few yards there, with better length to their kicks, with greater power in their overground drives.

Brandon was brave, however, on its thirty-yard line and took the ball for its own. Johnny piston ed his legs beneath him and barged away. But they got him finally. They dumped him hard, and flat on his back—a cleat sliced the flesh around his mouth. He arose and spat the claret onto the ground. Harris called time out and Mushky brought water for Johnny to rinse the inside of his jowls.

Mushky said, “You all right, kid? You ain’t killin’ yerself in here?”

Johnny said, “You know me, pal. I’m nobody’s slob. I don’t stick my head in the oven.” The icy water was wonderful. He felt himself swaying.

“Maybe I’m crazy,” Mushky said and stuck the salts under his nose. “You could get paid fer takin’ this kind of a lickin’?” He used a collodion pencil on the raw edge of Johnny’s mouth, as he would in a prize ring, and he was swift and competent with his ministrations, a man who knew his business. He said, “You gotta love a guy fer tryin’, Johnny, but it’s a good thing you ain’t got no wife an’ kids.” Johnny knew that the little man with the vegetable ear was worried. “If it gets too tough you give ‘em this,” said Mushky, and this was indicated by a pantomimed left hook.

Sands and Brodski, given minutes of respite on the bench, were sent back into the ball game. Murphy, briefly absent, because of an accidental kick in the head, rejoined the team. They had some hope of offensive efficiency as Harris barked the signals. Johnny loafed on this one as he was supposed to do, faking a spinner while Brodski slapped his head against a wall of flesh for two yards.

They shifted to the right on the next play, in double-wing formation. The ball came to Harris who faded and tossed a short pass over the line to Johnny’s stretching fingers. He took it out of the air and went twenty yards before they caught him. He came down like the side of a house and believed he would not be able to stand erect when next he attempted the feat. There was pain in his left thigh that would not go away, but grew with the passing minutes, and they hadn’t left a handful of skin along the taut surfaces of his shins. It hurt terrifically, but what could he do? The Brandon voices kept calling from the stands.

“Touchdown! Touchdown. . . .”

So Johnny forgot about the pain and galloped with the next one, through the hole cut wide by the efforts of Benny—and into Pitt’s backfield where Brodski spilled Tramulis. Johnny rode over another guy in his way and got to midfield
where he pivoted, rolled, and got loose, found legs for his mission and cut for the sidelines.

How he got out there he never knew, but he was out there now, and the yards were disappearing under his cleats. He was straining and hoping and dying until they bumped him out of bounds and he rolled over and lay still for a moment before he could get up.

The effort was unending and it was breaking him, he knew, but it was for that Brandon crowd. The efforts meant yardage, steady, bloody, inevitable yardage, and the fever of his striving put a flame in his pals. There was, for a little time, new strength in Brandon—a wonderful, terrible surge of power that was unexpected. The ball was on Pitt’s twenty. The time was closing out. The score was 7—7.

Johnny got over. He got over the last line with the blood cascading from his mouth and his body sore as an open wound and the last drop of his energy soaked up by the grass on which he spent it. He never forgot how it was he made it. He remembered how he charged and then stopped, and his legs were going forward, but not his body, and his will was going, too. He was fighting inside of himself, and then the enemy line fell apart.

Johnny slashed through the hole and was on his stomach, prone and stiff—but over the line!

He was able to climb to his feet. Then he was taken out. The game was on the ice for Brandon, and he could scarcely walk upon the legs that had carried him all the way. But he liked it fine.

Tipper Regan was off the bench and waiting to greet him. He put a blanket over Johnny’s shoulders and shook his hand and said a dozen grateful things before Johnny limped along the sideline toward the solace of the showers. The clock said that Pitt had two minutes in which to do something about the score.

Pitt didn’t do a thing but try. He could tell by the manner of noise that reached the dressing-room. There was no earthquake of sound as there would have been had Pitt been able to score. The shower came down hot and soothing to his body, but sometimes lancing him with pain where it touched his cuts and the skinless patches of his body. He felt better, and in minutes was stronger, and the water, turned ice, was bringing him around when the squad came through the door. He thought that Mushky’s voice was louder than anybody else’s, except Benny’s.

JOHNNY dried his body with a big towel, and behind him was Mushky, with another towel, sponging the water drops where the flesh was raw. “Can my kid play football?” he asked softly, and of no one in particular, then shook his head slowly in rapt appreciation.

Mushky was very proud and his pride was smug and personal now. It said that Johnny was of his world and not of these others’ world, and that his boxing world was the tougher and the braver and the stronger one.

Tipper inquired again of Johnny’s health.

“Yeah, sure, Tipper. I’m all right. Except a leg. It’s a little stiff.” Johnny moved the left leg, felt the thigh. “Feels like a couple of gold balls in there.”

“Where?”

“Right here.”

The coach’s hands were swift, kneading the ligaments. “Is it bad, Johnny? Are you going to be able to use it?” Regan was scared; he wore his fright as plainly as his nose. “Lift the leg slowly, Johnny. Bend it back at the knee.” Johnny complied, with one hand on Tipper’s shoulder, the other on Mushky’s. “It just hurts,” he said. “Probably bruised. It’s gonna be all right.”

“Lemme see,” Mushky said. His hands knew more about lumps and bruises and bones than those of any man in the room. “It ain’t bad,” he said. “It’s just gonna get worse for three days. Then it’ll get better.”

“How do you know?” Tipper was suspicious of such optimism. “My old man used to ride a charley-horse when he was on the cops.”

“This is no time for clowning, Mushky.”

“You think I don’t know my business?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“Then don’t worry. The kid’ll play next week. He’s better with one leg than
six Fordhams. He's a tough kid, Tipper, but just check it with the doc so's there's no mistake. Get up on the table, Johnny. What you need is rest, see? You gotta take it easy. Football's fer eleven guys. It ain't fer one."

Comfort seemed to flow out of Mushky's hands, deadening the pain, then taking it away. He maintained an utterly foolish monologue while he worked, and the linament smell, mixed with relaxation, finally put Johnny to sleep. . . . He awoke when the soothing hands had stopped their work and slapped him sharply on his naked flesh. He was drowsy, but comforted. He rubbed his eyes.

"How long I been asleep?"

"'Bout an hour."

"Where's everybody?"

"Gone to the hotel. I told 'em to leave you alone you'd be better off. You ain't fit to eat yet. Yer all gone inside. You got nerves. Here, Johnny."

Mushky had somehow produced a tall glass of milk, flecked prettily on top with nutmeg, a little cinnamon. "You like milk, don'tcha?" Mushky knew he liked milk. "You'll like it better this way."

Johnny sipped the egg nog slowly, very slowly, and let the iced fluid roll around his mouth. He said, "It's wonderful, pal. You're a smart guy. What's in it?"

"You don't wanna get messed aroun' like you was this afternoon. You're too smart a kid. They shouldn't have played you all the time today, Johnny. It ain't right. You don't get nothin' for it."

"I got a lot for it. I'm satisfied; I'm happy."

"If you like takin' a lickin' so much, why'n ya take that fight you was offered in the city?" Mushky demanded. "A thousand bucks, Johnny. You just knock over some bum an' you get a thousand bucks."

"You know better than to ask me that," Johnny said. "You could make more dough if you were out of here, too. But you hang on; you like it; you can't get away." He didn't say it was because he also wanted to be able to see Linda Drury.

"I like the kids," Mushky said, "an' here I don't even have to look at Dixie Maybaum. But I worry about you, Johnny. You're a great fighter. You was born that way, an' that's why yer so tough playin' football. Now tell me a football player who ever got rich bein' kicked in the puss?"

Johnny was used to Mushky's habit of worrying out loud. Johnny was sitting up and sipping the drink and his legs were swinging back and forth beneath the table. Mushky made everything feel all right. Mushky made you feel like a kid home from school with the measles, being pampered, feeling perfectly wonderful, being utterly dependent, where not long ago you were fighting and licking the world.

THERE was a dinner for the athletes, made of abundant training-table fare that would not bring them distress when next their bodies were put to work. There were speeches and Brandon songs and Brandon cheers. There was a fine fat steak for Johnny, now that the nerves of his stomach were quiet, and there was a growing desire among the afternoon's more vigorous participants for sleep, despite the tonic of their victory.

Johnny moved around all right on his stiffened leg, conquering his inclination to limp. Instinctively he cared little for college heroes who limped, when the limp could possibly be avoided. There was noise and excitement in the lobby and a steady repetition of his name, plus people to shake his hand, And without much searching there was Linda, her eyes shining when she found him.

She came toward him holding out her hands, and her friendliness took away the blanket of weariness he was wearing. This was everything he wanted; this was strictly the jackpot—if he could ever make enough money to win her. Automatically, he found himself searching for sight of George Cummings.

"Let's get out of here, Linda—just for a little while," he said.

She went along, not saying a word but following, until they were alone, on one of those mezzanines where there are writing-desks and postcards with the hotel's name all over everything.

But there was no one writing postcards where they sat, on a leather settee for several, beneath a light fixture that
needed a bulb. There was the dim light from down the hall, just light enough, permitting him to see her face, her eyes soft and exciting.

He said, "I knew it when I saw you in the Old Oaks, Linda. I never saw a girl like you. Maybe I never looked. They just didn't have them where I lived. But I could tell when you came in the door. I bet I could tell."

"You're sweet, Johnny. But you talk in wonderful circles." She halted.

Johnny looked at her—and knew he would have to amount to plenty—to win Linda.

And football players in training have little time for romance. They are supposed to have sleep and they are frequently so tired that this discipline is easily enforced. So Johnny, after a little while, departed—still wondering about Linda...

Benny lay wearily on the other single bed and read aloud to Johnny from the late evening papers they had bought in the lobby. He fell asleep hearing about himself and the Brandon football team. It was all very easy on the ears.

In the nights it was difficult for Johnny to attend to books. There was too much noise outside, plus bonfires in the night, and students marching and coeds screaming what was written on the banners they carried, "Beat Fordham!"

Benny said, "Great stuff, huh? It's like an election."

Johnny said, "We should know. We're old enough to vote. How many years did you shave before you got out of high school, Benny?"

"I shaved when I was fifteen. I told you that before. I got outa high school when I was nineteen. You're the guy who can vote." Benny kept looking at his pal. He said, "Stop double-talkin', Johnny. You got something on your mind."

Johnny stared.

"Maybe you're punch drunk, huh?" Benny considered this possibility three times each evening, and always with delight. "A guy don't get clouted around like you did an' not get punchy."

"I was a tough guy, Benny." Johnny grinned. "I was nobody's sandbag. And I'm not punchy. I'm thinkin', pal—just thinkin'."

"About Linda, huh?"

"About Linda some," Johnny admitted.

"She's beautiful. She don't have to clown aroun' with a punch-drunk guy like you," Benny said. "Stay in your own league, kid."

"I'm thinking about those kids out there, too," Johnny said. "If we don't beat Fordham, there'll be mass suicides. Funny how it gets you. It's silly, you know—silly as hell, Benny. What's the difference if it's Fordham or us that wins? Fordham would like to win, too. I bet you up in the Bronx they're marchin' around like madmen, too."

"We'll beat 'em, Johnny. We gotta beat 'em."

It was Thursday. In the evening papers they had a picture of Jimmy Crowley riding the Fordham Ram, opposite a cartoon of Tipper Regan perched atop no less a steed than Johnny Gallagher. They said it was even money now, and would be even money when the boys were let off the leash in the Polo Grounds, New York.

Then a man knocked on their door—Mr. Digby, a sober gentleman who worked in the registrar's office. Benny let him in, but Mr. Digby's message was for Johnny. Never a ball of charm, Mr. Digby seemed unaware that he was addressing Brandon's most useful son.

"The Dean wants you right away, Gallagher," was all he said, then departed down the ancient stairs.

"Don't break more'n yer back on those stairs," Benny called a bit too loudly, and to Johnny, "That guy don't read the papers. Whatta they want you for, another pep talk?"

Johnny had not the least idea, but he pursued the rapid steps of Mr. Digby, down the stairs and along the cracked stone walks that students had walked since 1850. Outside it was cold, and he walked with the collar of his jacket turned up and his hands in his pockets. The night was clear and refreshing and took away the weariness that printed pages had put in his eyes. He could see Digby, fifty yards ahead of him, entering the administration building across the way. Downstairs the windows were full of light.
and Johnny wondered what event had fractured the home life of the Dean of Men with sufficient force to bring him to his desk at such an hour as this.

He walked in the black night shadows and he could see, several hundred yards to his left, the red tongues of a big fire, like wild devils leaping, the silhouettes of students, feeding the fire, and many more, not clear to his sight, but merged in the darkness not sliced by the fire. He heard the Brandon band making loud music and he was somewhat proud and exceedingly pleased. It was fine that they liked him so and liked the guys who worked with him, making touchdowns every week and giving reason for nights like this with so many kids dancing.

D E A N G O R M A N’ S office was down the corridor and to the right. The corridor was wide with marble underfoot and high on the walls. Johnny’s footsteps thumped like potatoes dropping from a paper bag. The dim light in the hall was borrowed from the room that flanked it; ahead of him was a fat-stomached Atlas, big as a moon, bald as an egg and very educational. The building had flavor.

Johnny supposed the problem was football when he saw them—Tipper Regan sitting in an arm chair beside the Dean, and Mr. Walter Morely, the Graduate Manager of Athletics, and czar of Brandon’s muscular activity for so long as he czared with the Dean’s approval.

They were not a happy group, and Johnny wondered why, and did not like the way that Tipper tapped his fingers on the glass top of Dean Gorman’s desk, or the way his mouth was set, like the straight slot in a penny bank.

“Please sit down, Gallagher,” Gorman said, so Johnny sat down and crossed his legs, shifted back because he thought his toes might scar the polished mahogany. The Dean had one hand on some papers before him that Johnny did not attempt to examine. Through the opposite window he could see the rally fire being fed with crates and whatever available things there were to lengthen its reaching arms of flame. The Dean said, “There’s quite a celebration out there, Gallagher. Brandon likes to win.”

“Guess we all do,” Johnny said uncomfortably, then shifted his eyes to Tipper’s. He grinned and said, “How are you, Tip?” self-consciously.

“We’re not so good,” said Tipper quietly. “You’re on the carpet, Johnny.”

“What for?” It must be a special carpet, indeed, considering the troubled gravity of the men who faced him.

“The Dean will tell you, Johnny.”

He waited while the Dean picked up the papers before him. He thought swiftly but without success, of possible breaches of campus discipline. He knew there were none of recent date, and older escapades were long forgotten, vanished into the limbo of undergraduate silence. And sneaking out to parties was a rather minor sin.

The Dean leaned forward. “There’s no reason why I can’t be direct about this, Gallagher. The point is that from now on you are ineligible for athletics.”

“I’m what? Ineligible?” Johnny said.

“I don’t get it. It’s not studies. It couldn’t be that. Not yet, anyhow.”

Dean Gorman produced a lenient little grin of regret. “Sometimes we want things pretty badly, young man, and in our anxiety we stretch the truth a bit. It seldom works, however. The charges against you are professionalism, and I’m afraid that these are charges substantiated at their source. When you enrolled here and accepted an athletic scholarship, you overlooked the fact that receiving three hundred dollars for a boxing exhibition with Harry Fletcher constituted professionalism.”

“Wait a minute!” It came to Johnny like a sudden punch and the reflex was to punch back. He knew the source. It would have to be one source. He said, “That’s not so. I never got a dime!”

But you couldn’t blame the Dean for investigating charges, he thought. “You’ll find that’s all wrong, sir. That’s a bad apple. I told Tipper I was an amateur and I wasn’t fooling.”

“The evidence and the facts suggest something different.” Johnny didn’t like the way the Dean spoke. The Dean was accustomed to young men’s lies. His expectation of falsehood was shaping his attitude.

“But I wouldn’t stand here and make
up stories for you," Johnny said. "I wouldn't be ashamed of having taken three hundred dollars. It's just that I didn't take it. Who told you about this?" he wanted to know.

"Mr. Regan had a telephone call from Joe Farley, the sports writer," Dean Gorman said. "Yesterday afternoon. Naturally, that was the first inkling we had of the affair. Frankly, there are many things we would rather have happen. We have been until now investigating the charge."

"Why didn't you ask me?" The Dean looked at him strangely, as though the question were impertinent. "Well, why not? It's my wagon. I'm the biscuit in the oven. Why should you be so pleased with the results?"

"I haven't suggested that we are pleased, have I?"

Johnny said, "You've been satisfied with the evidence you've gathered, and you haven't asked me. The whole thing is phony. I tell you it isn't so. I kept away from that thief's money on purpose. I don't owe him a thing."

"What thief?"

"Dixie Maybaum. Dixie and Fletcher," Johnny said angrily.

THE Dean considered his fingers, slowly revolving a silver pencil. "It was from Maybaum that Farley first heard you had boxed professionally," the Dean said. "He's a responsible reporter, however, and did not publish mere suspicion, and because we asked him to, not even Maybaum's accusation. But we have, of course, investigated by now and the story has been released. I'm sorry, Gallagher. Things seemed to be developing nicely for you."

"Yes, I know. Things are just lovely." Who did they think they were? Why should they bury a guy before he was dead? "Who investigated what? Where did they investigate it?" he asked.

"That's the wrong attitude, Gallagher."

"I don't see why it is," Johnny snapped. "I don't expect to make this convenient for you. I deny the charges and expect a certain amount of support from the school."

"Easy, Johnny." That was Tipper talking, and Tipper was telling him not to lose his head, and to be nice to the Dean, because the Dean is too big a man to be patient.

"You'll find the school supporting you to a certain extent, Gallagher," the Dean told him. "But not in your personal affairs. Not in matters accrued before your enrollment here. However, for the specific charges—they are these: Farley was speaking with Maybaum about your present activities, aware, of course, of the feeling between you. You will remember that Farley was present at the Old Oaks Inn, during your charming affair some fifteen months ago." The Dean looked at Tipper and remarked. "I was persuaded to overlook that affair, I'll admit. Mr. Regan recommended you without qualification. You were a different and promising type. Earnest is probably the word for the impression you gave."

Johnny could not avoid saying, "Thanks, Dean. That's nice. That's real nice."

The Graduate Manager of Athletics, sitting opposite the Dean, said, "Less sarcasm, Gallagher. You're on the carpet, not the Dean."

Johnny wondered if these men could possibly have been his friends. He said, "We're all on the carpet. It's a big carpet." He turned to the Dean and asked, "What did Dixie say to Farley?"

"Simply that you were paid three hundred dollars for boxing with Fletcher in Philadelphia. The promoter, Nate Shirley, paid you the money."

"That's not right, though," Johnny said hotly. "Honest, I didn't get paid."

Tipper said, "Johnny never told me any lies before." Tipper wore all his distress in his face. "Then you should be able to say something, Johnny. You must know more about it than we do. You must have some proof."

Johnny wondered unhappily why it was they wouldn't believe him. He wondered why, when laden with Saturday's bruises, they choose this night to kick his shins, with their badly considered judgment, and their brutal lack of concern for his personal feelings. "I could have proof, Tipper, if I ever got the lousy money, or they paid me with a check. But there wasn't any dough, that's all I can tell you."

"This is not something I invented,"
Dean Gorman said. "Personally, I find it wholly unpleasant. Nevertheless I have in my possession the signed affidavits of five men. At least four of these men are subject to libel suits if they are wrong. This story has broken now, young man, and the obligation to remove the charges is your own. Consequently, I can't let you play on Saturday. We have never been touched by professionalism here, and we would rather lose a football game than our reputation."

"Could I see those affidavits?" Johnny demanded.

THERE were five. They bore, in their total, the signatures of Nate Shirley, promoter; Albert Maybaum, manager; Nicholas Matthews, attorney; Henry Fletcher, pugilist, and Gaston Maloney—more generally known as Breakwater Maloney—a Negro pugilist. Johnny put the papers back on the desk.

"I can't play Saturday?" he asked.

"You can't play Saturday," Dean Gorman repeated flatly.

"And it doesn't matter that Shirley can do himself a world of good by stooging for Dixie, does it? It doesn't matter that Matthews is a bandit who cheats in penny dice games and gets bums out of jail, does it?" Johnny was red-faced.

"I told you I was sympathetic. But you should know more about those things than I do, Gallagher. They're your friends, not mine." The Dean cleared his throat.

"And it doesn't matter that Breakwater can just about sign his name, does it?" Johnny persisted. "The man is punchy. He'll sign anything you ask him to. He doesn't know any better. But that's not the point. I tell you the charges are false."

"It doesn't seem likely that a young man with your capacity to take care of himself and his interests would box three rounds with the heavyweight champion of the world and not receive any compensation," the Dean said judiciously. "I told you I was sorry, Gallagher, and I don't even resent your efforts to square yourself. The University's position is a little different from your own. Football here has always been a sport. We can't be suspected of hiring mercenaries."

Johnny thought. . . . I can't fight this guy. I can't beat him down. . . . Rose Bowl dreams are very nice, in your little room when you are going to sleep. But Rose Bowl dreams are the dreams of little boys and not for a guy like me with things to do.

Johnny said to the Dean, "You know what I think, sir?"

The Dean said, "What?"

"I think I know of nicer places than your college," Johnny said. "I'm sure I can find one. Some place where I can throw punches when I get in trouble. And then you won't have to worry about what I did a year and a half ago, or whenever it was. Then we'll all be happy an I'll be smarter. And, honest, I don't care. I'll save you the trouble of throwing me out."

"Your attitude is suicidal, Gallagher. You can't expect to stand around my office and make speeches."

Johnny said. "I won't make any more speeches. I don't expect you to listen to my speeches—a man as smart as you are. You tell the newspapers just what you please. Good luck with Fordham, Tipper. So long."

He walked away from them and through the door, with Tipper's voice loud behind him. Across the campus the fire was still burning, the silhouettes of students black against the light. Johnny's eyes were curtained with water, and through the angry tears the fire danced dizzily. There was an ache in his head and his hands were clenched. He went up the stairs and into his room.

Benny said, "What's the matter?"

"I'm fired. They threw me out."

"They threw you out? Whatta you mean, Johnny? Whatta you mean?" Benny jumped out of bed.

"Yeah," Johnny said. "Out on my pants. They were going to, anyway. I didn't let them. I said the hell with it."

"You said the hell with what? Don't do this to me, Johnny. Make sense."

"I said the hell with the Dean and with Tipper and the rest of those monkeys. I said I know when I'm well off." Johnny could see that Benny's astonishment was gagging, so he hastened to explain. "They said I was a pro, Benny. They said I
took three hundred bucks for boxin’ Fletcher. It’s a damned lie. I told them that.”

“Three hundred bucks from who?” Benny demanded.

Johnny stated the circumstance. “Dixie and Fletcher did it all by themselves, understand? They put the needle in me when it would really count. That Dixie’s no dope, an’ he probably has a nice piece of change on Fordham. You know you don’t have to go to college to bet on a football game, Benny.”

“Whyn’t you tell ’em that?”

“I did tell them,” Johnny said. “I told them five times. I couldn’t tell them any more. They didn’t believe me. Not the Dean and Morley, anyhow. An’ Tipper’s scared of his lousy job. I could punch that Morley in the nose. Who asked him?”

“I’m gonna get out of here,” Benny said fervently, and he was exceedingly large and menacing when he stood erect in his angry fashion. “They can’t do that to you, Johnny. They can’t keep me here. They can go to hell for me too.”

Johnny said, “Wait a minute. Keep your shirt on. This is my party an’ you’re a schoolboy. Your old man sent you to college.”

“The hell he did,” Benny grunted. “He sent me to work in the colliery. Tipper sent me to school. He come and found me. I suppose I’m not a pro, huh? An’ pay me good dough for pretendin’ I’m clippin’ a hedge. You think I’m a student?”

“No, but you’re a great tackle, Benny, and the boys are going to need you Saturday.” Johnny shook his head.

“That don’t make any difference, Johnny. We can’t beat those guys without you. You know what it means, don’t you? You know what it means?” Johnny had an excellent idea, but he didn’t say what it meant. “It means no Rose Bowl for us, pal. It means all the nights we sat here dreamin’ and me talkin’ and you listenin’ I was just makin’ a noise with my mouth.”

Johnny knew that, and it was all pretty sour, but it wasn’t the most important thing in the world. The most important thing in the world was walking down the long aisle to a ring some night, with Harry Fletcher in the other corner and Dixie Maybaum squatted back there the way he always squatted, with the big cigar stuffed in his face and looking so wise, so very wise. That was important, and Johnny wanted to laugh then, and wondered why it was he ever played at football and being a college boy, and why it was he was marking time for a whole long year that he couldn’t retrieve for fighting. Fighting was the thing. They didn’t have fighting in a college. Not the real thing.

But in college they had Linda Drury, and that was important. He couldn’t go back to the fight game and expect her to follow him there and find it clean. When he had some dough he could ask her.

Tipper came in the room then. Tipper must have come up the stairs too fast, the way he looked. “You’ve got to use your head, Johnny,” he said. “You messed things with Gorman. We haven’t got a chance now. What’re we going to do?”

“I know what I’m gonna do.”

“But you didn’t defend yourself. You just blew up.”

“I didn’t defend myself?” Johnny repeated. “I told you it was a lie, didn’t I? I told you how it was with me and Dixie and Fletcher.”

“But you can’t blame the Dean,” Tipper said. “The evidence was there. I couldn’t help thinking things myself, Johnny. I was going crazy.”

“Well, not me, Tipper,” Johnny told him. “I was crazy once. But no more. I’m going back where I came from. I’m going to beat the ears off Fletcher—once for fun and once for the dough. And I’ll get a lot more than three hundred bucks. You’ll get along all right, Tipper. I bet you’ll get along just fine. Thanks for everything and take good care of Mushky. You’ve got the greatest trainer in the world there, Tipper. He’s a real professional.”


“You’re leaving now?” the coach asked.

“Right now, or as soon as I get packed,” Johnny said. “I can get a fight in New York—six rounds at the Manhattan Lyceum. I’m no bum, you know. I’m the Brandon half back now. I’m a personality. Some fun!”
THE undergraduates didn’t know what had happened to Johnny and their football team, and when it was eleven o’clock they were mostly in their rooms and it was quiet on the campus. But Linda knew, because Benny had gone to tell her while Johnny was getting packed, and he met her where he told Benny he would meet her—over by the stadium wall where there was a bench, and close to the road along which the bus would pass, going to the station.

When he saw her waiting there he dropped the bag and said, “I’m sorry, Linda. I tried awfully hard, until I couldn’t try any more. I was wasting time.”

She said, “Why did you do it, Johnny? Why are you running away?”

“I’m not running, Linda,” Johnny said. “I’m just going. I can’t afford to play with the boys any more. I’ve grown up. I got my diploma. I got it unofficially from Gorman. I’ve got a man’s work to do.”

“Those are words, Johnny. You like to hear them. It would take more courage to stay.”

He didn’t like the way she said it. “You don’t understand, Linda. They can’t chase me. Nobody can. I’m not afraid of them. I’m not afraid of anything. I’ll see you often, darling. You’ll be at Newark with your folks for week-ends. I’ll see you there. Nothing’s going to happen, Linda.”

But Linda’s eyes were troubled. Watching them, Johnny knew it was no use.

“Who knows what’s going to happen if you return to the mess of the fight game?” she said. “You won’t be the... No, Johnny don’t grab me like that, please. There are cars on the road. There’s—”

“I’m sorry, Linda.” He dropped his hand and it felt heavy at his side. He saw her in her loveliness, standing there, and didn’t know what to do.

He said, “Tell Mushky goodbye for me. He doesn’t know about it yet. Tell the gang they can eat Fordham. Those guys aren’t so tough. I’ll write you, I won’t forget.”

They could hear the bus coming. But she simply stood there—and watched him go.

ON the train he remembered how hard the fists of Fletcher had been and how it would be to match them with his own, right now—for keeps. It would be suicide, unless he was lucky. But people don’t grow lucky. You don’t beat champions like Fletcher by wishing you could lick them. It hadn’t done Gunnar Jensen any good.

You’d beat Fletcher by starting at the bottom and scratching your way up the difficult ladders of a difficult profession, soaking in knowledge with the punches and mending your body, changing your muscles from what football had made them, into what they would have to be for fighting. You fought a bum in the Manhattan Lyceum and got paid, because you were a champ in the Golden Gloves, or because you were the football kid whose name was splashed in all the papers. And then you might get a break—you would have to get a break—when Dixie and Fletcher were on the other side, they were so tough, so hard to fight, so entrenched and clever in their way of staying on the top.

But you could punch Fletcher and Dixie in the nose. You could just walk up and do it, if you were bold enough, or silly enough. Johnny thought he could do it. He wondered if Dixie still slugged guys with that ten dollars worth of quarters he sometimes wrapped in his fist.

He grew stiff sitting in the coach and tried to go to sleep but failed. He knew how much money he had, but he took it out and counted it. There were eighteen dollars when he paid for his ticket, and twelve of these had been Benny’s. He wished he had those three hundred dollars he had never received for boxing with the champ. That would buy him a place to sleep and food to eat in the city while he trained. It was expensive to live in the city, unless you wanted to live like a slob, and the boys at the gym could see you were down at the heels and all out of scratch, and Dixie and Fletcher could see it, too, and be tickled about it.

He went to a hotel on Forty-Eighth Street in New York where there was a clean room and a bath for two dollars and a half. He had some food in a cafe-
teria and then went back to his room and slept through the morning. He was very tired... He got up and put his clothes on, his very best clothes, when he had bathed and shaved. After a sandwich in a drugstore he was feeling better. Then he went to the Pioneer Gymnasium on Forty-fourth Street, west of Eighth.

THE Pioneer is the place—the Pioneer and Stillman’s. The Pioneer is a place where fighters go, all kinds of fighters, the good ones and the bums, where there are three rings going all the time, the fighters scrambling one another’s brains inside the leather headgear that they wear. All kinds of weights and colors are the fighters.

Downstairs he paid the training fee to a man named Charlie. Charlie knew Johnny—remembered him from before, and had read the papers that morning. Charlie had always read the sports page, and Johnny, of course, had read it, too.

“I was gonna see that game myself, tomorra,” Charlie said. “I see Fordham every week. I got a nephew goes to Fordham. What the hell those guys think you get for workin’ with Fletcher—gardens? They’re no more amachurs than you an’ me. Tough break, Johnny. You got Locker 26. How’s Mushky like it in that college, huh? Imagine Mushky in a college.”

“Mushky’s swell, Charlie,” Johnny said. “He’s got them standing on their ears. He’s a great guy, Mushky. Look, Charlie—confidential. Where’s Dixie?”

“Confidential, kid?” Charlie repeated. “Confidential, Dixie an’ Fletcher is on their ways to the coast. The champ’s got a picture job. They was supposed to leave next Wednesday but they left this mornin’.”

Johnny said what he thought of Dixie and Fletcher. “You could stuff a horse with what Dixie bet on Fordham,” Charlie said. “He is a smart hooligan, that Dixie. They’ll be back, Johnny. You just gotta wait. Then what good’ll it do ya?”

Johnny didn’t know what good it would do him, but he thought it might do him good to see Nick Gleason, the promoter at the Manhattan Lyceum. Nick was the guy who was wavin’ money a few weeks ago and had asked Johnny if he wanted some fights.

Nick said a fight could be arranged. Six rounds. “You can’t go no more’n six, kid. If you fight next week you’ll be lucky you can go two.”

“I’ll go all right, Nick. Who you got for me?”

Nick thought about it, as though the thought had not occurred to him before. It is essential that fight promoters look mysterious. “You can have Sammy Bednoz,” he said. “But Sammy’s a tough boy. He might cut you up, Johnny. Or maybe you’d like Manuel Farber.”

“You keep Manuel, Nick,” Johnny said. “He shouldn’t be let out nights. He’s a slug-bum. He falls on his face when he hears an alarm clock. You know that.”

“I was only lookin’ out for you, Johnny,” Charlie said. “Bednoz is very cute. He’s comin’ along. Dixie’s got a piece of Bednoz.”

“Then I’ll take Bednoz,” Johnny said. “I’ll knock ’im into your hat, Nick—a week from Wednesday night. Then you get me a guy for two weeks later and I’ll pack your joint. Only the price will go up.”

“Who’s your manager?”

“I’m my manager,” Johnny said. “I’ll do all right, too. You’ll be seeing my name in the papers.”

“I seen it,” Charlie said. “What do you think I’m payin’ you for?”

Johnny returned to his hotel and was met there by the newspaper boys who wanted to know about Brandon and Fordham and those three hundred dollars. He told them they should see Dixie and Dean Gorman who knew all about it, and then went upstairs. When he had been up there five minutes the telephone rang, and the room clerk said that Miss Doris Danube would like very much to see him.

“HELLO, Johnny.” It was Doris, all right, because he had never known anyone whose smile was so warm and bright; it was funny he hadn’t remembered that until now. But she wasn’t so loudly blonde as she entered the room, and the billboard colors had left her personality—permitting a look at the girl beneath them. She looked terrific. Johnny told her so.
"I knew you wouldn’t forget me," he said.

"Oh, I forgot you, all right," she said, smiling back. "But I read the papers. You look thin, Johnny. You don’t want to let them get you down."

"You know better than that," he answered. "How’s it with you? You look good."

"With me it is good," she said and he was willing to agree. Her fur jacket was becoming and looked expensive, although he wouldn’t know. Sitting on the edge of her chair she tapped her toes impatiently.

"No more Bronx Apollo, Doris?"

"No more Bronx Apollo. Now it’s the Club Casino," she said. "I sing, and I don’t take my clothes off, either."

"I bet you sing good," Johnny said warmly.

"I bet I don’t, but it’s the way I do it. The customers are tone deaf." She laughed.

Doris kicked his troubles out the window and he was sorry when she rose to leave.

She opened her bag and thrust her hand inside. "I almost forgot the reason for the call," she said. "My honest debts." She produced green money from her bag.

"It’s all here pretty," she said. "Fifty bucks."

"Whatta you mean, Doris?"

"Don’t play dumb, Johnny," she told him. "You know what I mean. Fifty dollars. That’s what I owe you—cash. You gave it to me that night at the station. You were very good to me, Johnny."

"But I don’t want it back."

"Yes you do. It takes a lady to give money back. You were a sweet kid." She tossed the money onto the bed and was gone. Johnny stood staring after her as she walked down the hall.

He spent the following afternoon in the Polo Grounds, after an early workout at the Pioneer. He sat high in the stands, on the Fordham side where nobody seemed to know him. He saw Fordham run over Brandon and win by fourteen points, despite the valiance of Benny and other guys on the field. He wondered how much profit that made for Dixie. He wondered if his presence on the grass would have made a difference. Fordham was a mighty ball club.

THE Manhattan Lyceum is uptown quite a way. It holds eight thousand people when they put in the extra seats. The ringside sells for two dollars, the reserved seats for a buck. You may hang on the walls or sit far away for as cheap as forty cents. Around ten o’clock you can hang your hat on the smoke that fills the air, and the noise is continual. When the fight is good the customers cheer. When the fight is lousy, their discontent is just as loud. And there are always the police, for when the trouble begins.

Johnny sat scraping his soft shoes on the cement. It was a damp little room under the street, and the shower dripped steadily, with persistent annoyance, as if it wasn’t damp enough down there. Mr. Lou Pollodino, from the Pioneer Gymnasium, had taped his hands, and Lou was all right. He would do a good job in a corner for ten or twenty bucks. They brought the gloves in and Lou put them on his hands, and Johnny knew they’d be going up there now, up to the ring, where Bednoz would be.

He didn’t think very much about Bednoz, except that Dixie owned a piece of Bednoz’s contract. He thought instead about his own condition, realizing that ten days are not much in which to mend your body or sharpen your skill. You just about get the knots out, but you are not ready for fighting.

A guy stuck his head in the door and said, "You’re on, Gallagher."

"You watch this Bednoz," Lou Pollodino said. "He’s a strong boy. He don’t fool around. He throws a right hand good. He throws it from the top of his socks."

"I’ll knock ’im on his back," Johnny grinned.

He went out the door and heard the noise upstairs. A man said, "Hold everythin’, pals," and Johnny turned and saw that the man was Mushky, taking off his very yellow camel’s hair coat.

Mushky was grinning and perspiring. He gave his hat and coat to the cop who stood by the dressing-room door. He said, "This is better than college," and put an arm around Johnny’s waist.

They walked up through the crowd with Lou carrying the towel and the col-
lodian sticks and the other necessary things behind them.

Johnny said, "Thanks, Mushky. I was wondering when you'd come." He had known somehow that Mushky would come. He had known it in the back of his mind for the last ten days.

The ropes were fancy, wrapped in red velvet, and taut beneath the lights. They shimmered when Mushky held them open for Johnny to go through. The white canvas was glaring and washed with the overhead light.

Sammy Bednoz was across the ring, wearing his blue robe as though it were a cape, rubbing soft shoes in the resin. His name was on the back of the robe in letters that were big and white. Whitey Nicholson, who worked for Dixie Maybaum, was standing there and picking his teeth with a collodion stick. Whitey wore a little grin and made a cute face at Mushky. Bednoz did not look over, not for a little while, at least, until the announcer told the customers who the fighters were—as if they didn't know.

Mr. Bednoz carried flat and ordinary features on his rather spectacular skull. "It ain't a pumpkin and it ain't a door knob," Mushky said, "But it's awful hard. He don't hit so good with his hands but he hits something terrible with his head. Dixie might let 'im keep a sawbuck fer himself if he busts yer nose with it."

Johnny stood by the ropes now, with his robe off and his body lean and powerful in the glare. He was yanking at the ropes and waiting for the bell. He heard the bell. He turned and walked out.

He stuck a left hand into Sammy's face and took his head away from the right that Sammy tossed his way. The momentum of the punch carried Bednoz to him, so Johnny just brought his left hand up hard and punishing to the body. He saw Bednoz make a face. He tried to push him off, but the other man held. The referee came and broke them and they moved around.

Bednoz was shorter than Johnny but packed with tough meat. In the clinch he had been strong. The scar tissue was white and ugly over his eyes. A fine bum was Mr. Bednoz. Johnny straightened him out with a left hand, then dropped him with a short right to the head. The punch was high but strenuous enough to upset Sammy who promptly rolled around and came to his feet with undiminished enthusiasm for his task. He didn't seem to like Johnny a little bit.

"The claret ran out of Sammy's mouth and he was a pretty brave guy. He rushed in and Johnny missed and the charge carried both men to the ropes. They punched at one another's kidneys and then, with a consummate skill, Sammy shoved his skull under Johnny's chin in a shocking bone collision. Johnny saw the lights dance. He felt his teeth shred his lips inside his mouth.

The referee broke them, warning Sammy. Sammy made outraged gestures with his hands, then brought the attack to Johnny who was waiting. Johnny leaned forward a bit and met the attack. He let the leather rain from the ends of his hands and forced Bednoz straight across the ring. He trapped him there and punched away. Sammy had his head wrapped artfully in his arms and the bell broke them up.

The crowd was pleased and loud, screaming, "Hold 'em, Brandon! We wanna touchdown!"

Johnny spat out the water Mushky gave him. He had a pain down the middle of his body that didn't belong there. He knew that condition came from rounds in the ring and not from hours on a football field. He came off his stool with the bell, determined that something should be done.

Sammy pulled his head in too late. Johnny's leather package hit him flush on the cheek and jerked up his feet and dropped him on his back by the ropes. He got up on his feet when the count was "six" but his eyes were full of haze, his arms were limp and he was bending in the middle. Johnny just stood there, rubbing one glove against his nose, uncertain of what he should do. Then Sammy fell back and through the ropes, landing finally on the apron of the ring, one glove dangling across the keys of a portable typewriter.

The working newspaperman was a sadistic fellow who shook the limp hand gravely and said, "Nice goin', Sammy."
Johnny didn’t like the way Bednoz lay like a slaughtered steer, but was otherwise pleased with his own performance, glad to find that high explosives were still in his hands.

Mushky chased his fears. “The bum’s fine,” Mushky said. “He’s lucky you done it so clean.”

Nevertheless Mushky left him momentarily and assisted Whitey Nicholson in the task of reviving Dixie’s least valuable heavyweight. Sammy awoke on his stool and was prepared to throw a left hook.

Mushky put a hand across his face and shoved his head back on the second rope.

“Lay still, Sammy,” he said. “You ain’t gettin’ paid for no punches now.”

Then he went with Johnny down through the admiring crowd, struggling to the dressing-room. Mushky said, “It’s fun, ain’t it?” And it certainly was fun. They were doing very nicely, but they were not prepared to find the familiar bulk of Benny Jagradski on the rubbing table when they reached the dressing room.

BENNY’s grin was restrained by nothing but the sides of his head. “You cooked ’im pretty, pal,” he said to Johnny, then rolled off the side of the table. “Lo, Mushk. How are you?”

Mushky said, “Don’t get up for me, kid. You was always less trouble when you was on yer back. You remind me of a heavyweight I had. He was a big Argentine, but he wasn’t as pretty as you, Benny.”

“Nobody’s as pretty as me,” Benny said. “It’s a nice suit I got, huh?”

“I seen better skins on a baloney,” Mushky said.

Johnny realized how much he had missed the big guy with the porcupine haircut. “How’s Linda, Benny?”

“She’s like she always was,” Benny said. “She was askin’ for you. She said ‘Give that meat ball a big kiss for me, Benny.’ So I brung it from her to you.”

“You come near me, you big whale,” Johnny said, “an’ I’ll murder you.”

“I told the Dean plenty about you,” Benny said. “Then they threw me out—like I hoped they would. Now my old man won’t get sore. I promised my old man I wouldn’t quit while they were feedin’ me. I also led a protest. This was a six-day protest, pals. With more action than a six-day bicycle race. They can’t get away with what they did to you, Johnny.”

“They can throw out pretty good, though,” Mushky said. “Just take a look at us. What’re you gonna do, slob?”

“I got it all figured out Johnny’s a fighter, isn’t he?”

Johnny could not imagine his large and brave and good-natured friend walking into sodden fists, and he remembered too clearly the times he had boxed with Benny in the Brandon Gymnasium. Benny took a punch too well and wouldn’t sit down. You could turn his face into a fleshy stew because his skin was soft and his bones were stubborn. Johnny was scared when he thought of that.

He said, “fighting’s a tough game, Benny. There’s nothing in it for you. You can wait until the fall and try pro football. You’d be a sensation with the pros.”

“I can’t play with the pros for a coupla years, Johnny,” was the answer. “You know that. They got rules. They don’t take college guys till their classes are graduated. I gotta better idea. I’m gonna be a wrestler.”

Johnny wondered why they hadn’t thought of that before.

“The thought wave is perfectly overwhelming,” Mushky said. “You was born to be a wrestler, chump. I know just the guy to handle ya. You go see Otto Burghmüller. He’s a fine thief who won’t do you no harm. You tell ’im I sent ya.”

“You don’t get rid of me like that,” Benny protested, happily. “I got it all figured out you’re gonna manage me, Mushky. You’ll manage me an’ we’ll all get rich.”

“You mean we’ll all get arrested,” Mushky growled. “I got trouble enough without no wrasslers.”

Johnny grinned. “Mushky doesn’t mean that, Benny. He loves wrestlers. He’s a hard-working guy by nature. He needs a wrestler.”

Mushky gave in. “I’ll go see Otto tomorrow. We’re goin’ on the road next week. To get Johnny fights with guys I got picked out.”
“What’s this, a tank tour?” Johnny asked.

“This is strictly kosher an’ on the level,” was the reply. “But if you don’t knock off these bums we won’t go no further. We quit.”

“But I promised Gleason I’d fight a guy in two weeks, Mushky. I can’t do that to Nick.” Johnny shook his head.

“That’s what you think. You didn’t sign nothin’ did you?”

“No,” Johnny admitted.

“Then don’t worry. Just never sign nothin’,” Mushky said. “I’ll take care of Nick. I’ll yank off his arms, see? Him givin’ you Bednoz! The punk is takin’ nickels an’ dimes an’ his orders from Dixie. You were supposed to get a skull in the puss. Well, you did, but you was lucky. You keep away from that Nick unless your Uncle Mushky’s around. Give us three months an’ we’ll talk business with Nick.”

He turned his attentions to Benny, said, “You keep away from them chocolate sundaes, chump. If you gonna wrestle yer gonna get kicked in th’ stomach. You gotta. It’s in the contract.” He continued to look at Benny. “That ain’t a bad idea, you being a wrestler. I always wondered what it was you looked like. Now I know.”

EDGAR SIMS, Johnny’s next opponent, was large and black and easily discouraged, was comfortably laid back on his shoulder blades by the third punch that came his way. But in Dayton, there was a stubborn local named Harold “Sonnyboy” Creighton, who had gone to the wars a dozen times as a professional and never met disaster. He was awkward and strong and always valiant. He was difficult to handle through five desperate rounds, after which they carried him away. Mushky said it was good experience for Johnny that would serve him later on.

In Cincinnati, there was Rocco de Bitari, who lasted four rounds, then Indianapolis and Mickey Santora for two rounds, and maybe ten or eleven additional sandbags whose talents occurred on a rising scale of quality, in almost as many towns and cities. Johnny would walk out and hit them and they would stay hit—and the newspaper notices grew bigger and the type grew blacker, and there was some money in the bank for the boys, but not so very much.

It was in Chicago, in the big indoor arena they have out there, where twenty-two-thousand can sit in the tiers and all over the enclosure where the ring is. Gunnar Jensen was the opposition and that was the Big Time, because the Gunnar had a lot of name left, although not many brains, and Mushky believed his legs were not what they had once been. Johnny didn’t know; he didn’t care. He was grateful for the match and the size of the purse, and he wanted to go out there and find some answers for himself. He knew the days and months and every winning fight were bringing him closer to Fletcher. He could see a million dollars, like green flags waving, across the broad horizon of his hopes...

He dumped the Gunnar in three rounds, whereas Fletcher had taken six, and no other man had put the Gunnar on his back through all the years he had quarreled with his fists. The drums started beating, and Mushky started talking, and Johnny Gallagher was a name in the papers every day—as certain as the box scores of the big-league teams, now barnstorming up from the south...

SOME of the thousand lights outside the Club Casino were employed to spell the name, Miss Doris Danube, and there were bigger lights, in April, than any that had spelled her name before. They said: Nightly—Miss Doris Danube.

Johnny was glad to see the letters blinking so gamely against the overwhelming Broadway night glare. It made him proud to see it spelled up there so big—and earned by Doris, herself. The lights blink your name when they know you’ll bring in the trade, and they don’t spell it out just to make a pretty sight. But he had not suspected, until now, that Doris had climbed so high.

“The little girl’s a natural,” Mushky said. “She’s got more on the ball than Bob Feller. I’d pay a sawbuck just to hear her sing.”

Inside, the Club Casino was something that Billy Rose might have worked out—sliced through four floors of an office
Fletcher smiled a sermon in self-control. "There's no money fighting in a night club. How about it, Johnny?"
building with more stages than the eye could encompass at once. There was a revolving stage raised high in the middle of the joint that rose in mechanical glory from under the floor. It vibrated with show girls, all of them blonde and decorated in powder and gilt. But the lights were trickly and deceptive and the revolving stage peev'd Mushky.

"It goes arou' too fast," he said. "You think you got one doll picked out—an' yer lookin' at another."

The headwaiter put them down in front, where the spotlights would sometimes touch the tops of their heads, making their faces blue and green and red, while the show went on. Two orchestras, clamped in ebony stalls against opposite walls, blew bold and muted music as the spectacle progressed.

The master of ceremonies stooge in a white tie shouted, "Miss Futurama!" meaning the Spirit of 1960, and a shapely lass went up in the air like a Roman candle, bundled in red and golden cellophone. The cymbals clashed and the lights went up. The lady was gone... the applause was terrific.

"I can't stand it," Mushky said. "If we don't see Doris soon I'm gonna get outta here."

Johnny gazed around and saw all the people, many of whom he knew—the Broadway crowd and some of the fight crowd, plus newspaper guys and uptown people, in boiled shirts.

Doris arrived simply, walking on a winding runway that led from one of the orchestra stalls. She was dressed in a long and modest arrangement of white. She did not strut, but there was a rhythm to her motion that kept the music in its place—soft and secondary, working for Doris, and for nobody else. She was tall and very young, and as clean as ginger ale. She was above the crowd as she walked and her left hand controlled the full folds of her skirt.

She was, to Johnny's eyes, sheer magic he had never seen before, and yet partly remembered. There was glitter all over the place, but none of it on Doris. He didn't hear what the M. C. said, because his ears were filled with a few bars of new music he hadn't heard before.

Then she sang.

SHE held the microphone in her hand, a little thing like a pocket compass, with a narrow chain that followed her where she went. The girl had talent that poured over the runway, and her voice was a mellow and happy sound that people would always remember. She looked down at Johnny when the song was tender; melting while she looked at him, with a little grin growing in the corners of her soft and pliant mouth. Johnny felt like a fool for flushing around the edges of his haircut.

When that song and two others were over, Doris came to their table. She sat down next to Johnny and said, "Hello, Dempsey."

He said, "Doris, you were tremendous." He was bowled over by the change in her.

"This is a fancier place than the Old Oaks Inn, Doris."

"I like it better," she told him. "I can dance with anybody I want to. I don't have to ask them twice."

Johnny remembered that other time—and winced.

"Look, Doris. We're not going to brawl, are we? Old pals like us?"

But she didn't answer.

The master of ceremonies walked to the center of things and clapped his hands. The lights fell away all around with only one big light remaining.

"This is for you, Dempsey," Doris told Johnny, and he heard the announcement.

"A New York boy that most of you know—the son of a Rialto Immortal, the beloved Sarah Gallagher, God rest her—and rest she will—her little boy, Johnny... a kid with a punch line—"

The light rested on Johnny and he had to stand up and bow to the left and to the right.

"That means you've arrived," Doris said. "You're famous now." Then she left them.

Just before the final show, Johnny sat facing the main stairs that came down to the ringside tables. He was thinking about how Doris had changed... when he saw a big man come in. Johnny felt his hand grow cold and he said softly to Mushky, "There's Fletcher."

He had waited the best part of two years to see Fletcher, and now the moment had arrived.

"I see 'im," Mushky muttered. "Keep
yer shirt on. Yer a big shot now. Yer in no collich bean wagon. Where's Dixie? I don't see so good."

"He's there," Johnny saw Dixie now, in back of Fletcher, getting rid of his hat.

Fletcher looked good, even at a distance. He'd soon find out that Johnny was here. He'd hear it in the lobby. Dixie would know—everybody told Dixie everything.

Fletcher was coming down the stairs now. He looked bigger than ever—and fit. Those exhibitions he'd been fighting, along the Coast and in the Middle West, after his picture work was through—they had been good for him. He'd knocked them all dead, Fletcher had. He was the champion, twenty-nine years old and at his peak. He'd fought an exhibition nearly every night. The guy was in shape.

"The hell with that," Johnny told himself, but he kept on watching Fletcher, and he knew that the crowd was watching, too.

He thought now that Fletcher looked the way Dempsey must have looked, but just a little bigger—like Maxie Baer. He moved like Dempsey, though; the short steps and the sliding motion of his body, the infinite grace—but menacing, like an Indian with a hatchet in his hand, no fooling.

"I almost licked the bum when I was a kid. I can take him apart now," Johnny told himself. But why was he worried? Why were his hands so cold and wet in the palms? Nervous, that was it. Only nerves and nothing else.

Fletcher was shaking a lot of hands while Dixie used his hands to talk.

"A year from now and you'll murder that turnip," Mushky said. "Just give us a year. Then get 'im in a ring if yer lucky, Johnny. Keep your shirt on now—understand? Let 'em come over. Let 'em come. We can talk tough. We can talk the skin off them baloney's."

The headwaiter unloaded the champ and Dixie two tables away—near a couple of local ladies who were nice to look at. Dixie gazed over with that big cigar stuck in his face. Fletcher looked twice, then feigned his mock surprise. His face lit up with a positively beautiful smile. He bowed and waved a hand broadly. He said, very clearly, "We wanna touch-down!" He said it loud and the customers thought it was funny because they knew about Fletcher and Johnny.

Mushky fumed over his lips and the lights went out and the show began, but the people were still laughing because Fletcher had been so funny. . .

Johnny paid no attention to the show, not until Doris was on again and the lights were up and he could see Fletcher and Dixie. He resented Fletcher applauding Doris when he did, but there was little he could do about that, now.

Doris came back to the table and sat down. "If they're going to watch me I want more money," she said.

The waiter came and asked what they would have. "Mr. Maybaum would like to buy a drink."

"Anytime that bum buys a drink I get it analyzed at a drugstore," Mushky said.

The waiter appeared to be pained.

Mushky dug in his trousers for some bills. "You take this dough an' ask them clowns would they like us to buy 'em a football. If they don't wanna football, you keep the dough."

Ed Melody, a columnist for the Illustrated News, was on the premises, as was Jimmy Camilli, a young man who wrote sports for the New York Record. They came happily over to the possible scene of conflict, the sports writer stopping at the champion's table, while Melody sat down next to Johnny. "What gives, kid?"


Johnny saw Dixie coming over, trailed by sports writer Camilli. Johnny said, "Here it is, Eddie. All you have to do is hold on to your seat."

Mushky said cordially to Dixie, who was also smiling prettily, "That's a great suit you got on, Dixie."

Dixie was glad to be greeted so mildly. "It cost a hunnert an' a half," he said. "It's a nice job."

"I got a suit like that," Benny said disarmingly and Johnny knew what was coming.

"Yeh? You got a suit like that? You can fill out a suit nice, huh, kid?"

"Yeah, an' he ain't gotta wear your face over it!" Mushky completed the game and they were happier at the table.
now than they had been before.  
“"I can use that," Ed Melody said, then  
put it down with a pencil.  
"It ain’t new and it ain’t funny," Dixie  
said.  “You use that, mister, an’ I’ll cut  
off your ears, I was talkin’ to friends.”  
“What friends?” the reporter asked.  
“Johnny an’ Mushky here, an’ the little  
girl an’ the big guy.  Right, Mushky?”  
“Wrong. All wrong. Don’t get cute,  
Dixie. Keepin’ outta jail don’t make you  
respectable,” Mushky said. “Whatja do  
with the dough you made on the Ford-  
ham-Brandon game, Dixie? How much  
o’ that did ya give to Breakwater?”  
“What about Breakwater?” Maybaum  
demanded.  
“Know damn well what about  
Breakwater,” Mushky said. “The guy is  
daffy. They’re takin’ ‘im to the hatch up  
the river ‘t get the knots outta his head.  
Breakwater’s got th’ whammies; he’s  
punch-drunk. He got it makin’ dough  
fer you, Dixie. You treated Breakwater  
very nice.”  
Mushky talked too loud for Dixie, and  
made the man look guilty about, aware  
of too many attentive ears. “You an’  
Fletcher,” Mushky continued. “You an’  
that two hunnert pound flounder.”  
“You mean the champ?”  
“I mean the champ.”  
“You just ain’t been’ nice, Mushky,”  
Maybaum said. “Yer hurtin’ our feelin’s.  
We treated Breakwater very nice. I  
always take care o’ my boys.” He sought  
to change the subject, and called to  
Fletcher, “The boys would like to see  
you, Harry.”  

The man was uncomfortable, uncertain,  
Johnny thought, and the way he walked  
and talked and wore his grin made little  
difference. Fletcher was not too sure of  
the score.  
Maybe Mushky saw that, too. “You  
sit down here it’s at your own risk, you  
tramp.”  
“Mushky, don’t talk like that,” said  
Dixie and you would have thought that  
Dixie was a man of sensitive nature.  
“He’s lucky the kid don’t belt ’im right  
here,” persisted Mushky. “He’s a spered  
termata.”  
Fletcher smiled a sermon in self-con-  
trol. “There’s no money fighting in a  
night club. How about it, Johnny?”  
“You ain’t in the amachurs no more,  
Johnny.” That was Dixie talking.  

Benny nodded at Fletcher. “I’ll wrassle  
the bum fer the price of a sandwich. I’ll  
wrassele ’im here.”  
“You’ll wrestle him an’ the cops,” said  
Dixie. “This is no place for that kind  
of talk.”  
“You don’t want no part of these boys,  
either of them,” Mushky said. “You got  
that title packed away an’ you ain’t puttin’  
it up to get it knocked off. My Johnny’ll  
fight you any time, and place, anywhere.  
I placed a challenge with the Commission  
to fight your Hollywood humpty-dumpty.  
I got five thousan’ bucks posted as a for-  
feit. We stand ready any time, any  
place.”  

Dixie said wearily, “We come to make  
a social call—and you wanna talk busi-  
ness. Harry don’t hafta defend yet. He’s  
got five months. He defended against  
Marty Goldfarb in Cleveland. That was  
five weeks ago.”  
“Yeah, and who defended Marty?”  
Mushky wanted to know. “You take big  
chances, don’t you, Dixie?”  
“I don’t take no chances,” the champ’s  
manager said. “That’s what makes me a  
smart guy. You think I should put my  
Harry against your bum. For what?”  
“For plenty dough, Dixie. For plenty.  
You don’t wanna take the chance.”  
“Your guy’s a kid, a amachur.”  
“He stopped the Gunnar in three,”  
Mushky said. “Fletcher took six. Is that  
a amachur?”  
“An’ you got the dough posted with  
the Commission, huh, Mushky?”
"We got ours there but they won't get yours."

"They'll get mine tomorrow," Dixie said savagely—and this was not what Mushky had expected him to say. This was not in the script, and Johnny knew it, because Mushky had told him so. "If you slap Dixie in the puss he won't risk that title," Mushky had told Johnny with confidence.

"We'll meet your strong-boy in June, wise guy," Dixie went on. "You talk a lot. You thought you was safe. You thought we was scared of your meat ball." He turned to Johnny. "We'll take you apart, sonny, if you got the nerve to show up. You see Mike Frankel for the details, boys. The champ's gotta get 'is sleep."

JOHNNY thought Mushky suddenly looked sick, though he couldn't see why. For himself, he was jubilant now that all of his chips were finally down. Fletcher in June, just two months away, with all that money packed in the stands, and the championship there to be taken away! He hadn't expected it to be like this. He had foreseen years of the old run-around, with Dixie milking the title for every last nickle, not putting it on the line for Johnny to take it away.

He said, "Congratulations, champ. I didn't know you were that brave." He was happy now. He could almost be cordial to Fletcher. There'd be a night, under June stars, with the ropes around them and nobody there to stop it, with people there only to watch it and pay to see it. There'd be money in buckets, as there always is for the man who wears the crown ... and he could win Linda Drury.

Mushky was speaking uncomfortably, half to Dixie, half to himself. "I been outsmarted, an' by a catfish like you. My kid ain't ready for fifteen rounds, but I didn't think you knew it. Next year we'll eat that biscuit o' yours. Johnny ain't ready. I never figured you had the brains or the nerve to call me."

"Then we'll pick up them five gees at the Commission, pal," Dixie said. "You ain't gonna lose it on no horses, Mushky."

Johnny was very fond of Mushky, but not grateful for this protective caution. He said, "Wait a minute. Nobody asked me." Mushky's words had stuck pins in his personal pride, and Mushky's careful custody was all right, but it would not put him where he wanted to be—inside of a ring with Fletcher.

Mushky said, "Take it easy, Johnny. Don't be a chump. Let these punks go back to pickin' pockets."

"June fifteenth is fine," Johnny said. "We'll be in Frankel's office in the morning."

"Oh, no you won't," said Mushky. "Oh, yes I will," Johnny told him.

"You got a contract with this kid?" Dixie wanted to know.

"None of yer business."

"This kid don't sign many contracts." Dixie calmly picked at his teeth and surveyed the panic of Mushky. He knew the situation, of course. He didn't miss. "Don't let your feet freeze, Johnny. See you in the morning." He walked away, and so did Fletcher. The champion straightened his tie and waved to some pals. Benny blew air very vigorously through his fingers, but Fletcher didn't turn around. A lot of people laughed, but not Mushky.

VI

MIKE FRANKEL had the situation in his lap, and Mike was a man who knew a bargain when he saw one. The promoter was a pale-eyed, stoop-shouldered man whose energy and imagination were not written in his face. Mike got things done because he never took time out to sleep. He was a lonesome, independent character with a talent for making money. He was basically honest but loved nobody.

He said, "The fight will do seven hundred grand. Ten years ago it would have done a million. But you can't fill up fifty-dollar seats no more. You sign here, Johnny."

Johnny signed, placing his name beneath Dixie's and the champion's. He was glad that it was done. It was better now. He and Mushky could make out they had never quarreled. Mushky would stick. You could count on Mushky. Already the guy was brightening up, reaching for hope over the barriers of his logic.
"We'll get this turkey fast," he told the newspapermen. "We'll slap 'im down before he gets off 'n is stool."

"You didn't say that last night."

"Last night I was not myself," Mushky tried to smile. "Last night I was a southpaw named Ginsburg."

Johnny was alone in the hotel suite, reading the papers. His big back was comfortable against the soft bulk of the chair. He had a week in which to loaf and eat a lot of food, putting suet across his stomach to withstand the seven weeks of training that lay ahead of him. Loafing was a fine occupation, he decided, but it was broken by the ringing of the phone. He walked across the room, picked up the phone.

"Hello."

"Hello? Johnny!"

"Linda!" He jumped up with the phone still in his hand. "How are you, Linda?"

"I'm not as well as you are, Johnny, but I'm safer. We've read the papers. We're all very proud. George and Tipper and just about everyone."

"Tell them thanks for being proud," he said. "Tell them I dedicate my body to Brandon. Are you down at school now, Linda?"

"Yes, Johnny," she said. "I'm just going home. Easter vacations, you know. We thought you might like to run down for the week-end."

"Down where?" he asked.

"Down home, of course. To Newark. We'd love to have you. You'd like it, Johnny. It would be fun."

"It would be fun to look at you, Linda. The best fun I know. How's George?"

"He's fine. He's writing a book."

"What kind of a book?"

"A clever book, of course."

"That's right," he said. "George is a clever gent." Johnny thought he knew why he wanted a million dollars. He would need it to beat out George and win Linda, and what she stood for in that world where he had never lived himself.

"Come down Friday night," she told him and gave directions.

"Benny bought an automobile," Johnny said. "I'll take that."

When the phone was back on the hook he sat there, thinking...
He grinned. "I'd like to own a place like this, Linda."

"Of course, Johnny. Why not?" She said it softly—and waited.

"I'd need you on the place, Linda, when I had the million dollars," Johnny said. "You'd dress it up. You'd make it right."

"Is that all?" She looked at him. But this was no time for romance. There were people all over the lawn.

He said, "You'd make me right, Linda. I think I've known that all the time. I think that's what I want."

"But you never really know, do you? You thought you wanted college."

"I've got something better than that. I've got a passport to any place in my hands." Johnny held them up. "I can knock down all the doors I want to with these."

She laughed. "You're having a good time. But poor George is cracking his head over that book of his. It's going to be a great book."

"What about?" Johnny asked—wishing she wouldn't bring up the young Brandon prof all the time.

"About things I'm not allowed to tell."

"Not even an old pal?" Johnny flushed.

"Sorry," she said.

The sunlight planted gold threads in her hair; her teeth were unbelievably white, revealed by her parted, desirable lips. Johnny took a breath.

"Are you and George engaged?" he asked quickly.

"I have another year at college," she said. "I don't talk about things like that."

"Then talk about things like us. I admire George, you know. But I think of myself, too. I think of a lifetime, Linda."

She said, "You'd better think of that prizefighter Fletcher. Here comes Father, Johnny."

Johnny was thinking of Fletcher, all right. He was in Dempsey's place by himself, the night before they were to leave for camp. Johnny was saying goodbye to the boys, and drinking the mineral water that Mushky permitted him to have at bars. He watched Dixie Maybaum blow the collar off his beer. Dixie had come in a few minutes ago and was talking to pals down the other end. After a while he walked down the bar to where Johnny was.

"What'll you have, kid?" He motioned to the man in the apron.

"I've got what I'm going to have. Right here." Johnny held up his glass of mineral water. "Let's save all the arguing for June fifteenth, Dixie. Save it for Fletcher and me."

"I was just tryna be pleasant, sonny," Dixie said. "I was thinkin' you might be a big shot a coupla months from now. You might be champ."

"I'm thinking the same thing, Dixie," Johnny said. "Two months from now you'll be back hustling pool games."

"You think so for how much, mister? For fifty grand?"

"Those are nice numbers, Dixie, but you say them too fast," Johnny pointed out. "Where did I ever see fifty grand?"

"You'll see it. You'll see more'n that," the champ's manager said. "You're cuttin' fifteen percent o' the gate, aintcha? You'll be seein' a hunnert thousan' bucks. A kid like you—an amachur, huh, Johnny?"

"So what?"

"So you can get eight to five in Kelly's horse room. You can get eighty for fifty. You can get it from me," Dixie taunted.

"You trying to scare me, Dixie?"

Johnny asked.

"I'm tryna' earn an honest buck," the other said. "I'll put eighty grand with Kelly. He takes fifty from what Frankel's gotta pay you after the fight. If you beat my champ, you get the bundle—you get a hunnert-thirty goos. If you lose, you get the small change what's left."

There it was, flat on the bar. Dixie had stuck his chin out and all Johnny had to say was "yes" or "no." Half of Broadway had eyes on him; they all heard Dixie. Johnny said, "I'll phone Kelly now. He can arrange it with Frankel."

He felt then as though the mineral water had turned to wine, intoxicated with his gamble. He walked back to his hotel with people saying "Hello" to him on the streets. It would put explosives in the punches he would throw...

The training camp was in upstate New York, on the west side of the Hudson. It wasn't so expensive as Dixie May-
baum's place at Brandon, but it was nice enough. There were pine trees to smell and look at, dirt roads for roadwork and enough hills and fresh air for laboring lungs.

There was a ring on a platform, out of doors, with seats around it for the press and the part of the public that would pay a dollar. There was a big barn, too, with another ring, set inside for when the weather was bad. The sparring partners were fairly good and expensive, and Mushky invested everything but his trousers in his efforts to produce the best.

"I ain't afraid of Fletcher," he quarreled mildly. "It's the fifteen rounds I'm worried about, Johnny. Sure you can get 'im in three roun's, or maybe four or maybe five. But what if ya miss? It's fifteen roun's, pally, an' you never been up that long."

"I can take what he's got," Johnny said. "I took it before. But he can't take what I've got. The geezer's gotta come up in Fletcher."

"Yer sure there's geezer there, huh, Johnny?"

"I've seen it there," Johnny said. "I oughta know. I'll make him quit."

Johnny's hands were sure and swift. He was down off his toes and throwing his punches for keeps. He was not the stand-up stylist of his amateur days, for fancy boxers work too many rounds before they get results. He was a crouching, crowding, murderous puncher, now, making capital of the sting in his hands. Resourceful, with his head like a serpent's head, keyed to the swift and dramatic type of fight that Dempsey used to make.

He climbed inside the ropes with Soldier Dale, the colored mountain from Oregon. Dale had a left hand as long as an elephant's nose. The man was big and made of classic flesh. His little head hid behind the mounds of his chocolate shoulders. Johnny let the left lead slip over his head, kept shuffling in, looking for the range. His crouching, darting head confused the leather hands before him. The Soldier dropped his right arm just a little bit. The left hook exploded against his cheek and dropped him on his back.

There were a lot of well-learned lads in the house, fighters like Young Otto and Abe Attel, Dan Morgan and Benny Leonard.

"Dempsey never done it better," Mushky said, and there was no one present to debate the point.

Johnny felt sorry for the Soldier and picked him up, held him until the jelly ran out of his legs.

"It ain' worth it fer fohty bucks a day," the Soldier said and Johnny repeated his regrets. Inwardly he was pleased and growing savage. The edge was coming to him. He was ready to fight, really to fight.

Later, he said to Mushky, "I tell you what we'll do. We get five guys to go three rounds apiece, on Friday, say. We'll see if I can go fifteen."

"An' leave 'em in that ring up there? Not you, Johnny. You save what you got for Fletcher. Whatever you got you may have to spend."

JOHNNY had been in the Yankee Stadium before, for ball games and other people's fights. But not for keeps. Not with the gloves on his own hands. Not for the heavyweight championship of the world. The Yankee dugout was his dressing-room, closed to outside view for the occasion. Fletcher's was the dugout across the way. He wondered vaguely if Babe Ruth had ever sat upon this piece of board where he sat now, while Mushky taped his hands.

He thought of a lot of things, but his thoughts were not of a piece. The thoughts were nervous thoughts, with wings and all confused. It was a hot night and the sweat stood in bubbles on Mushky's arms. Lou Pollodino was there, fussing with little bottles in a kit. Johnny was cold and clammy under his sweat; there was a pain across his brow and it was impossible to keep his feet still.

"You got th' jumps, huh, Johnny?" Mushky asked.

"I wanna get in there."

"You'll be in there, don' worry, kid. It won't be long now." That was Lou talking. Lou was a nice guy to have around. He didn't talk much but he talked sense.

"Hey, Mushk?"

"Yeah, Johnny?"

"They say Tunney slept before he went out to meet Dempsey," Johnny said.
“That’s what they say,” Mushky agreed.

“You think it’s true?”

“That was Tunney,” Mushky said.

“You ain’t Tunney.”

“I suppose I’m a bum, eh?”

“Oh; so ya wanna play games?” Mushky demanded. “You ain’t Tunney’s type, Johnny. Yer like Dempsey.”

“You don’t think I have Tunney’s brains?”

“Nobody’s got Tunney’s brains. Lookit the guy today. You fight like Dempsey.”

“Who does Fletcher fight like?”

“He fights like the marines is supposed to fight,” Mushky warned him. “You wanna remember that. You wanna go out there an’ take it away from the bum. You wanna get it fast. You hit better’n him. Remember that.”

“You’re an okay guy, Mushky.”

“Me?” Mushky scratched the top of his head; a piece of adhesive sticking to his fingers. “I was in a reformatory when I was eleven.” He grinned rather proudly. He never wore his teeth when he was working, but strangely he never whistled without them.

There was nobody else in the room, except a silent, perplexed and sour-faced man from the Fletcher camp, sent to watch the taping of Johnny’s hands. The Boxing Commission had already specified the amount of bandages, the amount of tape. The sour-puss was Mr. Moe Rapaport, a necessary evil. Not even Benny was in the dugout. Not now, in the closing minutes. Mushky had wanted it so.

It was ten minutes to ten. The dugout’s improvised barriers were removed.

A man said, “All right now, Mushky.” They could see a dozen cops outside, with silver badges bright against the blue. The cops were gaping in, wanting to see Johnny.

H e stood erect, with a white robe around him, swinging his arms and shuffling around, loosening himself in a bath of his own perspiration. Mushky put a blue robe of heavy flannel over the white one. He put his arm around Johnny’s waist and pressed a bit. Lou picked up the necessary things that Mushky didn’t have.

The door was now open and they could see Benny in the middle of the cops, waiting there, his face white—his smile of greeting cracked and foolish. Johnny did a little jog, then they moved inside the circle of the cops, Mushky and Lou and Benny and Johnny. The crowd didn’t see them yet, but they would, all right. The ring was up ahead. They could all see the ring. The cops moved faster.

The crowd was yelling at them, at Johnny and the boys, and at Fletcher who came from the other side. The champ was in white. The ring was raised, and the lights very bright. Now Fletcher was in the ring. Johnny could see him now, with Dixie behind him and other guys there.

They came to the ring, and the cops fell away, Johnny went up the steps fast. The noise was exploding all over the night. Johnny was their boy, adopted by the crowd for the evening. What a noise. . . . He had never heard a thing like that before, and all made for him.

At first you don’t see so well in a place like the Stadium; the lights come down so fierce; they seem to bounce off the canvas. This canvas was utterly white and free of war stains and spoke of preliminaries being lousy. The newspaper guys were all there, their faces looking up—some of them wise. Joe Farley was in the very first row, his portable right in front of his hands, his telegrapher sitting beside him. The radio gadgets were behind a neutral corner, one mouth moving . . . always moving. Johnny had forgotten that, but now it made things more important. How many millions listened?

The hell with you, Fletcher, he was saying to himself, and rubbing his feet in the resin. I’m hot now. Ring that bell, and I’ll bust ’im in half while I’m hot!

Officer Aloysius McKenzie was introduced to the crowd and he read a piece of paper in his hand. He told the crowd of traffic going north and traffic going south, what streets and bridges they should take to avoid congestion. The officer thanked the crowd and the crowd thanked the officer. . . . More guys came into the ring—Dempsey and Tunney and Braddock and Leonard and Jack Johnson and great loads of beef. Johnny rubbed his feet, shook their hands, thanked them all.
The bell rang for attention. The announcer, "Laydees and gentlemen . . . and Champion of the World, Harry Fletcher!"

There was a yell for Harry, but raspberries too, brisk and impudent, funny through the heavy blanket of the air. Mushky took off Johnny's blue robe, showing the white beneath.

"His worthy opponent, popular, dynamic. . . ."

Mushky said softly, "This is you, pal. Let 'em get a look atcha."

"—From Little Old New York . . . Johnny Gallagher!"

Johnny moved out a bit, as fighters are supposed to do at times like this, and swiveled around slowly, his hands at his sides. Then he returned to his corner. The noise kept growing; the bell broke through it, so that the judges could be announced, the time-keeper and the referee.

The referee was the competent Artie Monaghan, the scrupulously fair and fearless man who handled the big fights in New York. He gave boxing lessons in a fashionable club for men, but he must have acquired his muffin ear before he learned the lessons. He called them to the center. Dixie and Whitey Nicholson walked out with the champion, while Mushky and Lou came out with Johnny.

"I want a fast fight and I want a clean fight," Artie said.

"My boy always fights clean," Dixie said.

"Shut up," Artie said. "If one man gets knocked down the other will go to the neutral corner indicated by me."

Fletcher had pale eyes, Johnny could see. Their eyes were on a level, but Fletcher took his away. The champ hadn't shaved. The beard was on his chin like a tooth brush. That was sensible. Neither had Johnny shaved.

The referee talked on: "When the bell rings I want nobody sticking his nose inside these ropes but me. We want no assistance from outside. You men are properly protected. This is an important fight. There are people out there who paid a lot of money. Any low blows will cost the offender the round in which that blow was committed. You men are familiar with the rules. I don't have to read the book. Now shake hands." The rules say that you must shake hands, or touch the leather gloves of your opponent, at any rate. "Now go to your corner—and come out fighting!"

MUSHKY took the white robe off his shoulders, and the towel beneath that, leaving him nearly naked under the lights, except for the gloves he wore on his hands, and his purple trunks. Regulation trunks of heavy sateen with a band of blue above them. Johnny pulled at the ropes, felt the tauntness of them inside their velvet casing.

Mushky put his right hand in Johnny's glove. He said, "Be smart. But keep bringin' 'im all you got."

Johnny said, "Don't let them stop it if I get cut!" He said it fiercely and meant what he said. Lou Pollodin's grim, white face was the last he saw when the bell rang.

He turned and came out fast to Fletcher's leisurely advance. He came so fast the crowd stood up, and the champion pedaled away from the attack. His first left hook was wide, and wasted on the air. But Johnny didn't care too much. He was establishing his state of mind.

Now Fletcher moved, artfully, deliberately. The leather cut into Johnny's mouth, but the next one went over his head. Johnny moved inside of Fletcher, punching away with frightening strength and driving the champion to the ropes. They exchanged the punishment, bitterly and swiftly, until Fletcher tied him up along the ropes and Monaghan had to break them apart.

He could see Fletcher. The champ was poised, moving a bit and tapping the tips of his gloves together, his mouth-piece showing, very white, his pale eyes undisturbed. No gezer yet. Johnny moved in, feinting with his head, but the stabbing leather found his face, lanced at his brows. He came again, this time breaking the barriers of the champion's fists—this time getting close enough to rip a torrid hook to Fletcher's head. The punch was solid. Now we go, Johnny decided.

He stayed in close and ripped his hands upwards to Fletcher's stomach and broke free from the hands that sought to hold him. He brought the trouble back to the
champ—let it blaze. He didn’t hear the crowd. You never do at a time like that. He crossed a right hand, but the champ put a chunk of shoulder in front of it. Johnny pivoted on the momentum of the blow, let his left hand ride in a furious hook to Fletcher’s head. The blow was high, but not too high. He thought he saw Fletcher rock beneath its power. He’d have to try that again.

He moved in some more, always in. Then he began to spend it—let the punches rain. He felt them go home on fleshy targets, but his head was down, pressed on Fletcher’s chest. Those arms closed in around him again, until Monaghan came and took them apart.

They circled around and he saw there was no blood on Fletcher’s face, only caution written there. The champ had caught most of the punishment on his gloves. He was a cutie, Fletcher was. Johnny knew that. Well, he could be a cutie, too. He could be a Dancing Dan, but not tonight—the fewer rounds, the better. He’d let the punches fly.

Fletcher’s left hand was a puzzling thing. It didn’t miss. Johnny couldn’t seem to get the range on Fletcher. That left hand was always in his face. Stand still, you bum. I scared you once... Then the bell turned them both to their corners.

He looked questioningly at Mushky.
“Nice,” Mushky said. “Very nice.”
Johnny’s breath hadn’t hastened too much. “I nearly got ‘im that time. I felt ‘im going.”

“Sit still, Johnny. Save it.”

Already Mushky had his mouthpiece out and the cold sponge on his lips. “Just don’t lunge with them hooks, Johnny. Don’t be so anxious. Get the range first. Make ‘em count. You nearly got ‘im. Be smart, though. Keep yer head away from that right hand.”

Johnny listened. He knew he’d been lunging. He knew his feet were not too solid on the floor, and that was where the power was wasted. Fletcher might have gone down, if the punch had been right. It would be right the next time. He’d make sure of that.

“Don’t make motions ya don’t have, Johnny,” Mushky warned him. “Save yer arms.”

HE walked out with the bell and Fletcher was there. Fletcher’s eyes were pale and slitted. He held his hands nicely. The guy looked good. Johnny saw that. He caught a jab in the mouth, then another one. Fletcher did that very pretty. He was circling away. You’d think he was Tunney. Smart. Johnny moved after him... Wait for me, pal. He offered the champ the serpent’s head. The lead went wild; Johnny slipped in. The left hook thundered home. Fletcher went down.

Like that it happened. The champion bounced and rolled over, and the amazement was all over his face, and the blood was there. Monaghan shoved Johnny to a corner and Johnny looked over. He saw Mushky standing on the steps of the ring ladder, tapping his skull, meaning, “Easy, Johnny. Make it count.”

Fletcher took “three.” That was all he needed. But he was shaken; he was surprised. He spat on the piece of canvas where he’d been dropped. Johnny went after him, missed with a left hook, over-anxious, then punched a right hand down the middle. Fletcher rolled away from the punch. Damn Fletcher. He slithered along the ropes and a grin was growing on his puss. He stopped then and cracked a left hand into Johnny’s face, the way a champion should.

Johnny ripped inside, tore with his hands. His hands were tied. The referee came and broke them. The crowd’s roar possessed the night. Fletcher stabbed with that left hand—stabbed hard and strong and the blood came out of Johnny’s mouth. He didn’t mind. He’d get him again. He got him in a corner. He folded the champ in half with a body hook, brought his right hand up inside and smashed the champ’s lips. Now there was more blood on Fletcher, red and growing and making a mask through which his mouthpiece showed.

Johnny ripped a right hand that knocked the mouthpiece through the air, sent it bouncing on the canvas. Fletcher grabbed. Johnny punched through the defensive armor offered him. He was prodigal with punches, wasted dozens to get one in, a good one to the head. Fletcher wobbled there, reaching with his hands. Johnny hit him high and knocked
him over. Fletcher sat there on the canvas, the blood still coming out of his mouth.

Johnny watched him all the time, saw Fletcher dabbing with a glove at his face while he sat there and the count climbed up to "five." Fletcher got up all right. The geezer didn't show yet, if there was any geezer. . . .

Monaghan rubbed the champ's gloves against his shirt, taking away the resin that might be gathered there. Just in that pause, Johnny heard the crowd, crazy for the kill and out of their seventy thousand minds.

Fletcher pedaled diligently away until he was caught on the ropes. Trapped there, he struck back, a vicious right hand coming into Johnny's mouth, driving him back. Fletcher, surprisingly stepped forward, drilled a right to the head when the bell rang.

Johnny sat on the stool that was waiting for him. "He's tough," he said. "He's tougher'n I thought. But I'll get 'em. I'll break 'em down."

"Don' let 'im coast," Mushky cautioned. "He's gonna try. He's gonna punch when it counts an' coast when it counts. He's been aroun', Fletcher has."

His lungs were inflating and deflating footballs in his chest, but Mushky's hands fixed the wound above his right eye, made the claret stop. His legs shook a little bit, and in the loins they were tight. He wanted to get out there again. The bell said he could now.

"Keep your head, Johnny."

If he walked out and hit Fletcher right, there would be a hundred and thirty thousand bucks waiting for Johnny Gallagher in Kelly's horse room. If he just got him the one that counted—the solid one, flush and on the potato. It wasn't so hard. He'd been so close before.

The red glove glanced at his eyes, then at his mouth. Fletcher's face was very brown and very healthy, competently mended in his corner. Fletcher moved fast. His feet made a positive pattern on the canvas. They did what they were told to do by his brain. Johnny fired a right hand at the champion's chin, but merely grazed the top of his skull when Fletcher pulled it in. In the clinch they labored and a hand came up inside to sear the flesh of his cheek. Fletcher was skilled with the laces. They were wet now, with the sweat of their bodies and the water from their corners. The gloves were soggy and growing hard and they passed them back and forth.

Inside, Fletcher was smart. At long range, Fletcher was prudent, selective in the punches he threw. But they were good punches, running down the alley. They were solid and you remembered them. They didn't leave him open to be dropped again—not for a while.

But I'll get him, Johnny thought. I'll chase him and I'll get him. He can't run forever.

He thought he had him in the fifth, when he smashed Fletcher on the mouth with a lovely right hand and there was blood on them both. Fletcher faltered; he fiddled around, but Johnny kept coming, and pinned him there, right in his own corner where Dixie was, working his mouth on his unlighted cigar. The left hook splashed to the champion's head. You could see the water spray.

Now, Johnny thought—now was the time! But Fletcher moved out under his industrious arms, and a right hand buried wrist-deep in Johnny's stomach and made him a little sick. Now, try again, Johnny thought—but a left hand smashed his cheek and upset his advance, and when he threw the punch, Fletcher wasn't there.

Mushky closed the cuts in the corner, the collodion making gelatine in his brows. He could feel the sting of it, but that didn't matter. Pain brought you awake; it kept you alive. It was his body that hurt another way. That hurt was deep and way inside his body, spreading there, like a cancer to his efforts. And the hopelessness was in his chest, with a hot hand clutching his breastbone. His mouth was stuffed with burning hair. The water was good on his lips.

"All right, Johnny?"

"Awright, Mushk. Awright."

"Don' wrassle 'is arms in th' clinches, Johnny. Let 'im work, too."

"I'll get 'im now, Mush."

"Maybe you'd better, kid."

Johnny rubbed his wet gloves together. The ten-second buzzer rolled the familiar raspberry. He leaned forward. The bell.
How it happened, Johnny didn’t know. He’d been moving around the champion, looking for a spot on which to drop the bomb. But it dropped on him. He didn’t even see it. His legs went up in the air and the canvas slapped his back.

“Five!”

Five? Already? It was all gold now. The lights made it all gold. His legs had been working but now Johnny was on his knees. He lifted his head, saw Fletcher there—the look on Fletcher’s face. He got up when it was “seven” and steadied himself, and paused a minute and let the first few punches go over his head. Then he gathered his strength, in a tight little knot, and held it together while the punches went wild about him. He had the package tight and ready, the last little bit. He spent it now. He brought it to Fletcher. The champion brought it back. They stood and punched. They didn’t know how to stop. It was nice for the crowd. It wasn’t so nice for Johnny.

Fletcher was still up there in the seventh and doing fine. And he was up there through the eighth, doing better, and growing stronger, always stronger.

It hurt now to throw the punches, but Johnny threw them. Except that they didn’t go anywhere. And in the ninth he got it. He got it good. That canvas was against his back again and he was rolling over, and his mouth was open, gasping, the mouthpiece down on the floor in front of his face. On the floor like a dog, he would afterwards remember.

He got up, but the blood was in his eyes. He walked to where the punishment was waiting for him and soaked it up. He pawed with his gloves at his brows. He didn’t know for sure that he could keep his arms up. But he was pressing forward—his dull eyes open to the fire. He stumbled to his corner, although he didn’t want to stumble... although it killed him to have the crowd see him stumble.

Mushky said, “Thass enough, Johnny.” The voice was a sad, nice voice. “You ain’t goin’ out there any more, Johnny.”

Who wasn’t going out? “The hell with that, Mushky. I’m goin’ out. I got more left. I gotta go out.” His voice worked, anyhow, better than his fists.

“He wantsa chop ya to pieces, Johnny. I won’t let ‘im do it.”

“Monaghan’s running this fight.”

“Hey Monaghan!” That was Mushky calling the ref. “The kid’s had enough, Artie.”

Johnny pleaded, “I didn’t say so, Artie. I’m all right, Artie. Mushky’s just scared, thass all—he’s scared.”

“This fight is over when I say it’s over,” Monaghan told them, and Johnny was glad of that at least. He couldn’t lose while sitting on his pants in a corner. Not to Fletcher. Thanks, Artie, and there was the bell. Here we go, Fletcher. Don’t be surprised... .

A MINUTE’S rest can breathe some little power into a body, no matter how it was broken in those other minutes. Johnny was circling with Fletcher now, and looking for a place to throw the punch. He didn’t have any to waste. He knew that at last. A hundred and thirty thousand bucks, and friends out there—so many of his friends—and Linda listening, at a radio, perhaps, or afraid to listen, but waiting to see what happened... and Mushky there, and Benny and Doris. But Doris wouldn’t mind, so much, he thought, except she’d knock a tear off her lids and grin a bit and say, “There’s another time for Johnny. He’s just a kid.” But a house like Linda’s house, and a million dollars!

He saw the spot when Fletcher reached too far with a left jab intended to set him up. He dropped his right hand straight and hard. It’s soggy leather hit the champion squarely, slammed him back against the ropes. Now, Johnny. Maybe now! He went after Fletcher. He dug down deep inside of himself for a punch to spend. He found it and he spent it, and Fletcher was rocking there, the desperation suddenly new and all over his face, betrayed by his efforts to grin and make out he had stumbled. Johnny begged strength to throw another punch.

He got another punch—but got it right in his own face. The shock went through him and exploded in back of his eyes. He fought back against the helpless, mad void of his departed coordination. He was goofy there; he knew it now. He struggled for arms to hold, for three seconds respite. But he got murder.

Fletcher brought it to him fast, and only
the ropes were behind him to keep him on his feet, while Fletcher was in front of him, pouring it in, the punches raining, heavy, soggy, eternal, unremitting. He couldn’t get his hands up but he could keep his jaw tight shut, his teeth grinding to receive the shocks. It all was slipping away and the pain wasn’t there, but the helplessness was, and he was slipping, going down.

His hands pressed forward and there was the floor. The numbers were in his ears. His legs pushed, but it was like water there instead of boards and canvas. His legs ran into the water and then he had no legs. He rolled over on his back and scrambled that way, as a turtle will when set on its back.

He heard the timekeeper shouting, “Seven!” and tried and tried again.

He was standing now and wobbling. He tried to go forward. But he fell, as he went forward, and Monaghan caught him as he fell. And then he didn’t try to think. He understood that much. It was better not to think...

They put the salts under his nose, and took the gloves and bandages from his hands. They put a cold sponge on his face and cauterized his wounds. They let a piece of ice lay for a wonderful minute on his tongue, and the cops were in the ring, a great bunch of cops. The doctor came and looked at him, then took away his kit when Mushky said that Johnny was all right.

But they couldn’t take Johnny’s fatigue away. That was heavy upon him and merged with himself. He kept fighting against objective, coherent thought. He did not want to see the picture as it was. Not for a little while. He heard the announcer give the time—two minutes, eleven seconds of the tenth. He couldn’t go fifteen, he thought; he couldn’t go ten—not ten lousy rounds. Mushky had been right; he was always right.

There was a towel over his head when he went down through the crowd, walking still on rubber legs. He didn’t see Fletcher because he wouldn’t look, and Fletcher, far as he knew, had not come to his corner. He mumbled, “I should have stood up to shake his hand. He licked me, the bum. He did a good job.”

“Easy, Johnny,” Mushky said.

“I’m all right, Mushky. I’ll be all right.”

“You’re okay, Johnny?”

“I’m okay, Lou.”

He was thinking now. His nose was itchy inside his nostrils. He wanted to lie down. He wanted to cry. He knew he could; he knew he would, unless he were careful.

“It was a great fight, kid.” Somebody said that. Someone who meant to be kind. Sure it was a great fight to watch, a great fight for Fletcher—a hundred and thirty grand for Dixie.

“They just outsmarted ya, Johnny,” Mushky said it. “You wasn’t ready is all. You wasn’t ready.”

They went into the dressing-room and the long table was there for him to lie on, with his face in his arms. He did that and Mushky rubbed him with his hands. The crowd was kept outside.

“Lemme alone, will you, Mushky?” He didn’t know what else to say.

“Never mind that, Johnny. Be still. You lie there.”

“There’ll be your share of the dough left, Mushk,” he said. “That an’ expenses.”

“I didn’t ask ya that, did I, kid?”

“I’m just telling you,” Johnny said. “I want you to know I left that much.”

“You did all right.”

“Don’t tell me that,” Johnny said. “I was a sucker for them both. It was just what they wanted. I haven’t got any brains. I’m crazy.”

“Yeah, sure,” Mushky said. “Lie still.”

Johnny wept into his folded arms, and bit his lips to control the sobs that go with tears. Mushky couldn’t see the tears when they fell onto his arms, and there was nobody else around, except Lou and Benny who was there, big and mute and aggrieved in the corner where he sat.

VII

INDA and George Cummings sent him a wire on the following day—something about “The valiant never taste of death but once,” and “a proud effort, Johnny.”

But he held the crumpled telegram in his hands, wondering what they really thought. There were many versions in
his mind, none that he could believe.
Mushky and Benny were in the suite. But they were in another room, where Mushky was rehearsing with Benny the particulars of a wrestling match, scheduled for the following evening in a Boston Armory. Benny was popular with the lenient wrestling clients and his brief career was showing a profit.
Mushky called from the other room, "Hey, Johnny! Come in if ya wanna get a laugh."
Johnny said, "I don't want to get a laugh," then was sorry. "Later on, Mushky," he said.
He thought of his own finances, which normally would have been sufficient. But he'd hoped for so much . . .
Mike Frankel had held a golden goose by its long and lovely neck when he put Johnny in there with Fletcher. Johnny's fifteen percent ran to ninety-three thousand some dollars and some change. He didn't care to consider the exciting arithmetic of Fletcher's receipts. Take forty-two percent of a gate like that and you need a warehouse to store the money.
Johnny had suffered quite a brawl with Mushky. When he got that dough that afternoon, the fifty gees were taken out, as expected—all well and good.
He took thirty-one thousand and gave them to Mushky. "For what?" said Mushky.
"You're my manager," Johnny said.
"Managers get one-third."
"Not for that fight," Mushky said. "I don't wanna dime. You took all them punches, pally. You lost fifty gees to Dixie. You put those coconuts in the bank, or give it to the Soldier's an' Sailor's home. I was in the Army once. You know that, dontcha?"
That was like Mushky. Big-hearted Mushky. "I don't want you feeling sorry for me," Johnny said. "It's your dough. Take it."
"We ain't got a contract," Mushky said. "I'm a unofficial manager. You stick it in the bank. You gotta pay six gees expenses, anyhow."
So Johnny put it in the bank, in Mushky's name, after splitting expenses from his own remaining funds and Mushky's thirty-one thousand.
Now he was glad that Mushky and Benny were going up to Boston. He wanted to be by himself. He hadn't been out of doors, except to collect the money and sit in the dark of a movie house. The lumps were still on his head. They were high and purple on his cheeks and over his eyes. He looked like a wreck.
Doris had been in, of course. She'd come twice. But he hadn't seen her—not looking the way he did. And he knew she came to be nice. It would be just as hard for her as it would be for him. If only they weren't so nice.
Benny's big bag was packed and Mushky's extra shirt was in the same bag. Departing, Mushky said, "You take care o' yerself, Johnny. You get lookin' like yourself again."
"What for?"
"We'll be goin' on the road again," Mushky told him. "You an' me an' Benny. What you need is fights, kid. Plenty of fights. You'll fight two hunder't rounds. You'll get Fletcher again. Don't sit there like a poached egg."
"Fletcher won't fight me again," Johnny said. "You know that, Mushky. Don't try to kid me. You know the answers. That's why he busted me now—so he wouldn't be takin' chances later. You know it better than I do."
"If you get in shape," Mushky said, "he's gotta give you a return."
Johnny scowled. "What makes you think I could beat 'im if I was ready to fight a million rounds? He had me licked in six. The last four he was just playing. I saw the movies."
"Don't get like that, Johnny," Mushky said. "Take it easy."
"Lemme alone."
When they were gone, he sat there, and he hated himself because he was afraid to step out of doors. Big shot! He'd talked so much. He was going to do this; he was going to do that! The million dollars. It had made a nice noise on Linda's lawn, but it would sound much better if he had really done it.

So he went out, with all the war wounds still on his face. A bell-hop downstairs said, "Hello, champ." Johnny said hello and tried to grin. What'd the guy mean—champ? When he was in the
street he heard his name and knew that people were looking at him. He couldn't stand Broadway, in spite of his resolutions. He wasn't a Yogi; he wasn't made of stone.

He walked over to Eighth, then went into Rocco Bonimo's joint where there wouldn't be many people.

Rocco was behind the bar in an apron. Rocco looked as though he had been hit with quite a few of the bottles stacked behind him. Once a welterweight out of Brownsville, Brooklyn, he was now a heavyweight out of wind and teeth. But he was a merry man, and most people liked him.

"You had 'im in the second round, Johnny," Rocco said. "You nearly killed 'im."

"Yeah, I know, Rocco," Johnny said. "Gimme a drink."

Rocco reached for the mineral water. "Not that Rocco. Gimme scotch—a high one." Johnny put money on the bar.

"This is on me, Johnny. Yer a game kid."

"This is on me, Rocco. I'm strictly a slob." Johnny frowned. "You didn't bet, did you, Rocco?"

The fat man shrugged. "A few bob, Johnny. Always bet on a pal."

"How much?" Johnny insisted.

"Hunnerd bucks. I was lucky. I woulda bet more."

Johnny took out a fistful of money and found a hundred. "You should know better, Rocco. You been around. You shoulda had more sense." He put the money on the bar.

Rocco shook his head and said, "I don't bet like that. What do you think this is? Mushky shoulda had more sense, too. When a guy gambles, he's gotta take chances."

"Mushky bet on me, Rocco?" Johnny hadn't thought of that. "Come on, Rocco. How much'd Mushky bet?"

Rocco looked up a little startled. "How'd I know, kid? He bet a few. Him and that big kid. Benny, the kid is. A nice kid, too. They was layin' it around—maybe ten grand. Him an' the kid scraped ten. They ain't squawkin'."

"No." Johnny looked at his glass. He felt dizzy. "I guess they aren't, Rocco. Fill this up, will you?"

Rocco raised his fricaseed brows. "You're the doctor, Johnny. You need relaxation. You earned it." He poured the drink, then Johnny swallowed the drink.

"What d'ya mean I earned it, Rocco?" he said.

Rocco appeared troubled. "It was a tough fight. You earned relaxation in a tough fight."

"Tough fight nothing, Rocco. I was a bum."

And a few minutes later he said, "Another drink."

"Put 'at bottle down, now," the bartender was worried. "Go on home, now. Go ahead, Johnny."

But Johnny Gallagher was already on the skids. . . .

It went on like that and it was difficult for Rocco, until finally Johnny was asleep, and then he was put in a cab whose driver was a friend of Rocco's. He didn't know how it was he attained his own bed, but that is where he woke up in the morning.

H E felt ashamed next day—but he went back next day—and the next one after. Something had happened to him after the fight and now Johnny didn't care. They had made a bum out of him at Brandon, and Fletcher had made a bum out of him. And now, at a bar, Johnny Gallagher was putting the finishing touches on the job. And it was there that Mushky found him—plastered to the ears.

"He's out've 'is mind, I tell ya he's crazy," Rocco said when Mushky arrived. Benny was with him and looking sad.


"Mushky's in Boston," Johnny said. "The hell with that, you bums. When I get up I'll break ya'n half."

The phonograph kept playing; it was playing record number twelve—the song that Doris had sung.

They brought him coffee and it cut through the fog and gave an outline to things and made him ashamed. But he was still half-drunk and didn't want to be ashamed and bitterly he fought it.

He could see them now, all standing
there, with sick looks on their faces, as though he were the saddest sight that ever they had seen. Who were they to look like that, to pity him?

"Go on, beat it!" He told Mushky that...

"You're talkin' to Mushky," Benny said, as though Mushky were Johnny's father.

"All right, so I'm talking to Mushky. So what? So what? So what?" Johnny's voice trailed off thickly.

"Let 'im stay there," Mushky said softly, turned with embarrassment to the bar.

Benny said loyally, "I'll carry the guy home. C'mon, Johnny. It's your pals."

He put heavy hands on Johnny and tried to draw him erect and Johnny said, "You been wrestlin' too much, you big gorilla. Leggo me!" He didn't want hands against him, not hands so strong and insistent.

But Benny didn't understand that and tried again.

Johnny gave him a shove and said, "Don't come near me. You'll get hurt!" He wanted to run away; he couldn't stand their eyes, all looking at him the way they did. "Lemme alone, you dopey monkeys; lemme alone!"

Benny said, "I'll put 'im on my shoulder," and Benny more or less wound up his physical efforts, although Mushky called, "Cut it out, fellas. Cut it out."

Then it happened.

The chair tipped over and they were on the floor and Benny tried, still beneficently to apply a trick or two that he had learned. And this made Johnny mad. They struggled quite a bit, and finally they were upon their feet and Benny tried again.

Johnny lost his head completely and threw a clumsy right at Benny's jaw. It exploded there and knocked Benny through the air, flat on his back against the bar where he stayed. Johnny looked and didn't know what to do, nor what to say.

Mushky said softly and rather hatefully, "You shoulda done that to Fletcher, you bum!"

And Johnny sat back on the uprighted chair, looking at the picture he had made, while they assisted Benny out of the place and Mushky went along without looking back.

Hours later, Rocco said, "Well? How d'ya feel?"

"How would I feel, Rocco?"

"You oughta cut out yer heart an' feed it ta the cat."

"The cat wouldn't eat it. Thanks for everything, Rocco," and he stumbled out.

He left town for Asbury Park, and drifted down to Florida. And now there were no more sprees for Johnny Gallagher. He had hit Benny, his pal—and given Mushky the brush-off. They were finished with him for life.

In Scranton, Pennsylvania, he met Herb Delaney, who had played such a swell game at end for Brandon, two seasons before. Herb had a job teaching football to a high school team and for two months Johnny assisted him, living with Herb and his father and his mother, and seeking no compensation but this opportunity to pass the time.

In December, he went to Florida where the horses ran, and after a while he had no money—not a dime, but a hotel bill as big as the last horse he had bet on.

He took a deep breath and relied upon the sunshine he had been soaking in. He was offered two thousand dollars to engage, for ten rounds, Wild Willy Fitzgerald, a human horse-shoe crab from Saint Augustine. Johnny didn't like it but said, "What can I lose? How is Willy?"

"You know how Willy is, but there's a lot of people will pay to see you, Gallagher. And it's Willy's home town."

"That so? Let me have five hundred in advance."

Johnny paid his bills and came back to meet Willy, and he could still knock over guys like Wild Willy with a punch apiece. The guy was so big he couldn't miss. Two thousand dollars. Six months ago he could have earned that much just for showing his muscle.

He walked out when the bell rang and hit Willy in the middle and once on the chin, then walked away. He stood in a corner while the numbers were sounded for Willy, and the disgusted clientele threw things at the ring. Johnny didn't intend to do that again. He didn't like the way that Willy's head hung crookedly at the end of his neck. It frightened him.
It was in the papers, of course. They said it was a pretty punk set-up—which didn't surprise Johnny not at all. He put down the newspaper and turned the pages of the finely bound book George Cummings had written. . . . Two weeks before, Johnny had read the reviews, wherein the critics were exceedingly hot for George. He knew now that George was going to win Linda. George had amounted to something—and Johnny Gallagher was a low-grade bum. . . .

St. Augustine's palms placed shadows through the windows; the breeze brushed against his face. He put his coat on, bitterly, and went downstairs.

And then he saw Doris, standing there in the lobby.

"Johnny—I've looked for you everywhere!"

He blinked and saw the tall girl standing there in a dress that was made for the summertime or Florida, a lovely dress. Her clear eyes were soft and kind, and he realized how seedy he must look. He didn't want her to find him this way, but she already had.

"Johnny, you look terrible," she said.
"What have you been doing to yourself?"
"I don't want to look at myself," he muttered. "I know how I look."

"So you're smoking now," she said. "I thought you might be in training." She watched him, her eyes a little frightened. "Be yourself, Johnny. Don't act like that."

He stood there—sullen, ashamed.

Finally, he asked. "What are you doing in Florida, Doris?"

"Work," she said slowly. "I start Tuesday in Miami. Why don't you come to the opening? Mushky's going to be there."

Johnny shook his head. "I couldn't look at Mushky. I wouldn't dare."

"Benny'll be there, too."

He put his head down. "How are they, Doris?"

"They're all right, Johnny," she said. "They're doing fine. Benny's quite a success, you know. He's a great comedian."

"He's a great guy."

"You should see him wrestle that Indian."

"I'd just like to see him."

"Mushky's fine, too, Johnny. He's the same old Mushky. Did you hear what happened in Kelly's horse room?" Johnny said he hadn't heard. "It wasn't in the papers," she said. "It was a private affair. He punched Dixie in the eye."

Then she said, "You could lick that Fletcher, Johnny. Mushky says so, too. We saw you beat Fitzgerald."

"Was Mushky there? Was Benny?"

Johnny asked quickly.

"Yes, they were there. I wasn't supposed to tell you." She looked at him squarely. "They'd like to see you."

"You think they could stand me, Doris?"

he asked.

"I imagine so," she said. "They put up with those wrestlers, don't they?"

"I'd like to see them," he said.

VIII

MUSHKY said, "So, the hell with it. You was drunk. A guy can get drunk. You lost ya head, Johnny. A lotta guys lose their heads when they lose what you lose. . . . It's been a long time, Johnny."

"Six months is a long time to be away from your pals," Johnny said, swallowing.

Benny said the bang on the jaw hadn't hurt too much. "If you gotta be hit you should be hit by a pro," said Benny. "You hit me good. It must've been pretty."

"I know a lot of things nicer to look at," Johnny told him. "Any time you want to hit me on the nose you've got a free shot."

"I'll remember that," Benny said.

It was not awkward as he had feared it might be, nor did the barriers stay between them for long. "Tell me about the wrestling, Benny, and tell me what you did to the Indian."

Benny told him what he did to the Indian, but little of what the Indian did to him. "It's a fine business," Benny said. "I bought my old man a saloon back home. My old man is only happy when he's in a saloon. He made eight bucks last week over what he drank. They got big spenders in our town."

"What happens, Johnny?" Mushky interrupted the story of Benny's old man. Johnny shrugged. "You tell me."

"You wanna fight?"

"I've gotta do something."

"I figured that," said Mushky. "They're an eight rounder in New Orleans with
Roscoe McCarthy, January twenty-second. Roscoe is not the slob ya think 'e is."

"I didn't say anything about Roscoe," Johnny said."

"Then lemme see you knock 'im over," Mushky told him. "You got four weeks. You start workin' tomarra, wrasslin' with Benny. Then you start to run, then you start to box."

"I suppose you want to give this big monkey a chance to get even. You want to get me killed." Johnny was tingling with happiness.

"Thass exac'ly the idea, Johnny. You get ya back broke twice an' then it's okie-dokie. Next stop New Orleans. Benny's gotta wrassle the Indian there."

"Again?"

"They oney wrassle twice a month now. They usta wrassle two, three times a week." Mushky grinned.

**ROSCOE McCARTHY** was a large and sturdy man with no thoughts of surrender. He climbed up off the floor three times in the third round, then brought plenty of grief to Johnny in the fourth. It was a fine brawl up until Roscoe's extermination in the sixth and Mushky said, "That'll do you good, Johnny. They's nothin' like a tough one under ya belt."

The pay-off was nine hundred dollars. "I was going to be a big shot," Johnny said dolefully.

"Would you get nine hunnerd bucks if you was workin' in a bank?" Mushky demanded. "You'll be up there, Johnny. You keep workin' at ya trade. Just keep knockin' 'em over."

He averaged one fight in every ten days—in San Antonio and Dallas, in Oklahoma City and Butte, Montana. He met Roscoe McCarthy again in San Diego, and this time spilled Roscoe in exactly two rounds. "The next time you fight the guy he'll just die in his dressin'-room," Mushky said.

"I'm not getting anywhere, Mushky," Johnny complained. "I could always lick these bums." He was anxious to hit the come-back trail now. He couldn't wait for it.

"You fiddled ten roun's with Mike Ferrara, dintcha?" Mushky demanded. "You know it all adds up, dontcha? You know you're gettin' to be a pretty tough guy. You know you don't waste them punches no more. You don't lunge with 'at hook no more. You know that Jim Gaddy, kid?" Mushky asked. "The big colored kid from Chicago?"

Johnny said he did.

"He's strictly murder, Johnny. He's got twenty straight kayoes. You're fightin' 'im in Chicago, May nineteenth, Mushky announced. "Dixie's been steerin' Fletcher clear o' Gaddy, already."

Jim Gaddy moved like the Bomber, but not so gracefully—not like a big cat. But he was a puncher, all right. They found that out.

Johnny was in there stabbing in the second round, his left hand like the lance it used to be in his amateur days—moving around and not getting hit and not counting the number of rounds his legs would take him. The colored boy was crouching and Johnny was careless. It came from somewhere, down near the floor, a fine right hand that put Johnny on the floor and left his brains and his thoughts in another world.

He didn't know about it until the seventh, when things were suddenly clear, and he was still shoving left hands into Gaddy and making them stick. His head was full of pain, but his limbs were full of power. He could see that Gaddy was fading now, and he could hear the crowd making mountains of sound. He chopped a left hook and Gaddy went over, rolled to his glove tips and came to his feet. He went down again and was reprieved by the bell, then laid safe away in the eighth.

Johnny stood under the steaming shower and thought he could tear down a wall. "I'm ready now, Mushky. I'm ready any time."

Mushky said, "I know, kid. You been ready fer a month. But you're out in the cold, Johnny. If you wanna fight the champ you'll hafta do it in the street. He won't fight you in a ring."

**DIXIE MAYBAUM** asked all of those who were present, "Why should we fight the bum? For what? For 'is old age? Watta we owe Gallagher? We give 'im a shot an' my Harry murders the slob. Because we don't like the guy don't mean we gotta kill the guy."
“He had your cannibal on his pants, though, didn’t he?” It was Joe Farley, the sports writer, talking, and the place was Mike Frankel’s office in New York City.

“My Harry ain’t no cannibal,” Maybaum said. “He’s got another offer from Hollywood. Don’t be such a smart guy, Farley. You know what that Gallagher done to us, the punk. We give ‘im ‘is first chance.”

“I know that, Dixie,” the newspaper man said. “You gave him his big chance in college. You also got him kicked out of college.”

“We oney told the truth! You can’t hang a man for that, can ya?” Maybaum asked.

“Mushky hung one on your nose, though. Maybe that’s why you don’t want to give them a shot,” Farley pointed out.

“I’ll rent that Mushky a room t’die in,” the manager growled. “Don’t forget he used to work for me onct. He usta get his bread an’ butter from little Dixie.”

“And you haven’t had a decent stable of fighters since, have you, Dixie?”

Dixie did not enjoy his conversation with Mr. Farley. He said to Frankel, “Throw this bum out, willya, Mike?”

“He is the press. He is the rent and clothes for the wife, Dixie,” the other reminded him. “Throw ‘im out yourself.”

Dixie sat down and wiped the sweat out of his hat. Frankel said, “Gallagher’s been coming along, Dixie. He and the champ made a great fight last summer. The crowd don’t forget that. It would do a million, handled right. Don’t forget Harry was down twice the last time. That makes a fight, you know.”

“He hasn’t forgotten it,” Farley said.

“Shut up, Brisborn! What was ‘at newspaper guy’s name. Brisbock? Brisby?” Maybaum scowled.

“Brisbane.”

“Oh okay. Shut up, Brisbane.”

“The man is dead,” he was told.

“Gimme me hat. I can’t stand this wise monkey. I’m gettin’ outta here,” Dixie Maybaum said.

“Be reasonable, Dixie. We’re talking business.”

“Not with me, Mike. Not with Gallagher,” the manager declared. “We murdered the guy the last time. He don’t make a dime with my boy. The public don’t want it anyhow. I seen the Commis-sion. They say Harry’s done all he’s been asta do. My Harry’s gonna make another picture.”

Mushky came in the door then. Mushky said, “Your Harry’s gonna make a nice corpse. Johnny’s gonna bust ‘im in the nose when he sees ‘im, understand? Just like I busted you, Dixie.”

“They got cops in this town,” Dixie said and picked up his hat.

“They got cops in this town that wish they had you, Dixie,” Mushky said.

Dixie laughed. “You put yer bum on the ice this summer.” He went out and Mushky looked at the doubled hand he didn’t throw at Dixie’s features.

Mike Frankel shrugged. “Too bad. We could’ve done business. But he beat your boy, Mushky. He beat ‘im good enough.”

They sat around and enjoyed themselves defaming the name of Dixie Maybaum. It was a splendid game that never ran out of fuel for its perpetuation. Mr. Dixie Maybaum was nobody’s love-bug.

Farley said, “That reminds me. Give me fifty bucks, Mushky. I just got a hundred from Mike.”

“What for?” Mushky demanded. “I can buy your rag complete for three cents. What is this?”

“This is a collection,” the sports writer told him. “For Breakwater Maloney. The boys are kicking in.”

“For Breakwater?” Mushky was puzzled.

“He’s getting out of the hatch, Mushky. He gets out tomorrow.”

“He ain’t daffy no more?” Mushky asked.

“They say not. They say Breakwater gets around pretty well now. They got the pains out of his head.”

Mushky thought this was wonderful.

‘Course Breakwater ain’t gonna be very smart anyhow, mister. He took a lotta punches for Fletcher an’ Dixie. They’d let ‘im get ‘is head clubbed fer thirty-five cents. How much did Dixie give ya, Joe?”

“Fifty. I had to black-jack the guy.”

Mushky swore softly. “We can do bet-ter’n that.” He dug in his pocket. “Here’s fer me an’ Johnny an’ Benny. The dough’s comin’ in pretty good these days. Hey, Joe!”
“What? What’s the matter?”

“Never mind. I just thought o’ somethin’, Joe. Breakwater in that same hatch upstate?” Mushky was beginning to form a desperate plan—to get that fight with Fletcher.

The newspaperman said that Breakwater was. “The same place, Mushky. Why?”

“You going up to meet him?” Mushky asked.

“Somebody has to. There ought to be a delegation. He has to get this money I’ve collected. He’ll need it.”

“Look, Joe.” Mushky was talking with his hands and being infinitely earnest. “You’d do a favor for an old pal, Joe. This is off the record, Joe, but it’s a eighteen-karat idea I got. Don’t go t’ meet Breakwater. Let me an’ Benny do it.”

Farley was perplexed. “It’s no fun to go to that place. I always look around and begin to doubt myself. What’s the angle, Mushky?”

“It’s clean, Joe,” Mushky said. “You don’ hafta worry. This collection is your wagon an’ I love ya for it. Breakwater’ll get th’ dough. He’ll get more’n that.”

“I wasn’t thinking of that,” Farley said.

“I know, I know. I’m sorry, Joe, but it’s fer Johnny.” Mushky nodded. “It’s important fer Johnny. You lemme do it my way. Don’t ask questions, Joe, an’ you won’t be sorry. I won’t forget it, Joe.”

Joe said such vigorous persuasion was not required. He said it was all right with him. He said good luck and love to Breakwater.

MUSHKY explained how things were to Benny, but to Johnny he merely said, “We gotta go to Poughkeepsie, Benny an’ me. Justa coupla days on business. We’re gonna take it easy aroun’ there with Nick,” he said, employing his convenient knowledge that Nick Tursini, the wrestling promoter, lived in Poughkeepsie.

“Who’s Benny gonna take apart now?” Johnny asked.

“Maybe Chief Slocum in the Stadium, Johnny. But we gotta see Nick.”

The place was up the Hudson River, not far from the big jail they keep along that stream. They could see it from a mile away, and their car went over the hill. The good State of New York had built it huge and rambling, and pleasing to the eye, with green lawns running down to the river and ball fields and gardens everywhere. It had places for the boys to walk around, if they were free to walk around, and didn’t have to be kept between walls, or tied securely to their beds.

“Punchies don’ make trouble, poor slobs,” said Mushky. “Except a little shadow boxin’ here an’ there. I got lotsa pals what been up here.”

“You sure Breakwater gets out today?” Benny asked.

“That’s what Joe said. Joe oughta know.”

They marched down long corridors, with their hats in their hands. At last they came to a lonesome desk in the middle of marble walls where a lady sat in her white starched dress and hat and cuffs and with white starched hair.

“We come to see Mister Gaston Maloney,” Mushky said. “Friends of his.”

The lady seemed to know about it. “If you’ll sit in the reception-room, please,” she said. “Mr. Maloney is gathering his things. He should be twenty minutes or a half hour. Your names, please?”

Mushky gave her their names. “A Mr. Nicholson is waiting, too,” she said, after which they entered the reception-room and found Mr. Whitey Nicholson, of Dixie Maybaum Enterprises, rotating his hat in his hands. Whitey was not too completely surprised, nor was Mushky surprised at all. Whitey, however, was worried.

Whitey said, unnecessarily, but because he felt obliged to say something, “Breakwater’s gettin’ out today.”

“No foolin’, Whitey? We just come up here t’ get a strait-jacket fer Benny,” Mushky said coolly.

“Don’t be such a smart hooligan, you guys,” Whitey growled suspiciously.

Mushky seemed saddened by this bitter exchange. He said, “We don’ hafta talk like this, Whitey. We usta be pals onct. You could make yerself a nice wad.”

He produced fat money in his hands, legitimate money, all covered with ciphers. He counted it reflectively. There was a wide door that led from the reception-room to a lawn outside. Mushky said, “You an’ me can have a little talk, Whitey.” He indicated the door.

“We can talk right here,” Whitey muttered.
"Be a nice thief, Whitey," Mushky argued. "Don't make trouble. We can smoke outside."

Whitey walked outside with them, with his suspicions no stronger than his fondness for the kind of money that Mushky had in his hands. "You can't do business with me," Whitey said defensively, which indicated clearly that his honor could be purchased for seventy-five cents.

It was a square, grass-covered court that the sun could reach, and the flower smell was heavy here, rising up the steep stones to the barred windows above their heads.

"Like the jail you was in, huh, Whitey? Remember?"

Whitey took the cigarette and crooked his arms to apply the match flame. It was quiet where they were, with no other persons about. Benny utilized the moment to place a strenuous grip on Whitey.

Mushky said, "Break 'is arm, Benny. Don't open yer mouth, ya bum, or I'll cut ya tongue out."

"You can get locked up fer this, wise guy," Whitey protested. "Leggo my arm."

Mushky's hands went deftly over Mr. Nicholson's apparel, producing no item more sinister than the six-inch blade of a giant jack-knife. "What? No firearms?"

"I'm a legitimate guy," Whitey squirmed. "Ya'll go t' jail fer this!"

"Yer a legitimate rat. Wag ya tail, Whitey. Break 'is arm, Benny!" Mushky grinned sourly.

Benny began... slowly. Mushky held Whitey's blade at the flesh of his lard-laden waistline. "Open ya mouth an' I'll slice off a steak. You think I'm foolin', Whitey?"

"Lemme go! For God's sake, Mushky. Tell 'im to leggo my arm!"

"Not so loud, Whitey."

Mushky tested the quality of Whitey's vest with the blade and Whitey grew quiet, but was scared stiff. Benny reduced the pressure on his arm.

Mushky said, "We can break arms nice, can't we, Whitey? Benny can break off a leg, too. Now beat it, Whitey. Get the hell outta here. You bums done enough to Breakwater already. We don' want 'im to see you when 'e comes out."

"Lemme break 'is arm," said Benny.

"Ya can break it later," Mushky said. "Ya can break it if Whitey goes an' makes any phone calls to the city."

ALL of Breakwater Maloney arrived downstairs in a suit that didn't fit him and with his luggage carried at the ends of his mammoth hands. He put his bags down and bowed slightly from the waist, for he was a man of gentle deportment, Breakwater was, as polite as he was big.

"It's nice t' see you gentlemen, Mister Mushka," he said thickly. "It's corn'y nahce t' see ol' friends."

Benny had never met Breakwater, who was several inches higher than himself, but this situation was swiftly mended.

Mushky said, "I thought you might be lookin' fer a job, Breakwater. I thought you might like to come along with me an' Johnny and work aroun' the gym."

Breakwater said, "Thass very nahce. The doctor said ah can' make no comebacks, Mister Mushka. Ah feel very fit but guess tha' doctor knows better'n me. Ah don' have no pain no more, Mister Mushka. They took the pain right outta my haid."

"You won't stop no punches workin' for me, Breakwater," Mushky said.

"I don' wanna stop no mo' punches," the big Negro said. "Ah ain' heard from Mister Maybaum, either. Ah don' wanna hear he's got any fights fo' me. Tha' doctor knows what he says."

"You bet the doctor knows, Breakwater," Mushky said. "You're gonna be all right now."

"Ah gotta fin' work t' do," the invalid mumbled.

"I jest said you was gonna work for me," Mushky told him.

"Yas, Mister Mushka. Thass what you said. I jes' forgot what it was you said."

Breakwater walked on his heels, and-rockily, indeed, but certainly no worse than he had walked before, when in his last fighting years he was going to war for Dixie and absorbing the classic socks of Fletcher.

Benny drove the big car furiously, with the gas pressed to the floor. Mushky sat in the back with Breakwater, trying not to worry about the speed they had attained. He was pleased to hear Breakwater say, "Ah got frien's in Philadelphia,
Mister Mushka. Boy, thass all right with me. Thass a good town, Philadelphia."

"We just gotta make a stop there, Breakwater. We gotta see some guys." Mushky was thinking how to start on him.

After a while Breakwater inquired, "How’s mah fren’, Johnny, Mis’t Mushka? Did’ he go to some collich? Din’ you go to some collich, too, Mis’t Mushka?"

"I didn’t wanna mention that, Breakwater," Mushky said. "You done Johnny a dirty trick when he was in college."

"Ah, never done nothin’ to Johnny. I don’t know what you mean." Breakwater sat up in the car and his head was a threat to the roof.

"They kicked Johnny out, y’ know," Mushky reminded him.

"They kicked ‘im outta collich? I hear somethin’ ‘bout that, though, but ah don’ remember so good, Mistah Mushka. Wha’ they kick ‘im out fo’?" Breakwater looked troubled.

"They said he took dough fer boxin’ with Fletcher."

"Wha’ shouldn’ e get dough? He git plenny dough in the stadium ‘e fight the champ, Mistah Mushka. I was sorry Johnny lose tha’ time." The ex-fighter shook his head sadly.

"I don’t mean that time. I mean an exhibition in Philadelphia. Coupla years ago." Mushky watched him closely.

"Ah don’ remember tha’ so good in Philadelphia. Wha’ time was that?"

Breakwater stared.

Mushky went painfully, and with private excitement, through all the particulars. He told about the affidavit Breakwater had signed, saying that Johnny had received three hundred dollars for three exhibition rounds. He said it wasn’t nice of Breakwater to do that. It wasn’t pally like.

"Ah can sign my name pretty good," said Breakwater. "But ah don’t remember nothin’ lak that. Ah wouldn’t do nothin’ to hurt Johnny. Johnny’s always was very good t’ me. But ah’m always signin’ ev’rythin’. Mistah Mushka. Ah signs a lot more things than ah kin read."

"Did Dixie ask you to sign something, Breakwater? About a year an’ a half, two years ago? You remember a time he asked you to sign somethin’?" Mushky waited tensely.

Recollection was a painful process to Breakwater. He worked at it. He said, "Ah think ‘e did, Mistah Muska. I think ‘e gimme a sawbuck justa sign somep’n. But ah don’ know what it was. Ah didn’ say nothin’ ‘bout Johnny."

"You know who your pals are, dontcha?"

"You’n Johnny an’ Mist Benny’s my pals," said Breakwater. "Ah ain’t heard nothin’ from Mistah Maybaum. Ah don’ care nothin’ ‘bout Mistah Maybaum."

"We don’ care nothin’ about Mistah Maybaum, either," Mushky said—elated now.

They were in the Philadelphia Hotel when it was three o’clock in the afternoon. They were not far from the offices of Nate Shirley, promoter. Mushky said, "I want ya to sit here an’ be comfortable, Breakwater. I want ya to sit here until I get back. I’ll have ‘em send ya big steak from downstairs." He placed twenty dollars in the giant’s hand, "If they’s anything else ya want, tell the guy you got dough."

He went out in the street with Benny and they found a cab. They rode toward Shirley’s office and Benny said, "What makes you think we’re gonna be such a big success?"

Mushky said, "I dunno. Except you’re so big. Maybe we can bounce the guy aroun’. But maybe we’ll get shot, too. Nate’s a tough guy, y’know."

"So was Whitey Nicholson," Benny said.

Shirley’s office was a tidy and presentable pair of rooms up one flight in an office building. It said on the door, Nathan Shirley, Sporting Enterprises, Inc. "There’s a lotta things come under the name of sports," said Mushky. "This is a bad turkey. This is a man with firearms."

Shirley looked up at them, tapping the glass top of his desk with a busy finger. He was an immaculate, sleepy-eyed man with slender fingers and polished nails with a queer habit of continually scratching his nose. He was flanked by two companions who sat in straight chairs and looked hostile. One was Mr. Bugsy Batavia, ten years removed from his pugilistic prime, now inexpensively hired for chasing people from Shirley’s door. The other was Lawyer Nicholas Matthews, who was neither large nor small nor handsome.
nor ugly. He was merely middle-aged and dishonest, as Mushky knew, and not so faithful to the law he practiced that he would not sign a crooked affidavit because he was told to by Dixie and Shirley.

Mushky said, "Hello, Bugsy. Last time I seen you we was pullin' a tooth outta yer lip. You was a slob fer a southpaw."

Bugsy pursed his lips attractively and said, "You ain't no southpaw."

But Mushky ignored him and turned his attentions to Shirley. He occupied the remaining chair and said, "I got bad news for you, Nate."

Mushky saw a book-end within reach of his left hand that would weigh at least a pound and a half, maybe two pounds. It was made of bronze. Mushky was scared when he looked at Bugsy Batavia, remembering things that had been said about Bugsy.

"What kind of bad news? Something I haven't heard already?" Nate Shirley scowled at him.

"You been talkin' to Dixie?" Mushky asked.

"What do you think? Where's Breakwater?"

"Who wants to know?" Mushky turned his attentions to Mr. Nicholas Matthews. He said, "Hello, Shyster. I got bad news for you, too. You ain't even gonna be a notary republican. You ain't even gonna pick up a quarter. You're another bum what signed that crooked affidavit that queered Johnny Gallagher. You made yourself a large mistake, Nicholas. How much did Dixie make on that ball game?"

Mr. Matthews was annoyed by Mushky's words. "This is no place for amateur detectives or amateur athletes," he remarked.

"It ain't?" Mushky glared. "Well, you'll be sellin' yer services fer twenny cents and an extra pack of cigarettes when yer in jail, Nicholas. Breakwater ain't outta his head no more. He makes more sense than you bums. We got it all written down an' the guy can still sign 'is name. Maybe he can't read it, but he dictated what we got on the paper, see? We could even give it to a district attorney what don't like you. How do you like that, Mr. Shyster?"

Shirley spoke to Bugsy. He said, "Throw 'em out!"

Bugsy responded with fine professional warmth, preferring a fist for Benny to the crude objects in his pockets. The pride of a pugilist never grows cold.

Benny moved away from the artless right-hand punch. He put an arm lock on Bugsy and tossed him across the room where Bugsy broke some furniture with his back. Promoter Shirley produced a shining object from his pocket and when Mushky looked again he saw it was a gun.

This frightened Mushky very much. He picked up the book-end. He held it firmly in his right hand and announced, "Firing a gun is a dangerous business, Nathan. You could get hung fer even thinkin' that."

Lawyer Matthews said, "Easy Nate. Take it easy!"

Mushky said, "Gun or no gun I'll beat out yer brains with this hunk o' lead."

His hand was so full of sweat he could scarcely hold the book-end.

Matthews said, "For God's sake put that gun down!"

MUSHKY moved closer, the book-end threatening in his hand. Shirley put the gun down and Bugsy started to climb from the floor. Mushky spoke a pardonable falsehood. "Siddown where you are, Bugsy. Johnny Gallagher's outside, and Johnny would like to work on a bum like you."

Shirley just stood there, a little overcome with the situation. The gun was on the desk, between himself and Mushky.

Mushky quickly picked it up and said, "When yer feet froze, yer brain stopped workin'. Now how d'ya know I wouldn't use this patsy, Nate? Who knows if I'm the worryin' type?" He waved the gun at the three of them, but directed his voice at the lawyer and the promoter. From his pocket he brought forth papers prepared by Benny's scholarly hand. "It says here you was influenced by Dixie to sign them affidavits, pals. It says you never saw Johnny get any three hundred bucks for a exhibition with Fletcher. Now sign where the X is!"

Lawyer Matthews considered the article in Mushky's hand, and not the gentle nature of the man who held it. He said, "You ought to have more sense than that.
A thing like this won't stand in court."

"You'll never stand in court, either, you shyster, unless you put yer name here."
The lawyer complied.

Mushky said to Shirley, "How'd ya like this thing in your face?" He waved the book-end in the hand that didn't hold the gun. Shirley could be persuaded—and obeyed.

Mushky put the signed statements back in his pocket. "Maybe you don't think I can get you guys locked up," he said.

He was advised by Lawyer Matthews that they didn't think he could. "But you don't like it, do you?" Mushky asked them. He could tell they didn't like it by the looks upon their faces. "And Dixie wouldn't like it, either, would he? He wouldn't like it in the papers. That's where this would bite you—in the papers."

"We can straighten this thing out," Nate Shirley said. "You an' me have done business before."

"I could straighten your nose out, Nathan, if I busted it first," Mushky said. "You wanna know what I'll do?"

They didn't say so, but he didn't wait for their assurances of interest.

"I'll tuck this away like a nice little squirrel," Mushky said. "I'm the little squirrel what's got you both by the nose. But I got better friends than you in jail. I don't need you bums in jail to make me happy. I want Fletcher to fight my Johnny. I don't want nothin' else. I want Johnny an' Fletcher in the Stadium this September."

"You tell Dixie about it, boys. You explain how you can't tell lies about a college boy an' then get caught with yer pants down. You tell Dixie that's criminal libel. You tell 'im, shyster, cause you know more about it. You say that when you don't go t' jail about it, it costs you money. You tell 'im you can't get punch-drunks to sign stuff they can' read. You tell 'im how it looks in the papers. You tell 'im how Joe Farley loves Breakwater an' would like to write all this up. Then you tell 'im to see Mike Frankel an' sign on the dotted line. That's when you get these papers, chum. Otherwise they go to Joe Farley."

"Put another hold on that meatball, Benny. I like to see 'im fly through the air."

"WHAT you guys are is wonderful!" Johnny said. "Magicians is what you are. And what we can do is pension Breakwater. Imagine what kind of a world this would be without Breakwater? September second—that's the date? Oh, boy." He moved lightly around the room, tossing short punches at nothing in particular. "I can take Fletcher now, Mushk." He said it aloud, knowing what Mushky would say, wanting to hear the words spoken for him again.

Mushky didn't disappoint. "You'll fight 'im your way this time, Johnny. Ten, fifteen, twenty roun's. You jest wanna keep workin'."

Johnny stopped throwing the punches. "Weren't you scared, Mushky? Weren't you scared with that gun in your hand?"

"Not like I was scared when it was in his hand," Mushky admitted. "Benny's the boy, though."

"You betcha Benny's the boy," Johnny agreed.

"I threw that bum aroun' like a bundle o' shirts," said Benny. He couldn't get over it. He never would.

Johnny said, "I'm ready now. I could take Fletcher now. Did you tell Doris? Does she know it yet? Did you tell her before you told me?"

"How could I tell 'er? Tell 'er yerself. She's doin' the second show now." Mushky grinned.

It was midnight, and Johnny had known it for fifteen minutes, or since his return from the movies down the street, when Mushky and Benny had been there with the news. Mike Frankel had called at eleven, bewildered but happy, imparting the information that Dixie had agreed to sign for Fletcher. Mike, at the moment, did not know why, but Mike didn't care why, not one little bit. Mike only cared for the song of revolving turnstiles—the wonderful golden music they made.

"I'll call Doris," Johnny said. "We'll have a sandwich after her show. Then I'll tell her. I want to tell her myself."

ACROSS the early morning coffee and the eggs, Doris was like a girl he had never seen before. Leaving the exclusive Bombay Club, where clients gave up their salaries to drink the drinks and hear the songs she sang for them, she
wore a cape of white around her gown, soft as the back of a priceless cat, quietly beautiful in form and line, expensive, it seemed, as a bucket of jewels. And the way she filled the cape when she walked, with the girl and the woman faultlessly combined!

Johnny saw her hair, like soft gold sent daily from the mint, and the eyes of the people that trailed them as they walked. There's not another girl in the world that can touch her, he thought.

He said, "It's great to see you now, baby. Way up on top of everything. I wish I had your guts."

"One plate of tripe for the man, mister. Don't talk like that, Johnny. Don't embarrass me."

"But it's wonderful, that's what it is. It's the best thing I know."

"Licking Fletcher is the best thing I know, Johnny," she said. "You've got to do it. You can't miss now."

He nodded, silent and thoughtful. She said, "Johnny?"

"Yeah?"

"Remember you used to tell me about your mother going on the road?" He nodded that he remembered. "I used to love to listen to you then. It seemed so wonderful." She brought the coffee to her lips, but he could see her eyes upon him over the cup. "Do you know Max Tellinger, Johnny?"

"The producer?"

"Uh-huh. I saw him this afternoon," Doris said. "He wants me to go on the road with his show."

"The hit? The big one?"

"For the summer," she said. "In Eva Monroe's part. It's straight dramatics, Johnny. Not even a song—not one little one. He says I can do it. I've been doing monologues, you know."

"You've been doing the best in the world. That's great, Doris. That's big stuff. It's what you want." Privately, he failed to see the beauty of the thing. He was frightened by this threatened loss of Doris. "But you'll be away," he said. "You won't be around. We'll need you, Doris. I'll need you. I can't train all that time and just look at Mushky and Benny."

"I was wondering," she said. "You don't have to wonder."

"Then I won't go. I'll stay right where I am. I'm glad you don't want me to go, Johnny."

"You're really glad? You don't mind?"

"What do you think?"

He looked and thought she didn't mind at all. He thought there was a little color in her face that wasn't there before. She said, "Now take me home," she said. "You should be in bed."

IX

MUSHKY said that three months' training would be too much training. He said it would be better to go to Cleveland and knock over a difficult guy named Erminio Big Boy Daddio and put the money in the bank. Six or seven rounds with Erminio would be better than punching the bag. A good belt in the nose is a proper food for aspirant champions. Training could begin on July Fifteenth.

Erminio lasted five rounds, because of valiance and the thickness of his skull, and there was a splendid workout in this struggle with Erminio, wise insurance against the coming test with Fletcher. Benny wrestled a fat maharajah in Detroit, consuming further time, and then, in Columbus, Ohio, an Abyssinian chief-tain from Harlem or thereabouts, dressed in a beard and an elaborate towel, but vulnerable when grasped by the feet and stomped on the toes. He wore no shoes. Therefore, it was July when they got back in town, and New York, in this July, provided a night you would not choose to fight or wrestle with man or beast or maharajah.

"How about the night off, Mushky?" Johnny asked.


So Johnny went out. The trouble with Doris was her job, which always consumed the hours when you wanted her most. Then when you had her, it was two in the morning, and there was only time for the coffee and the eggs again . . . which would have to be changed.

He called Doris at her apartment, but she wasn't there. "She has a rehearsal,"
he was told. “She expected you tomorrow, Mr. Gallagher. I’ll have her call you. Sure I will.”

“I’ll call her,” Johnny said. “I don’t know where I’ll be.”

She’ll have a show at eight and one at twelve, Johnny thought. I’ll go to the movies.

“Johnny!”

He turned and found himself shaking hands with Marty Harris, the former Brandon quarterback.

Marty smiled and took Johnny for something to eat at the Columbia Club.

“Why the Columbia Club?” Johnny asked. “You’re a Brandon guy.”

“In my business you join everything but the Black Legion,” Marty said. “I took an extension at Columbia. A business course. And you’ll be surprised with what we have at the Columbia Club, Johnny. This is a reunion. I’m glad I found you. Look what else we’ve got. Over there. Take a look.”

The first thing Johnny saw was George Cummings, his elbows extended like wings, his hands busy with his food. The next thing he saw was Linda Drury, in a hat as wide as a wagon wheel.

They started shouting together, and George lost his knife and the leg of a fowl in his efforts to get to his feet. Linda sat happily under the hat, and in the flowered summer dress she wore so well, looking like a girl on a candy box, only better, because she was real. Johnny watched her, hypnotized all over again.

Johnny knew that George was not exulting for the benefit of the noise he could produce, but appeared pretty happy about something.

“George is up at Columbia now,” Linda told him. “He’s giving summer lectures.” Johnny saw her pride.

George could not be with them long, but had to see a publisher who was waiting at home for him. “He writes checks the way you write autographs, Johnny,” George explained. “Show Linda around and enjoy yourselves, won’t you? She doesn’t have to drive home right away.”

Johnny said he would be glad to, and after a while some people adopted Marty.

The pleasant hours ran along, and Johnny said, “I’ve got to call Doris.”

“The man just brought my drink, Johnny. What are you drinking—mineral water?”

“That’s what it is,” he said, and saw their glasses had been refilled and were standing on the bar.

Linda proposed a toast.

“To Doris,” said Linda pleasantly, and they drank to Doris. She leaned, with her back to the bar and her elbows upon it. This was a large evening for Linda; he could see it when he looked at her; her smile was repetitious as the surf, renewing itself each time she thought how much pleasure she was absorbing. And her poise remained unbroken, her confidence complete. He wondered, what is this barrier between us that I can’t break as other girls are broken, and take this tantalizing woman in my arms, then break her down like less expensive flesh. They talked a long while as he thought of that, and she was flirting now, he knew she was, she drove him crazy, mad as a wildcat, stuffed in a paper bag.

He knew that Linda wasn’t drunk, not even a little bit. Time passed quickly at the game they played. It was past the time for phoning Doris, suddenly, and Johnny was glad somehow he wouldn’t have to phone, and tell her where he was, what he was doing. . .

“You’ll drive me home, Johnny?” Linda suddenly asked—she knew he’d not refuse. “There’s a hundred trains back to the city tomorrow.”

They drove under the tunnel and out into Jersey, through the summer night. The soft and fragile, strong and clever Linda put her hands upon his arm. He turned a little bit and found her face and put his lips there, let them burn against her lips, and knew this was wrong, but wasn’t sorry. He was vainly proud that he could always do this to Linda, could make the mad excitement bubble and boil, when nobody else could do it, not George, he knew, not brilliant, faithful, patient George.

When they got to her house her mother came downstairs in robe and slippers and said she was glad that Linda had brought him home.

In the morning he went to church with the family and sat and stood in the pew assigned them. It was broadly indulgent
of the sporting Drurys to bring their fa-
vorite pug to church and let the parish
have a look. Johnny thought of this, but
disliked his thought, and decided maybe
he did them wrong.

But afterward, when Linda drove him
to the station, the showdown came.
“You don’t love me, do you, Linda?”
Johnny asked.
“When you’re around me, Johnny—then
I am.” She looked at him coolly.
“I know that,” he said. “But I’m really
not the kind you want. I can see that
now. You’d never be happy married to
a prizefighter—even the best one in the
world. Over the long stretch George
comes closest to being what you do want
—right?”
“That’s right,” she said.
Of course it’s right, Johnny told him-
self. And now he knew what a big mis-
take he had almost made. He had almost
lost Doris. Doris was really the one who
cared for him all the way. He was anx-
iuous to get back to town and phone her.
He couldn’t wait to do it.
The car stopped at the station.
“So long, Linda,” Johnny said. “I hope
you and George will be happy.”
She stood up. She could see this was
the end too. She smiled.
“So long, Johnny. Good luck with
Fletcher. Hit him once for me. Good-
bye, Johnny.”

He called Doris’ apartment, but re-
ceived no response, not even from
the woman who kept the place clean. In
the sticky afternoon it was no fun to walk
around New York. He was tired and a
bath and sleep would serve him well. But
where was Doris? He returned to his
own place where Mushky was waiting.
“Did you hear from Doris?” Johnny
asked.
Mushky sat in the pants of his pa-
jamas. “Where you been?” he asked,
and appeared pretty disturbed.
“I’ve been around—over to Newark.
Where’s Doris?” Johnny repeated.
“She ain’t here,” said Mushky. “But
she was here last night at eleven o’clock.
She was here this mornin’. You was in
Newark, huh? With Miss Cinderella.”
“You’ve got your characters mixed,
Mushky. Doris is Cinderella now,”
Johnny said. “Take that look off your
face.”
“My face is all right an’ so’s Doris,”
Mushky snapped. “She don’t care who
is Cinderella, mister. Doris is gone—
phett! Like that. You can’t shove Doris
aroun’, Johnny. Ya can’t run off with
’at debitanty any time she blows ya up
a great big kiss.”
“Cut it out, Mushky,” Johnny’s heart
sank. “How did you know I was out
with Linda? How did Doris know?”
“Don’t be a sardine, Johnny,” Mushky
told him. “You was in every joint in
town. You an’ Linda ain’t the Secret
Service. Everybody saw you.”
“There was nothing wrong,” Johnny
said.
“That’s what I told Doris,” Mushky
said, “but she said onc she wanted you
should take ’er on a picnic to Connec-
ticut.”
“She what?” Johnny groaned.
“A picnic t’ see a kid cousin she’s got,
remember?”
“I remember — now,” Johnny said
faintly.
“But you hadda run to Newark that
time she said,” Mushky went on. “An’
you hadda run t’ Newark las’ night, she
said. She wasn’t cryin’ them tears to
wash out ’er stockin’s, Johnny. The tears
is all over the top o’ my pajamas,”
Mushky told him. “She’s gone—phett!
Like that. Like I said.”
Johnny remembered that once she had
wanted a picnic and he had gone to
Newark at Linda’s invitation. That time
she had said, as Doris would say, “Give
my best to Linda,” and nothing else, not
one complaint. This time the scars he’d
dug in Doris would be deep.
“I’m sorry, Mushky. I’m awfully
sorry, no fooling. I didn’t mean it should
be like this.” If he had only phoned
her, put a nickel in the slot when he had
the chance, and not stood standing and
admiring the beauty of Linda. “Where
did she go, Mushky? Home? Rehearsal?
To the movies? Where?”
Mushky put his hands on his knees and
said, “I mean gone! To California.”
“California! Cut it out, Mushky. Be
serious!”
“Everybody goes to California, Johnny,”
Mushky said. “Fletcher an’ Dixie used
to commute there. Now it's Doris."

"You don't run out of somebody's hotel room and go bingo to California, just like that!"

"Doris does. And it wasn't bingo jest like that." Mushky shook his head. "She coulda gone a week ago. She told the guy she wouldn't go. Last night she heard about you bein' in town. She come to see me. Then she told the guy she would go."

"What guy?" Johnny demanded.

"The movin' pitcher guy, Thurman. Harold Thurman." Mushky frowned. "He's a very big guy. She gave up one job for you a month ago, Johnny. The time she coulda gone on th' road."

"But she wouldn't do that to me, Mushky! Not Doris." Doris, he had learned to believe, was always there, like a comfortable sweater you hang in a closet. Doris would always be there, growing nicer for him through the times he was away, and loving him, never changing at all, except for the better, and waiting for him to collect the bubbling affection she had stored away for him.

But now she was really gone.

"She ain't a punchin' bag," Mushky said. "She's gonna make a pitcher. She says you can have Linda."

"I'll get her back," Johnny said. "I want her—not Linda. I'll grab a cab and stop her before she goes."

"You'd better grab wings, Johnny," Mushky said. "You'd better hire an angel. Her plane went outa Newark a half hour ago. Maybe she'll drop a small bomb on Linda, huh, Johnny? Don't look so sick, Johnny."

Johnny was stunned now—really shot.

"Get yer clothes off'n hop in bed," Mushky said. "Get some sleep. We leave fer camp, tomorra, Johnny. Dream a lil' dream o' Harry Fletcher."

"Who's this Harold Thurman?" Johnny asked.

"You know better'n I do," Mushky answered. "You'll see 'is pitcher in the paper. He's a high-class guy. He's crazy fer Doris. As a matter o' fact, who ain't?"

Johnny couldn't do much about love's lost dream on a brilliant summer's afternoon, with Soldier Dale's long left arm in his face, and the fight mob sitting in judgment outside the ropes. He couldn't get the range on the lumbering Soldier, and his nose was sore with the leather horns the big man slapped against it.

Between the training rounds Mushky removed his mouthpiece. "Lemme see you tip this turkey over," Mushky said. "The Soldier's makin' ya look like a bum."

"So what? So who cares?" Johnny scowled.

"It looks bad in the papers."

"Don't read the papers," Johnny said. "Who cares who reads the papers?"

"Lotta people read the papers, Johnny. Doris reads the papers."

"I read the papers, too," he reflected dolefully and turned around when the bell asked for his services and walked into a sharper left hand, than the Soldier had ever wielded before.

Johnny had read the papers, the day before, when someone had shown him a section of rotogravure. That was his latest view of Doris, in the Sunday papers, four weeks from the day she had taken the plane. It was a lovely picture of Doris, sitting at a table, with the nice-looking guy named Harold Thurman. There was a caption that told you what they were doing, and why it was that Doris wore such a splendidly conspicuous smile: "Reel Life Pose of Picture Prexy's New Discovery," it said.

"He's a good-lookin' guy," Benny said. "He's only thirty-two."

Mushky added, "He makes two hund' red sixty gees a year. I read it in a movie magazine. Thass five gees a week. An' 'e gets it every week. The guy don't miss. Next year 'e gets more."

"Whatta you trying to do, Mushky," Johnny moaned, "annoy me?"

But it wasn't wise to think of other things when a man is throwing punches at your head. Mr. Soldier Dale had never been so successful with his left hand before, and thus encouraged, he tossed a right. It smashed against the headgear Johnny wore; it rattled the thoughts that had been boiling there. Johnny became irritated. The Soldier saw the change in Johnny's pace; he backed away. A torrid hook went to the Soldier's ribs, bringing
panic to his feet. Johnny moved in and crossed a right hand to the head, a left hand to the body, and a smashing blow to the jaw. The Soldier went down and did not get up.

Mushky called time and climbed into the ring. "You don’t hafta kill the guy," he said.

Johnny considered his work and was ashamed of himself. He assisted in scraping the stricken gladiator from the floor and in restoring him to a proper state of consciousness. He said, "Send another guy in, Mushk. I’ll watch myself."

“You had enough,” Mushky told him. "Go work two rounds on the mat and get in the showers."

Johnny came out of the showers and climbed into Benny’s car. He drove the necessary mile to the telegraph station down the road where newspaper men were filing their stories to the various desks that received them. He talked to them because he had to, then found a corner where he could write a wire to Doris. He hunched his shoulders and made a sheltering circle of his arms. He hoped that none would be sufficiently bold to glance at the message he was writing. He wrote:

DORIS: ALL THE FROSTING IS OFF THE CAKE. I CAN’T LICK FREDDY BARTHOLOMEW UNLESS YOU COME TO SEE ME DO IT. I’M LICKED BABY AND I’M THE GUY WHO KNOWS IT. SEE YOU WHEN? LOVE . . . JOHNNY.

He watched the woman send the wire. He watched her read the words, then look at him, new interest in her face. He had to take his eyes away. He waited until there was nobody looking, and the newspaper boys were matching quarters on the other side of the room. He paid for the wire and gave the woman large money for herself. “Just so you won’t discuss things with the boys,” he said, then left the place and drove back in the car.

JOHNNY thought . . . my trouble is I have no right to send a wire like that. Once I was tough and brave enough to go alone. Now I’m asking her to come back—like a small, discouraged boy.

“You keep wearin’ a face like that the dog catcher’s gonna get ya, Johnny,” Mushky said. “You’re fightin’ in two weeks. You read what Dixie said in Farley’s column?”

“What’d he say?” Johnny stared.

“He said you ain’t forgotten the lickin’ Harry give you before,” Mushky told him. "He said you look lousy in trainin’ cause yer too scared to lift yer arms. Maybe you have got th’ lump up, Johnny. Maybe you ain’t forgot what Harry done th’ last time.”

“I remember. Sure I remember,” Johnny said. “You’d remember, too, if you were hit by a truck. But that’s not the trouble. I’m not afraid of Harry.”

“Then what’s the funeral?”

“Cut it out, Mushky.” Johnny walked away. He couldn’t tell anybody about Doris now.

Doris sent a wire back. She didn’t neglect him. It said—with the “stops” out:

DEAR JOHNNY: IT WOULD BE NICE TO HOLD YOUR HAND WHILE YOU WERE IN THERE WITH FLETCHER BUT I CAN’T AFFORD TO GET HIT. STARTING A PICTURE FOR THURMAN ON AUGUST THIRTY-FIRST. BIG CHANCE I CAN’T AFFORD TO MISS. BEST OF LUCK AND MAKE THE MOST OF IT. THIS ONE IS ON YOU JOHNNY BOY. DORIS.

He put the telegram in his pocket and thought . . . it’s exactly what I deserve. The funny part of it was that Doris and he had started the climb to fame together. And she had reached the top long before he, and against tougher competition.

“Why, the girl is absolutely crazy about you,” Mushky said. “She always was.”

“She’s bigger than I am now, Mushky,” Johnny said slowly. “She doesn’t need me—not one little bit. Suppose I lose?”

“You ain’t gonna lose.”

“Suppose I do, though? What if I do? I’m washed up then. I can’t make Doris’ kind of dough,” Johnny sighed.

“So go out an’ lick the bum,” Mushky said. “Stop talkin’ about it.”

“She has a right to expect a winner. She doesn’t deserve a loser now,” Johnny was grim.

“Listen,” Mushky said, “be yerself.”
They weighed in at the State Commission's building in downtown New York. The place where they weigh is downstairs under the street, not nearly big enough to hold the mob that wants to see what it can see—the newspaper lads and photographers, the other pugs to fight preliminary fights, their managers and their friends, and all the officials... and so much noise. Johnny caught the excitement. It had come to him now—the_showing mob and the yelling outside in the street. It certainly mattered to them. He said, "I can lick this bum. I can take 'im apart."

"In little bits," said Mushky.

"Like meat for a stew," said Benny.

"Like any way I want," Fletcher's jacket was of pastel blue, the rest of him the modest shades of a candy stick. "Hello, Fletcher! You look beautiful today. You only forgot your earrings, Fletcher."

He got a laugh. He saw Fletcher striving for adequate speech, and Dixie trying, too. Dixie said something loud that wasn't funny. Fletcher said, unable to think of anything else, "I'll talk when the fight's over. I know how to do it. I done it before."

They waited until the champion stepped on the scales, clothed only with the fighting trunks assigned him. A commissioner fiddled with the scale, and finally it said two hundred and twelve. The champ looked fit, the hard meat lean and tanned against his classic frame, but loose, and ready for fighting—a whole night of fighting, when the bell would send him under way.

Johnny succeeded the champion to the scales. He was bigger now than he had ever been before, with late maturity spreading the width of his back, and bulging the punching muscles under his arms. Two hundred and three pounds, the scale announced, twenty pounds more than he had carried to war in the Golden Gloves.


Lou Pollodino was along, pressed back into the services required. Mushky led the way out through the crowd and into the street where the cab was waiting. Kids and grown men were hanging over the cab, putting their hands through the open window when Johnny had settled inside. The cab went slowly away, requiring assistance from the cops who walked their horses amid the crowded curious.

In the hotel room, Johnny could only sit in a chair or lie on the bed, hoping for the hours to go away. It is never easy to sit and wait, and he wondered how Fletcher liked it, watching the clock, and thinking of the unexpected things that can happen in a ring—those cuts around an eye that cause a referee to stop a fight, the punches that will stop your brain and brake the efforts of your limbs.

Mushky walked in and sat down. He looked out a window and into the street. He said, "Dixie's bettin' a hunnert grand. A hunnert is seventy-five. He's a plunger."

Johnny reflected, "A hundred grand? Who's he got it with?"

"With us," said Mushky, aware of his dramatic simplicity. "It's news, ain't it? Kelly's holdin' the dough, like the last time. Same arrangements with Frankel, too—only it's more dough."

"It's a lot," Johnny said, restraining the emotional reaction that Mushky had sought to produce. But the responsibility sat down with him on the side of the bed. The thought was with him that Fletcher wasn't worried, or that kind of money would not come out of Dixie's hands.

"Dixie don't like the way you trained," said Mushky. "He's believin' all that noise he was makin'. He talked 'imself into believin' you are a fine lobster. Fletcher ain't worried, either."

"No?" Johnny asked.

"No. You know that dough you put in my name, Johnny?"

"Yeah," Johnny nodded.

"My cut o' that first little date with Harry?"

"That's your money, Mushky"—their quarrel over this was familiar.

"I never thought so, Johnny," Mushky said. "But Fletcher don't care. He covered that dough. He put up four to three."

Johnny stood up and walked around. He said, "You'll all get a run for the dough."

"Why n't ya lie down? Whyn't ya take it easy?"

"All right, Mushky, cut it out. Cut it out. Cut out th' high-school stuff," Johnny
said. “How can I take it easy? Lemme see you take it easy. You know what it means to me.”

Of course, they knew, and he knew that they knew. Mushky was dragging him out of the training-camp grind. Mushky was putting all the marbles down, and letting him see how many there were—showing him now that it all was up to him.

“So you was lousy in trainin’,” Mushky said. “Lousy? You got no idea. But you ain’t trainin’ now, Johnny. You can forget how bad you was when the bell rings. You do yer improvin’ on Fletcher, C’mon, Benny. Leave ‘im alone.”

X

IT was the same room where the Yankees sit in season, the same park and the people much the same. Lou Pollodino was there, and Mushky, too, plus Benny, and that sour-faced man from Dixie’s camp, quiet and unhappy in the corner where he sat. No Doris, though. Just the memory of Doris and the hope so badly spent that he would come.

“She could’ve come, Mushky, if she wanted,” Johnny said. “She didn’t have to leave me like this.”

“Stop beelin’,” Mushky said. “She coulda given up the job she worked for, couldn’t she? She coulda done a lot o’ things. Ya don’t know how to lose, that’s all. A kid like Doris, she knows how. She learned how early. Now it’s your turn, Johnny. You gotta grow up.”

“Cut it out, Mushky,” Johnny growled. “Stop trying to make me feel like a heel.”

“You’re gettin’ tough, eh?” Mushky grinned. “Gimme the other hand. How’s the left one feel?”

Johnny raised his bandaged left hand and flexed the fingers, pressed them against the meat of his thigh. “It feels fine.”

He sat there. The sweat was on him. He was ready to go. Why didn’t they call him?

“They’ll call ya soon enough,” Mushky said. “Fletcher ain’t gonna run away.”

Mushky took his teeth out with the approach of important business and gave them to Benny.

“Okay now, we’re goin’ out,” the guy called through the door. . . . And there were the cops again, waiting outside of the dugout, the way they’d been the last time, and waiting to make a circle. Mushky didn’t put an arm around him as he had before. Mushky shoved a hand in the middle of his back and said, “Get out there!”

The cops closed around them. The night was like the night a year ago. The lights atop the ring were so bright you couldn’t see the stars that hung above them. The smoke clouds floating through the outdoor night, the noises growing just the same in the fabulous throat of the crowd . . . the biggest noise he’d ever heard, maybe bigger than the last one.

He was walking steadily, with large, deliberate strides. “Tell ’em to move faster,” he said, and Mushky told the cops. The circle advanced. The ring kept coming closer. “He’s in there now,” Mushky said, meaning Fletcher.

“He’ll wish he wasn’t,” Johnny thought, then went up the steps by himself. Mushky and Lou were locked in the crowd, and Johnny liked it up there by himself. He hoped they never came.

He only wore one robe, the white one. He’d given the blue robe back to Mushky. “Wear it yourself,” he’d told him.

Now he took the robe off without assistance. He laid it across the top rope and pulled up his tights. He did a stationary jog in his corner and threw his bandaged hands a time or two. He saw Mushky and Lou still snarled in the knotted ringside traffic. He was amused by their efforts to get up the steps.

He looked across at Fletcher, resplendent in his corner. He saw that Fletcher was watching him—Fletcher and Dixie, too.

T THE bell was ringing for the crowd to shut its hectic mouth. Mushky tied the gloves on Johnny’s hands, while the former champions came through the ropes. The routine was pretty much the same. They came and shook his hand, then went away, while lights died in the three tiers of the stands. “Introducing . . . I” that hadn’t changed a bit, although the fans displayed more love for Fletcher than they had a year ago.

Now all the lights were out except the dazzling cluster overhead. The crowd was
He threw a left hook, ripped the blow with all his power. . . . The pain shot through his hand again.
noisy, flecked with the brilliant glows of their matches and cigarettes.

Artie Monaghan was still the boss. He called them to center and told them what they could and could not do within the rules.

Johnny, with his back bare to the lights, and Fletcher, with his white robe still upon him, went to their corners, and tugged at the ropes.

Mushky said, “It’s up to you, kid,” and then the bell rang and there was Fletcher, walking out, folding the leather gloves that covered his hands.

Johnny eased out with his hands at his sides and leisurely drew his head away from the champion’s tentative lead. *We’ve got all night,* he thought. . . . *Let’s see who falls down, Harry—you or me.*

Maybe it was better to be alone tonight, without any Doris in the house. Nobody helping, not a soul, but himself—the strength and skill in his own hands and nothing else. This one was one on him. Doris could read about this one, and see how he tried, all by myself, without any help, for Mushky’s dough and what she’d think of him when he was done. *I won’t be around to see you if I lose,* Johnny thought. *I wouldn’t dare,* . . .

Fletcher stung him with that left-handed lance. He got his hands in front of him and matched the champion’s jab with one of his own. He eased in a bit and tried it again, right where it looked best, on the end of Fletcher’s nose. Better than he’d done in training camp, and this is where the punches really count.

They put their eyes across the space between them. These men were big and their fight had not begun. Fletcher was surprisingly fast. He ripped a left hook home that bounced on Johnny’s jaw. Johnny hadn’t remembered Fletcher being so fast. He kicked up the pace, smashing three lefts to Fletcher’s face. The face grew red. He dropped a short hook swiftly to the jaw. They moved around, and Johnny was boxing now. Not like the last time, charging, as a brainless goat would charge. This was the fancy stuff he used to do when he was a youngster—when he was twenty pounds lighter and terrific in the Golden Gloves.

The first round went away like that. They hadn’t really tried to swap the dam-
hear the crowd’s noise arising all about. He could hear their yells.
“Go get ‘im, Johnny!” they were screaming.

He turned abruptly and walked to his corner.

“How is it?” Mushky wanted to know.
“How is what?”
“The hand.”
“How’d you know?” This clever Mushky. He looked at Mushky. The man seemed haunted now and dying with the fears he held. “The hand’s all right,” he said. “A little twitch, that’s all.”
“I saw your face,” said Mushky. “I saw you wince.”
“So what? So I winced. It’s okay.”
Mushky gave him the sponge again. This time he took it, because it was wise to take it. His hand was all right, he decided. A little trouble, but nothing much.
“You’re doin’ good, Johnny.”
“I can do better.”
“Then do it, ya bum. Get out there now. Nobody’s gonna do it for ya.” There was the bell, and here was Fletcher.

NOW Harry was stabbing away and trying to look like Tunney. He’s cautious, Johnny thought; he’s worried from before. He knows I don’t get tired tonight; he knows I travel now on different legs.

Johnny moved with Fletcher and fenced with long left hands. He slipped into a crouch and feinted with his head. He slipped inside and bombed away. He felt his arms go sinking into flesh, the arms of Fletcher striving hard to hold. He shoved with both hands to keep his man in the clear, then followed, throwing punches, hard and fast, wasting what he had to waste, but landing finally to the head—the hard left hook he wanted there. Fletcher wobbled and Johnny smashed again. Fletcher grasped with arms to hold. Johnny ripped the body punches home. Fletcher retreated along the ropes, wise and not yet ruffled, but worried with the punishment he took.

Johnny thought . . . now I’m carrying the basket for everybody, for Doris and Mushky and Benny, too. There’s nobody helping me at all, but I’ll take the guy apart!

Then Fletcher fought back, retrieving the tide of the fight, colliding his full attack against opposing force. His punches were rifle shots. Johnny took them and absorbed them, scorned them and then came back for more, and gave some more to Fletcher—drove him slowly to the ropes, and pinned him, and fought him there, a vicious, unremitting duel . . . not ending till the bell.

“Fine! I feel fine, I tell ya,” Johnny said. “I don’t need that stuff. You can take it away.”

“Keep yer left hand tight,” Mushky was gritting. “Don’t throw it with the fingers loose. Yer gonna get in trouble, if ya do.”

“The hell with the hand,” Johnny said. “It hasn’t buckled yet. It’s not gonna buckle—not tonight.”

He went into the fourth round, and Fletcher was ready for fighting, hastened in his readiness by the three rounds he had already lost.

Johnny wanted him to come to him. And then he would beat his brains out—he wouldn’t miss. He shattered Fletcher’s efforts with a violent body attack. They struggled and the champ punched up inside, the leather lanced, the blood came free from Johnny’s brow. They broke and jockeyed around, and Johnny put several hooks to Harry’s ribs, then wrestled him and overpowered him, cracked him sharply with a right.

The blood came down and made a film across the left half of his sight. He put a glove up there to take the blood away. But he could still see with his other eye, and Mushky would mend the trouble in the corner. That’s where you really needed Mushky—you couldn’t really go it by yourself, no matter how you tried.

Fletcher threw his punches at the wound, and Johnny knew this, sought to let the blows slide past his ears—by judging the distance and moving his head. But this didn’t work for the pretty punch that Fletcher riddled now. This punch was big and exploded. It made a mask of Johnny’s face.

Fletcher was desperate, flailing at the wound. He made good capital from Johnny’s lack of sight, all perfectly legitimate and not to be squawked about, all part of their own grim profession, all to be expected. Johnny knew where Fletcher was,
because Fletcher was where the trouble came from. But Johnny’s strength was still there. His arms were full of heavy blows. He started punching fast, unmindful of the consequence. He felt his left hand striking solid meat, felt Fletcher back away. He pawed where the blood was spreading on his face.

He saw Fletcher, clean and moving, dancing and striking in the light. He edged in closer and took the punch in the mouth. He drilled his right hand straight to Fletcher’s head—the kind of punch that put all lesser men to sleep. The champ fell back and tumbled to the ropes, then brought himself around and measured with his fists. Johnny threw the right again to Fletcher’s cheek. This time the champ went down.

He was down on the floor where Johnny could see him, so long as his leather hands kept clearing his sight. He clawed the mess away and Fletcher was getting up, and what the crowd was doing, Johnny didn’t know. They fought it out on the far side of the ring, away from Mushky’s eyes. The referee came between them at the bell, and then the stool was under his tights, and Mushky’s hands were working at his wound.

The work was swift and Mushky did it well. Artie Monaghan came over, looking at the eye. Satisfied, he went away, and stood in his neutral corner, writing on a slip of paper who it was that won the round.

“How does it look, Mushky?” Johnny asked. “Is it very bad?”

“It’s okay now. For a little while it’s okay, Johnny,” Mushky said. “Don’t get it sliced again. Keep watchin’ what he does in there. He’ll cut yer heart out with them laces.”

Johnny returned to the fight and thought, I’ve got him now; he’s ready to be taken. I’ll take him fast; I won’t let him get away!

FLETCHER had a bicycle to ride and he rode it wisely, remembering the knockdown of the previous round, and knowing, too, that if a man will bleed enough, the referee will stop the fight.

Johnny chased him and caught him. But in the clinch that followed, Fletcher hammered at the damaged eye again, and slit the flesh enough to make the claret flow. That left hand reaching, lancing, stabbing. It got to Johnny; it rarely missed; it picked the tape from off his brows.

He told himself not to be a dope—not to give the guy a chance to pick the eyes out of his head. He hustled after the champ and let the punches rain. He threw them too fast for Fletcher to persist in lancing that eye. His blowing fists and unrelenting action demanded that Fletcher fight. So the champ fought back with his strength renewed and with a savage force that Johnny did not expect. He felt the right hand hit his jaw. He felt his own eyes glassy for a moment, his own legs buckling now beneath the shock that came to his brain.

But the fog was scarcely with him, before it passed away. He slashed a right to Fletcher’s head, a left deep to the body. Briefly, and because he had to, he fenced with Fletcher and beat him to the punch, and showed him how a left jab should be used. Then they put their heads together and rocked the night with the thunder they exchanged. Now Johnny had him, going back a little at a time. He threw a left hook, ripped the blow with all his power. It landed high and the pain shot through his hand again, but this time was a flame that scorched at first, then left the fingers numb.

He gasped and moved again toward Harry. He tried to grab his man and beat away with the one hand that was good and ready for use. He had his face stuffed full of leather gloves and Fletcher was out there, dancing in the clear, wise in his eyes and pleased with what he saw, and ready now to sharpen up his blade.

But Johnny was not a fool. He clubbed his right in the distinguished Firpo manner, he bulled his way inside. But one hand is not enough. The two-fisted sledges came to Johnny’s head and tried to beat him down. Blackness came with the punches he absorbed, and he had to fight his way back to the light. He tightened the fingers of his left until they hurt, then chanced it in a screaming belt to the side of Fletcher’s jaw. Something gave and the pain consumed him where he stood. But Fletcher was rock-
ing under the lights. His eyes were turning milky, the rubber was in his knees... though not for long. The champ was still dealing punches at the bell.

Through the sixth and seventh rounds, Johnny stalked his man, faking with the left he held before him, throwing cannon shots with the folded knuckles of his right. The blood was running again from Johnny. Fletcher, tired of being hunted now, brought back the heavy siege and placed it well—against the bone of Johnny’s jaw and in his body where it hurt.

_He can’t beat me down, thought Johnny. I’m staying up. He’s spending all he’s got in vain, for nothing._

In the eighth round it was just like that, and in the ninth as well. But the right-hand shots were slowing Fletcher down. They wrestled hard along the ropes in the heavy fatigue that held them both. Johnny bullied and fought like a pit dog in the clinches, clubbing with his right.

When they broke, he looked at Fletcher, and the champ was measuring with a right. It came and Johnny ducked his soggy head and took the crushing wallop on his skull. He knew his head was harder than a hand. He looked up with a red grin and read the answer right off Fletcher’s troubled face.

_You’ve got one hand now, Harry, just like me. We’ll see who falls down first._

He knew that he had not been wrong when only left hooks came his way. The right was just an ornament that Fletcher hung across his chest. This Fletcher, though; he was quite a guy. There was no terror in his face. He hated Johnny like Johnny hated him.

But a left hand was better than a right hand, unless you were a southpaw. The left is the hand that can lance and wound and cut and bleed, while the right is just a club, with the power always in it to destroy, but not so deft or swift in execution.

**JOHNNY** put his head down and covered it with his useless left glove and walked into Fletcher... looking for the range. He found it once and ripped home. Fletcher swayed beneath the punch. A rapid fire of hooks came back, but Johnny shed them from his arm and smashed his right to the side of Fletcher’s head. He stood with his left side undefended. He knew that Fletcher couldn’t throw a right. He saw the champ’s mouth wide and gasping, and with his other arm too weary now to make the trip, or else his heart not great enough to call it back to work.

Another right hit Fletcher in the face; a third right put him down. He sat on the canvas and turned his troubled eyes to Johnny. His eyes held more life than his body... and Fletcher was getting up. Now Johnny could see that there was no geezer in this champion.

Fletcher went down again and Johnny heard the ref count to “seven” and he didn’t hate Fletcher when the big man came erect, all spent in the flesh but not in the spirit, and seeking to toss one final punch of desperation. His left hook lumbered heavily and Johnny walked away from it. Fletcher was winding up another punch when Johnny let him have it.

The champion wavered on his feet and the curtains rolled over his eyes. He fell on his face and the smash of his falling was loud upon the canvas. The water sprayed from the spot where he fell and he wasn’t a champion any more. You could tell that Fletcher would not get up, just from the way he’d fallen.

That’s the way it was, with Johnny standing there, not knowing what to do in the seconds they counted Fletcher out. Johnny was saying to himself, “Champion of the world,” just to hear its sound.

He stood there with his chest going up and down, and saw all the things about him—the people at the ringside looking up, familiar faces there. . . Breakwater Maloney, with his black hands over his head, and the crowd, with its big mouth, calling at him loudly in the night because he was the champion of the world. Mushky was climbing through the ropes to claim him, and Benny was scrambling, too, and Lou Pollodino, and all the boys together.

The things you think when you’re out there under the lights, the mad excite-
ment bursting all around you . . . the strangest things.

_They're standing up on their seats, Johnny thought, just to see me._ . . .

Mushky, Benny, Lou Pollodino and a lot of guys had hold of him. He was tired now, very tired, and his left hand hurt terrifically. Dixie, was desperate and stricken, standing by the ropes. Mushky said something about "a hun-nert gran'." And it was nice to think of all the money they would have now.

Johnny wondered if Doris had listened on the radio, where she was in California.

They put his robe around him now, and the announcer told the crowd about him, who the winner was, and the time of Fletcher's defeat, in minutes and seconds. The radio guys put a microphone in front of his face. He said, "I'm very glad I won. I hope you liked the fight."

"That was a nice thing to say," said Mushky.

"Get me outta here, will you, Mushk?"

"You're a great kid. You're the champ-phen."

They went down the steps of the ring and into the circle of cops. The cops were glad they had the winner. The gloves were no longer on Johnny's hands, but covetously acquired and kept by Benny who would treasure them like the teeth in his head. Johnny scratched his nose with the edge of his bandages. His left hand ached, but not too much. He'd go to sleep and they all could yell as long as they wanted to.

He stood in the showers now. He was never coming out. This steam and warmth was good against his flesh. It made a curtain against the things outside—the shouting and overbearing mob that pursued him. He let the cold water drive its needles against him then, until it brought him awake and alive again.

Mushky reached in and turned the water off, then rubbed him nearly dry, avoiding the rope burns on his back. He put a soft robe over Johnny's body, tied the belt around his waist. He led him like a horse to the table where he stretched him out.

Then a door closed and Mushky's hands were not busy any more. "Gimme a cigarette, Mushky?" He wanted a cigarette very badly. He'd punched and earned his way to that small concession. They'd certainly give him one cigarette; they always had. "Hey, Mushky!"

"Okay," Mushky said, "but only one."

**DORIS** wore a suit of the faintest tan, high-waisted, with a ruffled blouse of white above the waist—a little jacket, gracious to her form, and ruffled cuffs protruding from the sleeves. Three-quarters of a hat were stuffed with the soft folds of her hair, and her white teeth bright with laughter. Her moistened eyes were on him.

"Look at your face," she said. "A big boob like you."

"Doris!"

She put her soft hands in his wet and tangled hair. She put a kiss on each of his troubled eyes.

"That's what I wanted," Johnny said. "You belonged here all the time."

"Of course, I did."

"I knew you wouldn't let things stay like that. But I could fight alone, all by myself. You saw I could." Johnny kept his arms around her.

"I know," she said. "I saw you fight. I died more times than Fletcher did. I was afraid you were being killed." She lit the cigarette herself, then placed it in his mouth.

"I couldn't get along without you," Johnny said. "I know that now. Your picture, Doris. You said they started work the thirty-first of August. You said that in your wire." "They thought so, too," she told him. He couldn't see her face. Her head was on his shoulder. "That's the day I took the plane here, Johnny. You've got to know that now—win, lose or draw I took the plane."

"Look at me, Doris."

"I'm looking," she said. "I hope it gets better. I ate a sandwich once that looked like you."

"I love you, Doris."

"I love you, Johnny."

He had been world's champion for many minutes. But now, at last, he felt the way a champ is supposed to feel.
"TELL you, I ain't holdin' you back. Ain't my fault you're big and dumb and ain't no fighter. Anyway, 'Slug' Hodapp would murder you, and then where would I be?"

"Nerts!" I says, startin' to walk away. "That's a alibi. You don't wanna give me a chanct, that's all. It's just like I've always said and remarked—they's always somebody tryin' to hold somebody back from bein' somebody."

"Hot Shot" Hafey, my manager, the guy that owns and runs Hafey's Physical Culture Institute, was searin' round the edges. We was havin' our annual daily run-in.

"What are you yammerin' about now?" snaps Hafey. "What do you mean about somebody holdin' somebody back?"

Hot Shot walked right into my punch. "Well, take my case for an instant," I says, "and twirl it aroun' in your opinion for a few twirls. Here I am, Punchin'
Paul Putnik, a real fighter. I've always been a fighter. I was born with a bone between my teeth, and when the kids acrost the railroad tracks tried to pick that bone with me, they got knocked loose from their rompers. I was bad. I slapped my brothers' ears back on their shoulder blades and they wore 'em for wings, and when my ol' man put up a squawk, I busted the nursin' bottle over his potato."

Hot Shot had quit listenin'. "What's that got to do with me holdin' you back?" he asts and inquiries. "I know you're bad. You're the baddest chump I've ever had in this gym."

I don't know whether or not Hafey means it or is kiddin' me, but I shoot the piece just the same.

"Well, here's the answer," I says. "You're holdin' me back 'cause you won't let me tangle with Slug Hodapp. Here I've been a punchin' bag for your stable for months and what chanct do I get to show what I can do? Not none."

"You've had some battles," says Hafey. "Battles!" I snorts. "I loop a few frankfurters with round heels and you call 'em battles. What I want is fights with fighters. I'm sick of punchin' these lily-white, marshmello-fisted eggs you've fed me. What I want—"

"What you want and what you get," says Hot Shot, "is eight different things. Now scram. Can't you see I'm busy?"

Can you tie that? Here I am so tough I'm afraid of myself, and this ape chitterin' back at me like a monkey. I stared at Hafey like he was a freak. He looked like he had all his buttons, still I knew they was somethin' screwy about him. I walked over in front of the desk which Hot Shot was sittin' at and bulged out my chest.

"Lissen, Hafey," I says, "don't tell me to scram. I ain't smacked my quota of wise guys today and my mitts is itchin', so if you wanta be crowned and put in the king row, start somethin'."

Hot Shot got up. He had a dirty grin on his pan. He ankled toward me cat-like.

"There's the exit, Stupe," he sneers, pointin' to the door. "Outside now and no more cryin' about Slug Hodapp, or I'll hang one on your puss."

I laffed. Honest, I laffed. Here was a chanct to show Hafey somethin'. "Please lay one on my puss," I begged. "I'll donate one free punch!"

"I'll take it," says Hot Shot, and he hooked for my whiskers.

I ducked and let him have it—a twistin' uppercut—and before he come to, I'd smoked three of his flora del finers.

NOW, offhand, you'd think, Hafey would be done and through with a hard guy like me account of that rude punch in the pan, but he wasn't. Pickin' himself up from the bear rug on which he had crashed, he tottered over to his swivel chair and set down. He looked at me for an hour and ten minutes about, then he said:

"A nice punch, Putnik," he says, "and no hard feelin's. I done a lotta fast thinkin' while I took the snooze, and I've decided to give you a chanct."

I felt all quivery, like I'd took three or four doses of vodkey or somethin' in rapid succession.

"You mean," I says, "you're goin' to give me a crack at Hodapp? That you're—"

"No," cuts in Hafey. "Not Hodapp. He'd splatter that lame brain of youn all over the rafters in less'n a heat. I've already picked a opponent for Hodapp. It's 'Tuffy' Martin, my ace. That go'll break up in a fight."

"But I thought you was gonna give me a chanct?" I says.

"I am, but not with Slug. Lissen to me, Putnik. I'm a keen and clever manager. Any sportswriter in the country will tell you that. I know how to get the glue for my boys, and I'll get some for you pervedin' you let me do the managin' while you do the cuffin' . Do you understand what I'm sayin', or are you as dumb as you look?"

"What you yammerin' about now?" I cracks.

Hot Shot favored me with a scowl. "Here's what I'm yammerin' about," he says. "I've got three or four trial palookas I wanta feed you, and then, if you get by 'em, we'll go gunnin' for the heavy geedes. See what I mean?"

I saw, but I hate to admit anythin' to Hafey. "But I don't want pushovers," I says. "I'm ready for any of 'em, from
the Bomber down. Get me a real fight with a real fighter and I’ll slap him wrong side out. They’s small profits in crownin’ clowns. Now, Slug Hodapp is different. He’s near the champen and—"

"Forget Hodapp," yaps Hot Shot. "Forget him. Slug’s outta your class. He can make a monkey outta most of the heavies in the business. Tune in on this: What would you say to a go with Hurricane Smith?"

I stared at Hafey in amazement; then I snorted. A big snort.

"Hurricane Smith!" I says. "You must be nerts. What do you think I’m called Punchin’ Paul Putnik for?"

"I ain’t got the slightest idee," replies and says Hafey, "but even that ain’t the point. As far as I care, they can call you Punk Paul or Puny Paul or whatever, and still you ain’t answered my question. Will you agree to go with Hurricane?"

Hafey is that way. Corner him in a argument and he gets dirty. And he’s the stubbornest guy yet. He still thinks Nova gave Louis a boxin’ lesson the last time. But I seen they was no use squawkin’ no more for a chance at Slug Hodapp, so’s I says oke, I’d fight Smith, and then I suggests changing the subjeck.

"Very well, says Rafey. "Le’s do that little thing. We’ll talk about your trainin’ for Hurricane. What’re you goin’ to dc to get yourself ready for the murder?"

"Nothin’," I says. "I’m in shape now. I could crawl outta a convalescin’ ward in any hospital, spot him nine heats and whip him in a ten-round go."

That remark only stopped Hafey for a second.

"You mean, then," he says, "that you ain’t gonna do no road work, no bag punchin’, no sparrin’, no—"

"No nothin’," I says. "It would be wasted efforts. I’m jest gonna stall aroun’ and wait till it’s time to waltz in and smack him; then I’m gonna waltz in and smack him."

Hot Shot got up from his swivel chair and started to walk out on me.

"And you expect to be a champeen?" he says.

"I do," I says.

"You have high hopes," he says.

"High hopes and a powerful poke," I says.

Hafey felt of his jaw and walked through the doorway. As he went out, he says: "Don’t forget your last will and testaments when you go in there to fight Hurricane. You should leave that ol’ sweatshirt to somebody."

I didn’t ans’er. I didn’t have a chance. Hafey was clatterin’ down the stairs on his way to the gym before I’d thought up a snappy comeback.

SOON after Hot Shot had told me once more and for all times that he wouldn’t even introduce me from the same ring with Slug Hodapp, I flipped over to Anny Bell Thatcher’s igloo to cry down her neck for a spell.

Anny Bell is the skirt I call my lil’ honeychile. She knewed me when. She’s the neese of ol’ Theobold Thatcher, proprietor of the Square Deal Plumbing and Heating Company, which outfit I used to kill time for before I took up the conk-cuffin’ business as a perfession. Anny Bell has got everything a girl needs, includin’ this, that and if. Someday, I hope to sign a contract to fight her for life.

I squawked on Hafey to Anny Bell; told her he refused and wouldn’t let me battle Hodapp, and she said: "Well, that’s the ans’er then, ain’t it? He’s your manager, ain’t he?"

"Sort of," I admits. "He is and he ain’t, but if he is, he’s a fine hunk of cheese as a manager. What I want is fights which’ll get me a rep. If I just wanna fight, I can stroll around and push over taxidrivers and flat-footed cops."

Anny Bell, however, strung along with Hafey. "He knows his way around," she said, "else he wouldn’t have picked you for a comer, Paul."

That remark blew me up to a hundred and eighty, and I felt fine and didn’t care who Hafey picked for me as a opponent.

To celebrate my comeback to normal, I ast Anny Bell how about takin’ in a mumblin’ snapshot and throwin’ the houn’s at Dreamland for a little relax, and she said, "Oke by me," and everything would have been fine and fuzzy if Hot Shot hadn’t saw us comin’ outta the crawl college. He acted like he hadn’t saw us, but I knowed he saw us. The next mornin’ in the gym he give me my ride.
“Who was that shrill I seen you anklin’ outta Dreamland with last night?” he snaps. “Ain’t I told you to stay away from the dolls and dance halls when you’re in trainin’? Ain’t I?”

My ears started to bristle. What right has that monkey to call my honeychile a shrill and what’s it his business if I pound the puppies a little bit for relax?

I ast him was it his business, and he says, “Ans’er what I asts you,” and I says, “what do you wanta know?” and he says, “who was that shrill and why was you dog trottin’ around in the Dreamland when you’re supposed to be in trainin’?”

Hot Shot was offside, but I remained and stayed clam (I hate to get a rep for poppin’ managers).

“That shrill,” I says, “was not a shrill but a lady, and if I want to dog trot, as you calls it, I’ll dog trot, ’cause it’s good for my footwork and anybody knows I need footwork to chase them oomlofs you put in the ring with me.”

“Maybe she ain’t got no handle,” says Hafey, ignorin’ what I said. “Maybe she’s Missus X.”

“Maybe she is,” I replies and says, “only she ain’t. If you’ll rest easier on your straw pallid, I might haul off and tell you her name is Anny Bell Thatcher and she’s the neese of ol’ Theobold Thatcher, the master plumber who was payin’ me eight bucks a day when you coaxed me into the fightin’ business.”

“Have you knowed this Anny Bell long?” asts Hot Shot.

“Since whenever,” I says.

“That’s too long,” says Hafey. “Quit knowin’ her until you’re firmly convinced you ain’t no fighter, then you can sleep on her door mat for all I care.”

Hot Shot was readin’ the riots act to me, but I acted like I didn’t comprey.

“What are you yammerin’ about now?” I says.

“Just this,” he says. “Stay away from everybody’s neese until after you’ve been cuffed cock-eyed and that won’t be long, ’cause I’ve got three fights lined up for you, and you’ll probably never get your feet outta the resin box in any of ’em.”

That was hot news to me, but I didn’t act too much as if I cared.

“Oh, yeah?” I says, just like Victor Mac (whatever his name is that said he knocked knuckles with Jack Johnson). “Yeah? And who are these sets up you want punched insensible?”

Hafey favored me with a sly grin. “Well, first,” he says, “is Hurricane Smith, and, if you get by him, I’ll feed you Battlin’ Andrews the Scotch Assassin, and then—” Hot Shot was grinnin’ dirtier than ever—“if you’re still able to be up and around, I’ll let Red Regan smear you all over the ring. What do you think of that for a line-up?”

I was silence for a long while. I couldn’t believe Hafey was serious. Finally, I says, “Cheez, Hafey, you’ve got a bad case of jitters. You’d better go home and sleep it off.”

“You think I’m nerts, then,” says Hot Shot.

“Think? I know. You’re crazier than a insane man. Them ain’t fighters you’re talkin’ about. Them’s knockwuhst. The bugs will holler frog and fake and frame-up before I lay leather on ’em. They’ll tack your hide to the ringpost. They’ll—”

But, as usual, Hot Shot had quit listenin’.

“We’ll see, Putnik,” he says. “We’ll see whose the wise guy and whose the big dumb. Now quit arguin’. Will you fight ’em and do as I tell you?”

“I’ll appear again ’em,” I says. “There’ll be no fight. What else is troublin’ you?”

“That Thatcher wren,” said Hafey. “Will you stay away from her and her nest?”

“Oke,” I says. “For the time bein’, I and Anny Bell Thatcher is total strangers which ain’t never knowed each others. I’ll dangle over to her place tonight and tell her we’re total strangers.”

“You’ll do no such thing,” yells Hot Shot. “You’ll phone her or I will. The lollygaggin’ is out. I’ll phone her.”


Hafey looked and regarded me a long time. He saw I was havin’ quite a cackle.

“On second thought,” he says, “I’ll let you see her once in a while. It may keep you outta jams.”

These sportwritin’ guys won’t give me no tumble. They call me “Punchin’ Paul Putnik, a journeyman plumber, a big
oaf who aspires to heavyweight honors," forgettin' or overlookin' to say how rugged and willin' I am and how I can take 'em and hand 'em back.

When I laid Hurricane Smith with one punch, they wrote: "A lucky punch from Putnik. Hot Shot Hafey's clown, put Smith in the clear." And that was all. Later, when I battened Andrews, the Scotch Assassin, into insensible, they said: "Andrews stuck his melon in the slot where Putnik was swingin' and his seconds carried him out."

Fone notices! Yeah! I'm a Chinese shot-putter, too.

I squawked to them writin' guys, but I squawked loudest to Hafey.

"What did I tell you? What did I tell you about fightin' sets-ups? How do you expect me to get a rep for myself bangin' over summer sausages which can't hardly crawl into the ring. How do you—?"

"Go lay an egg," cracks Hafey. "What do you expect? And, besides, you're gettin' a rep. They'll be callin' you Kayo Putnik soon."

"Soon, my eye," I says. "Never mind about soon. Lissen what they're callin' me now. They're callin' me Hafey's clown, a dumb journeyman plumber, a lucky joint wiper, a oaf. Say, what the so-and-so is a oaf?"

Hafey looked at me, looked away, regarded me again and started laffin.

"I ain't no clareyvants," he says. "I'm just a fight manager, but offhand I'd say if there's such a thing as a oaf, you're it."

Talk about mad! I was so mad I could hardly help from smackin' myself down.

Hafey seen I was sizzlin' and smokin'.

He tried to clam me.

"Forget it," he says. "Forget it and quit readin' the pink sheets. Them sports writers don't know a left hook from a for'd pass no how, and, besides, what they say ain't gonna make no champ outta you. It's what you do. Your job is to get by Red Regan. Decision him and see what them newspaper boys say."

The sports sheets told what I did to Red Regan, so there's no use me tellin' it again, but I'll give you my vision of it anyhow. I was as cool as a Norwegian well-digger in February while Hot Shot was tyin' the mitts on me, and, when the referee was introducin' us to the bugs, I

give Regan a terrible scowl. Poor Red! The bell rung and I scrambled after him. He danced light on his toes, side-stepped and aimed one for my tomato. I ducked under his wing and connected with his button. It was a real sock—a Putnik punch—and I noticed his eyes startin' to glaze. He fell into a clinch and we waltzed a few seconds, then I shook him off and measured him. It was murder. A light left to the beak followed by a crash to the jaw and Red was down. There was plenty of countin' and they lugged him out.

A HALF hour later in the dressin' room, I say to Hafey:

"Well, wise guy, what do you think of your champeen now?"

Hot Shot didn't ans'er, so I rephed the queries. Then he says:

"Who're you talkin' about?"

"Me, of course," I says.

"But you said 'champeen'," sneers Hot Shot.

"I know it," I says, "I speak American."

Hafey put on that dirty sneer again. "Champeen," he says. "If you're a champeen, I'm the guy that flippin' acrost the Atlantic backwards and upside down. You ain't no champeen. You're the luckiest stiff in the world, bar none. If Regan had connected with that first wallop, you'd have—"

"But he didn't connect," I says, "and that's where the science of fightin' comes in. Regan was lucky I let him off the stool."

Hafey turned to a gang of my admirers in the dressin' room. "Hear that ape chatter," he says. "He decisions one of General Grant's rear guards and he calls hisself a champeen. What's the ans'er?"

I moves over and grabs Hafey by the arm. "Here's the ans'er," I snaps. "If you're goin' to continue and keep on bein' my manager you've got to get me some fights while I'm hot. I'm liable to bust my hands on some of those no-good wee-nies and then where would I be? Think fast, big boy. Who's next? Turn me loose with Hodapp and feed Tuffy Martin the sets-up."

There was a long silent. Hafey acted like he was thinkin', and the gang waited for him to spill it. Finally he said:
"All my life, ol’ John Hard Luck has hounded my footsteps and I can’t lose him. My career has been one ‘cumulation of greefs and now another string of boloney has been added to my burdens. If I fight this guy with a real battler, I’m up for manslaughter, and, if I don’t, I’ll—"

I was sick in tired of hearin’ Hot Shot hammer me. He was gettin’ me down, plenty. I cracked:

"Don’t rack that nickel’s worth of stew meat in your conk any more, Hafey," I says. "You’ve had your thought for to-day, and besides I’m leavin’. I’m beatin’ a path to the hut of my lil’ honeychile and I may buy a mousetrap. There’s whoopee to be made to celebrate my third win, and I’ll be the biggest dog in the pound. Will you shag with me?"

"Not any," says Hot Shot. "I’m losin’ my taste for dogs."

The pink sheets that night carried the story about the coming fight between Slug Hodapp and Tuffy Martin, Hafey’s big shot, and when I barged into ol’ man Thatcher’s trap, the big tangle was the main topics of the yammerin’. The sentiment, I found, was about fifty-fifty—half thinkin’ Slug would lay Tuffy like nobody’s business and the remainder thinkin’ just as hard that Martin would slap Hodapp down whenever. I sided with the boys and gals who was pullin’ for my stablemate, and I told ‘em why.

"This guy, Tuffy Martin," I says, "is a real fightin’ machine. He’s got the give and the take, and, when he gives, he gives ‘til it hurts the other guy’s distant and far-off relations. He’s a wonder," I says. "He’s more’n half as good as I am, and I’m sure and positive I can make a all-time resin-sniffer outta Hodapp in any round you wanna name."

My mentionin’ the idea of callin’ the round led to one thing and another and, first thing you know, Thatcher suggested we make a pool, a dime a chance, drawin’ the numbers from one to twenty. Thatcher flung his dime in the hat and drewed Martin in the third round; Anny Bell got Hodapp in the first heat; Doc Dash, Hafey’s trainer, who had been buzzin’ around my doll all evening, got Martin in the fifth; I snared Hodapp in the sixth and so on. I wanted to swap chances with the Doc, the lucky stiff, but he cackled me off. Martin in the fifth. Dash sure got a break, I said, ‘cause Tuffy sure bows ’em down when he gets under way. He sure does.

Well, anyway, then we went into our dance, forgettin’ fighters and fights for the time bein’, devotin’ our efforts to puttin’ the boots to ol’ John Pessimistic. About two in the A.M., I poured Doc and a coupola other guys affected with athletics’ feet, into a taxi and honked ‘em home, and then I turned in and knotted up the raveled sleeve of care until noon.

Late in the afternoon that same day, I trekked over to the gym to give Tuffy the eye while he was workin’ out. Hot Shot was the first guy I smacked fenders with, and he was as crazy as a loon.

"Where the so-and-so have you been?" he stormed. "I’ve been waitin’ for you all day. Why don’t you ans’er your phone? Why didn’t you show up this mornin’? Why don’t you—"

"Why don’t you close your yap and quit yowlin’?" I says. "Can’t you see you’re blowin’ all the pitchers off the wall? Now clam down and tell me what’s the what."

"Big dumb!" yells Hafey. "Big stupid dumb! And you asts me what’s the what! Don’t you know what’s happened? Can’t you read the papers? Don’t you know—"

"Sure, I know," I says. "I know that Moosalini has got Italy by the ears; I know that Hitler—"

"Stop," squawks Hafey. "Stop before you drive me nerts. Don’t you know that Tuffy Martin was decisioned in an automobile accident last night and that he’s at the Providence Hospital?"

"You mean he’s hurt serious?" I says. "He may get well," says Hafey, and even I could see he felt bad, "but he won’t be fightin’ anybody but the nurses and sawbones for a long time, if ever."

"What a break!" I says, and honest, I felt just like somebody had stole my dog.

"What break is right," says Hafey, "and he’s billed to battle Hodapp come Friday. What’ll I do?"

I was still thinkin’ about poor ol’ Tuffy Martin, laying in that hospital. Tuffy is a real guy. He learned me how to upercut and twist my fist at the same time.

Hafey started to walk away and I got
bright. The idea smacked me. Why not me fight Martin? Me substitoot.

I told Hafey.

"I was waitin' for you to offer," he says. "You've yammered me into it. All day I've tried to find a Elmer who'd face Hodapp, and none of 'em want any part of him. You're it if you'll take the job."

Would I take it? Here was the chance I'd been moanin' and takin' on for, and Hot Shot tells me would I take it. And how!

"Put a peace in the papers," I says, "and tell my pro bo publico and admires that I'll knock Slug Hodapp naked. Tell 'em I've pointed to give him the mother and daddy of all beating's. Tell 'em—"

"I'll tell 'em," cut in Hafey. "I'll tell 'em plenty. I only hope they'll believe half of it." Then he walked away.

Hot Shot's a back-biter, though. Not five minutes later, I heard him tell Doc Dash: "If that guy Putnik could fight like he can talk, he'd whip Louis, Conn, Nova and Franklin all at the same time."

EVERY man, they say, has a tale to tell, and so have I a tale to tell, and I'll ship it to you now without no more details nor no varnish.

When Hodapp clumb through the ropes on Friday night, lookin' as big as the Chrysler Buildin' with twenty more stories added on, I wished I'd payed more attention to my trainin' and less to my yammerin' during the passed few days.

I didn't look at Slug when we was called into the center of the ring. I didn't want to get the light in my eyes, and besides, I was ignorin' him. When he stuck out his mitts to shake, I slipped it to Hafey, who pays plenty of bills with hand shakes.

The bell rung and Slug tore at me just like I tore at him. We met in the center of the ring like a couple of infatuated bulls and started to gore each others. His first sock knocked me loose from my plan for fightin' him, and we stood toe-to-toe, blastin' away. I closed his right eye with a hook which missed his whiskers by a hair, and he looped me with a smash to the side of the head.

I was up before the count started, almost, and we clinched. What a sucker I was in a clinch! His arm's felt like
hawsers around me and everything was black, but I scuffed loose and begin back peddlin'. He followed, but I was too fast for him. I was goin' away like easy money when the bell sent us to our corners.

"Stay away from him for three heats," hissed Hafey, as he worked on me between rounds. "Stick with him for that long, then dive."

I glared at Hafey. "Dive?" I says. "Why should I dive? I'll give him a shellackin' that he'll remember."

"Cheez'l" That's all Hot Shot said.

I led Slug the merry chase durin' the round, pepperin' him at long range, always keepin' outta his reach. Just before the bell rung, I stopped, side-stepped, and put over my haymaker. Hodapp took it and fell back again the ropes with me on him like syrup on a waffle. I was bangin' away without no returns when the gong sounded, and the referee pried me off.

In the third, I've got to admit and confess, Slug got back at me. My footwork wasn't up to par, and he chased me into a corner and dropped me. I took an eight, and he dropped me again. I got up somehow, and from then on, durin' the rest of the heat, all I remembered was gettin' up and fallin' down. Hafey brung me to. He said the bell saved me. He give me no credit. Didn't say nothin' about my fightin' heart and I was bereave when I lashed out for the fourth.

Slug was tired. He'd done too much chasin' and bangin', and he was ready and willin' to dog it for a couple stanzas. I wouldn't dog it. I threwed ol' John Caution outta the ring and started to get hunky. Rights and lefts to the face and head. I pumped 'em in as hard and as fast as I could, and Slug's face looked like a barrel of ketchup. He wouldn't go down. The crowd was yellin' for me to finish 'er up, and I tried, but somehow Hodapp weathered the blizzard of fists I flung at him. When the bell sounded, I was going like a windmill in a hundred mile blow.

In the fifth round, I reputed the operation, opening the cuts over Slug's eyes, cuttin' his lip, bustin' his beak, givin' him everything I had. Hafey was jumpin' up and down like a monkey on a stick, and the packed house was roarin' like animals in the zoo at chow time. Slug wormed his way outta the corner where I had him trapped, and swung. I ducked and walked into his left. I felt my conk cavin' in, but I fought back and we clinched. Hodapp was snortin' blood down my back as the round finished.

During the minute's rest, I thought of poor ol' Tuffy Martin in the hospital (the lucky stiff!); of Doc Dash, who I poured into a taxi; and of Anny Bell, lil' honeychile; and then—and then I remembered the pool! My ticket—Hoddap in the sixth! I'd forgot about the pool and my number. Could you beat that?

The bell rung. Hodapp charged at me. I dropped my mitts, shut my eyes and waited, and the next thing I knew I was in the dressin' room and Hot Shot was bendin' over me jabberin' like a idiot.

"What happened, Paul? What happened?" chattered Hafey. "Here's this guy goin' like a million, and in the sixth he gives one free punch and it's curtains. You coulda licked him," he moaned. "What got into you?"

I opened my eyes, and I remembered I tried to grin.

"Don't be a big dumbbell all your life, Hot Shot," I says. "Don't you remember I told you I had Hodapp in the sixth?"

Hafey's eyes popped out. His jaw sagged down to his belt buckle. Honest, he'd gone nerts.

"Hold me! Hold me!" he yelled. "I wanna ast this orangotang one question."

Doc Dash and a couple other fellas took him by the arms and steadied him while he put his silly queries.

"Putnik," he says chokin', "do you mean to lay there and tell me you dived for two bucks—for the money in that pool?"


"I'll be a so-and-so," Hafey groaned. "Why not?" I said. "A dollar ninety is a dollar ninety."

"But how about whippin' Hodapp?" Hafey yelled as they led him away.

"Oh, I can lick Slug anytime," I tells him.
Tony Canzoneri
WON MORE CHAMPIONSHIPS THAN ANY OTHER FIGHTER
FEATHERWEIGHT...LIGHTWEIGHT TWICE...JUNIOR
WELTERWEIGHT TWICE...ALTHOUGH A KNOCKOUT
HITTER—HIS HANDS ARE
SO SMALL THAT HE USES
ONLY A LADIES SIZE
GLOVE!!

Jimmy Wilde
WAS THE LIGHTEST
WORLD'S CHAMPION
EVER...HE WEIGHED
JUST 100 POUNDS!!

Bat Nelson
AT THE
AGE OF 55
HAD THE SAME
WEIGHT AND
MEASUREMENTS AS WHEN HE
WAS WORLD'S CHAMP IN 1908!

Jack Johnson
RAN A HALF MILE
IN TWO MINUTES AND ONE
SECOND AT THE AGE OF
40...WHEN HE WAS OUT
OF TRAINING...
DIVE BOMBER

By Tom O’Neill

It was fist skill against gun magic in the toughest town in the oil-fields . . . where the law reads “Kill or be killed!”

MICK LONEY, prizefighter, and Buck Hyde, his manager, turned from the hotel window with the expression in their eyes of a groggy boxer who is trying to find his corner. They blinked at Miller, the oil man, who had brought them to Marsville.

“Did you,” their shocked eyes asked, “see the same thing we did?”

“Anything,” his shrug replied, “might happen here.”

They had just gazed upon a murder, done in coolness of aim, in the heat of a June afternoon, on the wooden sidewalk.

The murderer pocketed his smoking gun, sauntered to his car, drove leisurely away. The murderee was put on a board and carted to the morgue, leaving a thin trail of blood to mark his progress.

And that was Loney and Hyde’s introduction to Marsville, a Texas oil town—a town where anything might happen.

“That may make it easier to understand,” said Miller. “My proposition will sound odd enough anyway.”

“I thought our deal was straight when we signed the papers in St. Louis,” countered Buck. “Mick fights Young Carnehan in the arena here a week from tonight. We’re satisfied with the price you pay. Mick here is the greatest light heavyweight fighter in the country. Ev’body oughta be satisfied with that arrangement. Why, this Carnehan ain’t even been heard of in the East. If it hadn’t been for the price you paid, we wouldn’t be here.”

“Carnehan is an oil man first, and boxer afterward,” Miller smiled shrewdly. “I hope you don’t think I paid the price I paid you to see your light heavy pet put on an invitation fight when things such as we have just seen are an everyday occurrence.”

“Look here,” burst out Mick hotly. “I ain’t no imitation—”

Buck’s hand went out, palm down. “Easy, kid.”

Buck’s hand stayed Mick’s outburst. He turned to Miller. “No proposition you c’n make’ll surprise me. I been thinkin’ in the half hour since we got off the train. Anythin’ can happen in a town like this. It’s a brand new oil town, one of the biggest bangs in the whole boom.”

Miller nodded with a show of civic pride. Buck went on:

“It’s fulla roughs an’ hard guys. Not that I blame ’em. They wink at death every minute on the wells. A oil rush is every man for himself an’ the devil gets the hindmost. Every minute they work they’re racin’ somebody to get their drill first into the sand. An’ near every well that comes in, blood has greased the cables.”

Miller nodded.

“You turn my stomach,” remarked Mick. “Come to the point.”

“Right. The point is this. These guys ain’t wearin’ out the seats of their pants in office chairs. They don’t havta pay to see fights. They get ’em. You was brought here for more’n one reason.”

“Say, I come here under contract to meet young Carnehan—”

“You’ll meet him,” interrupted Miller. “Hyde’s partly right. This is a boom town. A hard town. A man has to fight. Lots of oil companies here. Bitter hates between ’em. Between our company and another, it’s come to the point of murder. One of our wells was set on fire, on another the cable was cut when we were on the verge of bringing it in. Entailed a fishing job that wasted time and money and may yet ruin the well. Our men have been beat up and bought off. Last night one was beaten so bad he died.”
“An’ what’ve your men done to the other gang?” asked Buck, hiding a slur under an interested eagerness.

“You’re in my employ, so that doesn’t matter,” said Miller, dryly. “At any rate, it’s come to the point of killing. I was attacked last night... Escaped by a stroke of luck. The other company is owned by a man named Carnehan. Carnehan is behind everything that happened.”

“Oh,” put in Mick brightly. “And you want me for a bodyguard.”

“No,” Miller said as steadily as death itself. “I want you to kill Carnehan.”

MICK leaped to his feet, throwing the chair from him. “Say, what kind of a dirty fighter do I look like, anyways? What d’you think I want t’do to my reputation?”

“You’ll have to worry about that. You’ve signed up to meet this man. He’s a boxer as well as an oil man. Well, anything might happen in a prize fight. Ring murders aren’t unknown. Every man has his price. I’ll pay yours. You handle things in the ring. I’ll handle the outside. You won’t have to stand
trial. I'll attend to that personally."

"When's the next train for the East?" asked Buck.

"Never mind. You've signed a contract stating that Mick Loney will fight Young Carnehan here a week from tonight. You'll fulfill it. If Carnehan leaves the ring alive, you men won't see the East again. I'll pay if you succeed, punish if you fail. I always get what I want. I want Carnehan killed."

He caught up the dust coat and strode out, shutting the door quietly behind him.

Mick loosened his collar to get more air and reeled into his chair again. "Say, listen, he can't put that over. I won't fight. He can't—"

"A man was bumped off across the street a while ago an' nobody lifted a finger. What d'you mean you won't fight? With that contract tyin' you up, you'll havta see it through. I believe every word Miller said. Anythin' can happen in a town like this."

"But I ain't a killer," said Mick desperately. "Say, what you my manager for? Can't you break that contract?"

"Breaking that contract'd be like puncturin' a diver's suit. You might rise to your old level, but it'd be a long, hard fight. I know you think you'd got a good reason. But try explainin' this in St. Louis. Would they believe you? Would you believe about that killin' if you hadn't seen it?"

Mick regarded him thoughtfully. Buck was right—absolutely right. Miller had them trapped. They were too good businessmen to risk breaking the contract. They had to fight it out here.

"There'll be no murder," he warned. "I'm a clean fighter."

"Gee, don't I know it? But we're in a tight place. Breakin' the contract or killin' in the ring, either one'll ruin your rep. And kill or get killed is what you're offered. We'll have to squeeze out between the two."

Miller arranged for training quarters in the hotel. From the floaters in town, Buck got some sparring partners. The next few days Mick brushed up as he always did just before a fight. The training quarters became a meeting-place for all crews off duty. Once a day, Miller came in with his dustcoat over his arm and watched the workout. Each day Mick informed him there would be no killing.

Miller replied, "Kill or be killed. I get what I want."

He left, smiling in satisfaction. It was a terrible smile, springing from some dark well inside him. The atmosphere of the training quarters reflected Mick's clean, hard hitting and Buck's smart breciness. Into that clean air Miller came like a noisome reptile.

The strain was having its effect on Mick. The watchers thought he was a good boxer. He was by far the favorite over Carnehan in the betting. He kept his sparring partners stepping. Buck only, knowing the timing of his blows, the placing of them, knowing exactly what the result should be—Buck alone realized what was happening to Mick. For Mick was pulling his punches. Already he was afraid of hitting too hard, afraid of a ring murder. If he pulled his punches on Carnehan as he did on his sparring partners, Carnehan would knock him out in the second round. Yet he dared not be knocked out. It was kill or be killed. And, aside from that, to be knocked out by an unknown would ruin the reputation that Buck had nurtured like a hothouse flower.

Thus things went until one day when Miller, suddenly affable, said, "Ever see a rig working at night? No? I'll send over a car and you can drive out to ours tonight. Since the two accidents Carnehan caused, everything depends on one well now, you know. The location is fenced. It isn't everyone that's allowed in."

Something clicked in Mick's brain when he heard the suggestion. Innocent enough, it struck him as highly important, something that would later prove to have been a turning point in his life.

"Like to see it, Mick?" asked his manager.

He hesitated. Premonition held his heart in an icy grasp, and pinched his throat till he could not talk. He stood stock still. He wondered whether reptiles crawled through the muck of oil under the earth. If such things did, they must be very like Miller, he thought. He realized the two were watching him—
Miller, smiling; Buck, worried. They were awaiting his answer. It was the part of common sense to go, both to keep Miller in good humor and because he really could see nothing to fear. He had no reason for refusing, except the chilling premonition.

"I'll go," he said, and felt instantly he should not have said it. Common sense said nothing was wrong with the expedition; said nothing would happen. But the sword of ring murder swung by a thin, thin thread.

INTO the soft, thick desert night the car hummed. The lights and noise of Marsville died into black silence. It brought the first peace Mick had known since coming to town. For a while, nothing could happen. Then against the silence they saw dotted lights to mark the rigtops, and heard the hum of working rigs. Instantly he was alert, chilled. Because of these working rigs, Miller had brought him to town—brought him to kill Carnehon in the ring. He wouldn't do it, couldn't do it—not if he never left town alive—not if he lost every shred of reputation he had.

At the top of a hill, the driver shut off his motor and coasted. When the car stopped, he turned to them, and said in a low tone, "Out here. Top of this next hill. To your right."

"Why don't you come?" asked Mick suspiciously.

"My orders is to stay with the car." The spring clicked as he threw the door open. They climbed out. Sand shuffled underfoot.

They climbed on through the sand. The starlight showed a fence. Buck touched it. It was barbed wire more than head high. They followed until, on the hilltop, they came to a locked gate. The rig was about a hundred feet away. They could see the lighted derrick floor, the cable pounding up and down, and a man moving around with a wrench in his hand. All sound of movement was lost in the clatter of the drill.

"Climb over. No use walkin' farther'n we have to."

They climbed, holding to a wooden post and feeling for safe footing between barbs.

At the derrick floor they stood respectfully in the doorway. The powerful machinery shook the derrick itself. The floor shuddered as from an earthquake, with every pound of the drill. Mick drew back, pulling on Buck's sleeve. The rig fascinated, but it terrified, too. It fitted in with his chilling premonition. He was swept by an overwhelming desire to get away. At that moment, the man with the wrench saw them. He shouted something. Another man appeared from a side room.

He was about Mick's height, powerfully built. Greasy coveralls could not hide his compact strength. He stood with his elbows well in, feet braced as though constantly ready to go into action. He was not over twenty-two, but the set of his jaw and his direct eyes showed determination beyond his years. At sight of the two men, rage flashed across his face. He caught a whip from the wall and ran toward them, shouting, gesturing threateningly with his free hand.

Mick could not understand the words, although they registered on his mind and he was to recall them later. Now all he could see was a whip some five feet long and thick as a rattlesnake. The tip of it cracked within an inch of Mick's nose.

"Don't get tough," warned Mick, backing away, yet unable to realize that the man really would strike him. The whip whistled and cracked. Only a swift duck, learned in the ring, kept him from being cut.

"You blasted slaver!" He tried to get in under the whip for a smash at the man. He could have felled him with one vicious blow. For the lash of a whip cuts into a man's brain as well as his body. A blow with a fist stuns, but a blow with a whip lashes to raging anger. Mick raged, but he could not get under the whip. It cracked around his legs, slashed down his back.

"Run!" called Buck. "You can't fight if you get cut, Mick."

The fight came first, of course—this fellow later. They had backed off the derrick into the sand. Now they turned and ran, the oil man hot on their heels and the whip hissing like a vindictive snake. They plowed through sand that gave way and held them back. They
scrambled over the gate, almost rolled down the hill.

Where they lost the whizzer, they never knew. At the car, the driver stepped on the starter the minute he heard them. As they dropped exhausted to the seat he asked:

"Get along all right?"
"No. Where'd you send us?"
"First derrick to the left."
"You said to the right."

"Oh, gushin' gertie! I never! That's one of Carnehan's rigs. You never went on that rig? It's a wonder you come off alive."

"We've got welts all over our backs," growled Buck. "I got a notion to take it outa your hide."

Mick said nothing, but slumped against the side of the car to ease his blistered back. He tried to remember what the oil man had said when he first saw them, but the words escaped him. Not only did his body sting, but his mind throbbed like a cut finger. He had been whipped, driven like a slave. And he had been forced to run before the attack. Well, the fight came first. But after the fight, he could settle this thing. Clenching his fists, he muttered through set teeth:

"If I ever get my hands on that bird—"

"Forget it. We got enough troubles," advised Buck. "That was just a mistake. I dunno that I blame the bloke at that. It's his rig—Carnehan's rig anyways. This bird is actin' under his orders. The deputy said Carnehan's a square guy, but he fights with the other bird's fire. Whippin' may be one of Miller's stunts."

"He don't have to act like we was mules an' him a muleskinner. If I ever catch him I'll break him in two. I had a feelin' I shouldn't go out there."

"Aw, put it down to experience. Be glad he never shot you. Anythin' c'n happen in a boom oil town."

"You'll think anythin' c'n happen if I lay my hands on that bird," snarled Mick. He kept his thoughts to himself the rest of the way into town.

Mick did not know anything could turn him into such a demon as that whipping did. As the bruises on his body healed, the ones in his mind burned deeper.

The insult was even greater in retrospect than it had been at the time. He forgot his fear of committing ring murder in the hope of meeting the whizzer when the bout was over.

The blows he had pulled became vicious. He went after his sparring partners until Buck begged him to lay off. He was wearing himself out and killing the sparring partners. If he wanted to kill somebody, Buck suggested, he could kill Carnehan and save himself a lot of trouble with Miller. Mick eased for a while, boxing with his old cleverness. Then he remembered the biting lash of the whip on his shoulders. One blow floored the sparring partner.

"The more I think about it, the madder I get," he said hotly to Buck. "He lashed me with a whip. Me! Say, I ain't no slave. I'm a boxfighter. Don't tell me anything can happen. I've heard that ever since I come to town. Sure it can happen. But I don't havta stand for it, do I?"

The bout was held at night in an open air arena filled with oil workers and cowboys. Noise of their conversation hummed like working rigs. Sweet, blue tobacco smoke drifted up to the night sky. Carnehan was already in the ring when Mick walked down the sandy aisle with Buck at his heels. He swung through the ropes, went to his corner.

In the opposite corner he could glimpse Carnehan in a faded red bathrobe, although the referee, all in white, kept him from seeing the boxer's face. Mick sat down, feet wide apart, arms resting on the ropes. His eyes roved under a frown. He found it hard to sit still. He was the picture of a man who is eager to get the fight over and free himself for something else.

Then the referee shifted his position. Mick sat straight up, his eyes on the opposite side of the ring. His hand groped for and caught Buck's shoulder. His eyes stared in hypnosis, and his words fell from his lips of themselves.

"Buck! Look!"

Buck followed his eyes. He too, froze. His lips moved. He repeated, as a man repeats a prayer to keep his sanity:

"Anything c'n happen in this town. Anything c'n happen."
For the man in the opposite corner, Young Carnehan, was the man who had swung the whip—the man Mick hated to the point of killing—the man for whose death Miller would pay him.

Carnehan looked up. Their eyes met. A shock of recognition and hate snapped like an electric spark across the ring. An instant their looks held. With the parting, the two men snapped into energy. Eyes glittered, nostrils were distended, muscles tensed. Viciously each thrust out his hands for the gloves. At the referee's signal, they jumped to the center of the ring.

Instructions finished, their four gloved hands met, supposedly in a clasp of sportsmanship. Their looks clashed. Once more Mick felt the sting of the lash on his shoulders, and his brain went white hot.

"So you're Miller's man?" said Carnehan.

"Yeah, an you're the bird that lashed me."

They took the required steps back, essayed a few blows, feinted for position. Carnehan tried a right and missed as Mick's left cross jarred his whole body. They maneuvered, bobbing to tip-toes, dancing away.

Mick caught Carnehan by the ropes, battered his head, Carnehan ducked out, recovered, drove in a swift, thudding one-two, one-two that sent Mick's body pink. Round the ring they went, flashing in, dancing out. Mick was the better boxer, while Carnehan was a slugger. He seldom broke Mick's defense. When he did break through, his gloves beat a hard tattoo.

Mick watched him keenly to see how he fought. His intention was to cut Carnehan to pieces as a whip would cut, holding off a knockout for the very last thing. It would require utmost artistry to do it.

When the round ended, he had found that Carnehan could take punishment. And he had a way of glancing to one side that might count with the gloves flying fast.

At the first tap of the gong for the second, they were in the center. The crowd sat up hopefully. With the quick sense of the prize fight audience, they knew this was no ordinary battle. After a few exchanges of blows, Carnehan forced a clinch.

"So Miller paid you to kill me, huh?"

Mick blinked. He had forgotten he was hired by Miller to commit ring murder for business reasons. He wanted no misunderstanding. What he would do to Carnehan, he'd do because of the whip, not the money.

"Listen, Carnehan, I ain't that kind."

"No?" The scorn lashed like a whip.

"Scared out? Yellow?"

For answer Mick lashed out with a left that hurled him into the ropes. Carnehan came back with a driving right. But the boxer Carnehan met was not the boxer who went into the clinch. Mick's lips were tight, eyes like slits. The clever boxer had changed to a slugging killer.

He ducked the rights, feinted with the left, sent over his own right in a short hard drive to the eye. Carnehan winced, covered. Mick danced away, flashed in, planting a left to the cheek and a right to the eye. Carnehan grunted in pain, smashed through his guard with murderous punches to the head. Mick took them, gritting his teeth. The instant the battering ceased, he drove in again—a left to the face and a right that laid the eye open. His left clipped the ear. Suddenly he changed tactics. His right drove into the stomach like a tractor.
“Yah, that was foul!” hissed Carnehan.
“C’mon, don’t fight with your mouth,” snapped Mick.

Carnehan came on. Toe to toe they stood, exchanging piledriver punch for piledriver punch. The audience roared till it drowned the hard thuds of their gloves. Blood streaked from Carnehan’s eye. Mick could taste salt, as blood dribbled from his own nose. But he could take the punishment necessary to whip Carnehan. He could taste victory, could feel it in the power of every blow he landed.

At the end of the round he threw himself into the chair, took his water and rubbing and advice without being conscious of any of it. He was repaying for the whip. He’d show Carnehan what it was to call him yellow. He’d show him what it meant to meet a killer.

BEFORE the gong had died, he was at Carnehan, his fists flailing. Carnehan, a slugger always gave him blow for blow. Not for an instant were they apart. Their crimsoned gloves stopped work only to see an opening and start again. When one backed, the other followed. Their bodies went from pink to deep red. Crimson smeared their faces, and crimson smeared their gloves. The oil man’s breath came in hard, machine-like snorts. Mick combined his slugging with his old cleverness. He worked as silently, as deadly and as surely as a stiletto.

At the end of the fifth, the crowd that had howled for blood and a knockout, quieted in awe. They were gazing on a worse battle than any battle they ever had seen before. They were used to fights in which a man could call on his friends or run away. Here were two men, pitted in a roped ring, under a merciless light. Two killers, bent on murder. One would kill for revenge, and one because it was his way of fighting. Death stood in the corner, sharpening his scythe. Men who worked with death on the drills sickened for months when they heard the words, “Ring murder.”

Mick fought till the ring reeled under him. He knew there was an awful silence over the house, a silence broken only by Carnehan’s breathing and the thud thud of gloves. He saw nothing but a bloodied, battered face, with one eye closed, hair straggling down in sweat, mouth quivering with weakness, but set with determination. Only one thing was in Mick’s mind. To kill, kill, kill.

He slashed. He cut. Only killing, slashing, cutting would take the sting from his brain. Every blow went in calculated to cut Carnehan to pieces. For every three blows at the face and body, he shot a right to the heart. When the time came, he’d fix Carnehan. Yellow, was he? Use a whip on him, would he!

Mick knew just how to cleanse his shoulders of that whip stain. He’d put a good one into the solar plexus, another to the heart. And if Carnehan rose again, it wouldn’t be Mick Loney’s fault.

In the ninth his left smashed into the mess of an ear. His right shot over in a short, hard drive to the jaw. Carnehan crashed. The gong interrupted the referee’s count. Carnehan was saved for one more round, as Mick had intended. The knockdown was only a preparation.

“Whip me, will he?” He saw Carnehan’s second motion with the towel. He wanted to quit the battle. Carnehan shook his groggy head. He was a fighter, fighting to the death.

“Huh, he’d better stay and take it. He’ll get it later just the same.”

Then across the ring his look met Carnehan’s look. And as the first glance had sent his brain to white heat, this glance plunged him into cold sanity.

Carnehan there was as good a fighter as he. What if he had used a whip? It was his rig. Mick had been a trespasser. Mick was wrong all the way. He had got like Miller, trying to win by killing when he couldn’t win otherwise. He had always called himself a clean fighter. Now in a mad rage, he’d used the sport for personal revenge—dragged a good clean game into the muck.

“Got mad cause he whipped me like a slave an’ here I’ve been a slave to revenge. Well, what a dumb egg I am! An’ that ain’t all. I remember what he said when he saw us. Somethin’ about knowin’ we was comin’. Miller sent us an’ then got the word to Carnehan, so’s he’d be sure to meet us with the whip.
Why, I’m just playin’ Miller’s game all the way."

He went into the tenth his old cool, clear-headed self, no longer a mad killer—once more afraid of ring murder. Carnehan’s gloves flew. Mick let them fly. He blocked, ducked, kept out of the way. He would stall one round, and it would all be over. What if Miller’s gang did for him and Buck when it was over? He was going out clean. That was it. Clean. The greatest game in the world. He had to stay clean. . . .

Mick never was certain how the horror happened.

He had no intention ever of hitting Carnehan again. Then suddenly he felt his fist strike into the other’s jaw. He heard a solid, terrible crash as of a body that is without life. He saw Carnehan bloody and silent on the floor. He heard the crowd’s dull threatening mutter, the referee counting. A chill struck his shoulders. He was conscious of the odor of sweat and blood and tobacco smoke.

He saw Carnehan’s manager leap into the ring, bend over his man, shake him, slap him, speak to him. A dreadful thought shaped in Mick’s mind. The manager took the thought and shouted it from a grief-distorted mouth:

“Carnehan’s dead. Mick Loney killed him!”

MURDER . . . Murder . . . Ring murder. Mick wanted to cry out against it so much that his throat ached. His emotion was like to burst his lungs, and he couldn’t utter a word of it. He had a jumbled knowledge that he tried to get to Carnehan, but hands jerked him away. A bathrobe went around him. They bore him through the crowd to a taxi. Buck was with him, trying to talk to him. But all Mick knew was a wave of agony and remorse beating on his mind like the ocean on a rock.

“I wanted to kill and I killed.” Hadn’t meant to at the last, but that made no difference. Carnehan was dead. Mick had wanted to kill. Mick had killed. That made him twice a murderer.

They were out of the taxi, in the night air. And then in the smoking car of a train, because what murderer can sleep? He was in street clothes, although he couldn’t remember getting into them. Murder, murder—The black desert night slipped away behind the train.

They were four hours on the road when the porter brought in a telegram. Mick had then his first clear thought. He would go back and stand trial, of course. Opening the yellow paper, he looked haggardly at Buck.

“We should never have run away. Whatever this says, I’m goin’ back to face the music, Buck. I’m just comin’ t’my senses. I didn’t mean to kill him. I’ll go back and see it through.”

“I’ll stick with you. You know I’d never say run from a fight. But them birds had a gun in my back, an’ I thought it was better to take the train, Mick. I been tellin’ you all the way, I’d stand by you. Miller paid me. We’ll use that money for the defense.”

“Then back we go and face the music,” said Mick, and read the wire.

“Mick Loney,” it read, “if you were paid in checks cash them at once.”

Mick looked at Buck, and Buck said, “Paid in cash of course. How big a fool d’you think Miller is? He gimme hundred dollar bills an’ plenty of ’em. What comes next?”

“Not your fault I did not stay dead. That’s Miller’s tough luck. He won’t dare squeal. I am glad of opportunity to give him a cleaning. Hope you got plenty. Saw you change your mind, so ran into your fist. You are a real fighter. And clean. Good luck, Carnehan.”

“I told you anythin’ could happen,” said Buck blithely.

Mick crushed the paper in his hand. He watched the night run out behind him. In his heart was a prayer of thankfulness that his lips could never utter.
SAMSON HAD A SOFT SPOT

By Mark Adam

Yeah, even Samson had his soft spot, but shed a sentimental tear for brawling Steve Costigan, plumb defenseless against the triple weaknesses of wine, women—and loyalty for a low-slung, scrapping bull pup!

ME and my white bulldog Mike was peaceably taking our beer in a joint on the waterfront when Porkey Straus come piling in, plumb puffing with excitement.

"Hey, Steve!" he yelped. "What you think? Joe Ritchie's in port with Terror."

"Well?" I said.

"Well, gee whizz," he said, "you mean to set there and let on like you don't know nothin' about Terror, Ritchie's fightin' brindle bull? Why, he's the pit champeen of the Asiatics. He's killed more fightin' dogs than—"

"Yeah, yeah," I said impatiently. "I know all about him. I been listenin' to what a bear-cat he is for the last year, in every Asiatic port I've touched."

"Well," said Porkey, "I'm afraid we ain't goin' to git to see him perform."

"Why not?" asked Johnnie Blinn, a shifty-eyed bar-keep.

"Well," said Porkey, "they ain't a dog in Singapore to match ag'in him. Fritz Steinmann, which owns the pit and runs the dog fights, has scoured the port and they just ain't no canine which their owners'll risk, ag'in Terror. Just my luck. The chance of a lifetime to see the fightin'est dog of 'em all perform. And they's no first-class mutt to toss in with him. Say, Steve, why don't you let Mike fight him?"

"Not a chance," I growled. "Mike gets plenty of scrappin' on the streets. Besides, I'll tell you straight, I think dog fightin' for money is a dirty lowdown game. Take a couple of fine, upstandin' dogs, full of ginger and fightin' heart, and throw 'em in a concrete pit to tear each other's throats out, just so a bunch of four-flushin' tin-horns like you, which couldn't take a punch, can make a few lousy dollars bettin' on 'em."

"But they likes to fight," argued Porkey. "It's their nature."

"It's the nature of any red-blooded critter to fight. Man or dog," I said. "Let 'em fight on the streets, for bones or for fun, or just to see which is the best dog. But pit-fightin' to the death is just too dirty for me to fool with, and I ain't goin' to get Mike into no such mess."

"Aw, let him alone, Porkey," sneered Johnnie Blinn nastily. "He's too chicken-hearted to mix in them rough games. Ain't you, Sailor?"

"Belay that," I roared. "You keep a civil tongue in your head, you wharf-side rat. I never did like you nohow, and one more crack like that gets you this." I brandished my huge fist at him and he turned pale and started scrubbing the bar like he was trying for a record.

"I wantcha to know that Mike can lick this Terror mut," I said, glaring at Porkey. "I'm fed up hearin' fellers braggin' on that brindle murderer. Mike can lick him. He can lick any dog in this lousy port, just like I can lick any man here. If Terror meets Mike on the street and gets fresh, he'll get his belly-full. But Mike ain't going to get mixed up in no dirty racket like Fritz Steinmann runs and you can lay to that." I made the last statement in a voice like a irritated bull, and smashed my fist down on the table so hard I splintered the wood, and made the decanters bounce on the bar.

"Sure, sure, Steve," soothed Porkey, pouring himself a drink with a shaky hand. "No offense. No offense. Well, I gotta be goin'."

"So long," I growled, and Porkey cruised off.

Up strolled a man which had been standing by the bar. I knewed
I hadn't heard the gong. Grieson had slipped up on me from behind again. "Look out, Sailor!" roared the crowd.
him—Philip D’Arcy, a man whose name is well known in all parts of the world. He was a tall, slim, athletic fellow, well dressed, with cold gray eyes and a steel-trap jaw. He was one of them gentleman adventurers, as they call ‘em, and he’d did everything from running a revolution in South America and flying a war plane in a Balkan brawl, to exploring in the Congo. He was deadly with a six-gun, and as dangerous as a rattler when somebody crossed him.

“That’s a fine dog you have, Costigan,” he said. “Plain white. Not a speck of any other color about him. That means good luck for his owner.”

I knewed that D’Arcy had some pet superstitions of his own, like lots of men which live by their hands and wits like him.

“Well,” I said, “anyway, he’s about the fightin’est dog you ever seen.”

“I can tell that,” he said, stooping and eyeing Mike close. “Powerful jaws—not too undershot—good teeth—broad between the eyes—deep chest—legs that brace like iron, Costigan, I’ll give you a hundred dollars for him, just as he stands.”

“You mean you want me to sell you Mike?” I asked kinda incredulous.

“Sure. Why not?”

“Why not!” I repeatedly indignantly.

“Well, gee whizz, why not ask a man to sell his brother for a hundred dollars? Mike wouldn’t stand for it. Anyway, I wouldn’t do it.”

“I need him,” persisted D’Arcy. “A white dog with a dark man—it means luck. White dogs have always been lucky for me. And my luck’s been running against me lately. I’ll give you one-fifty.”

“D’Arcy,” I said, “you couldn’t stand there and offer me money all day long and raise the ante every hand, but it wouldn’t be no good. Mike ain’t for sale. Him and me has knocked around the world together too long. They ain’t no use talkin’.”

His eyes flashed for a second. He didn’t like to be crossed in any way. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

“All right. We’ll forget it. I don’t blame you for thinking a lot of him. Let’s have a drink.”

So we did and he left.

WENT and got me a shave, because I was matched to fight some tramp at Ace Larnigan’s Arena and I wanted to be in shape for the brawl. Well, afterwards I was walking down along the docks when I heard somebody go: “Hsst!”

I looked around and saw a yellow hand beckon me from behind a stack of crates. I sauntered over, wondering what it was all about, and there was a Chinese boy hiding there. He put his finger to his lips. Then quick he handed me a folded piece of paper, and beat it, before I could ask him anything.

I opened the paper and it was a note in a woman’s handwriting which read:

“Dear Steve, I have admired you for a long time at a distance, but have been too timid to make myself known to you. Would it be too much to ask you to give me an opportunity to tell you my emotions by word of mouth? If you care at all, I will meet you by the old Manchu House on the Tungen Road, just after dark. An affectionate admirer. P.S. Please, oh please be there! You have stole my heart away!”

“Mike,” I said pensively, “ain’t it plumb peculiar the strange power I got over wimmens, even them I ain’t never seen? Here is a girl I don’t even know the name of, even, and she has been eatin’ her poor little heart out in solitude because of me. Well—” I hove a gentle sigh—“it’s a fatal gift, I’m afared.”

Mike yawned. Sometimes it looks like he ain’t got no romance at all about him. I went back to the barber shop and had the barber to put some ile on my hair and douse me with perfume. I always like to look genteel when I meet a feminine admirer.

Then, as the evening was waxing away, as the poets say, I set forth for the narrow winding back street just off the water front proper. The natives call it the Tungen Road, for no particular reason as I can see. The lamps there is few and far between and generally dirty and dim. The street’s lined on both sides by lousy looking native shops and hovels. You’ll come to stretches which looks clean deserted and falling to ruins. Well, me and Mike was passing
through just such a district when I heard sounds of some kind of a fracas in a dark alley-way we was passing. Feet scruffed. They was the sound of a blow and a voice yelled in English: “Halp! Halp! These Chinese is killin’ me!”

“Hold everything,” I roared, jerking up my sleeves and plunging for the alley, with Mike at my heels. “Steve Costigan is on the job.”

It was as dark as a stack of black cats in that alley. Plunging blind, I bumped into somebody and sunk a fist to the wrist in him. He gasped and fell away. I heard Mike roar suddenly and somebody howled bloody murder. Then wham! A blackjack or something like it smashed on my skull and I went to my knees.

“That’s done yer, yer blawsted Yank,” said a nasty voice in the dark.

“You’re a liar,” I gasped, coming up blind and groggy but hitting out wild and ferocious. One of my blind licks musta connected because I heard somebody cuss bitterly. And then wham, again come that blackjack on my dome. What little light they was, was behind me, and whoever it was slugging me, couldst see me better’n I could see him. That last smash put me down for the count, and he musta hit me again as I fell.

I COULDN’T of been out but a few minutes, I come to myself lying in the darkness and filth of the alley and I had a most splitting headache and dried blood was clotted on a cut in my scalp. I groped around and found a match in my pocket and struck it.

The alley was empty. The ground was all tore up and they was some blood scattered around, but neither the thugs nor Mike was nowhere to be seen. I run down the alley, but it ended in a blank stone wall. So I come back onto the Tunen Road and looked up and down but seen nobody. I went mad.

“Philip D’Arcy!” I yelled all of a sudden. “He done it. He stole Mike. He writ me that note. Unknown admirer, my eye. I been played for a sucker again. He thinks Mike’ll bring him luck. I’ll bring him luck, the double-crossin’ son-of-a-seacock. I’ll sock him so hard he’ll bite hissel in the ankle. I’ll bust him into so many places he’ll go through a sieve—”

With these meditations, I was running down the street at full speed, and when I busted into a crowded thoroughfare, folks turned and looked at me in amazement. But I didn’t pay no heed. I was steering my course for the European Club, a kind of ritzy place where D’Arcy generally hung out. I was still going at top-speed when I run up the broad stone steps and was stopped by a pompous looking doorman which sniffed scornfully at my appearance, with my clothes torn and dirty from laying in the alley, and my hair all touseled and dried blood on my hair and face.

“Lemme by,” I gritted, “I gotta see a mut.”

“Gorblime,” said the doorman. “You cawn’t go in there. This is a very exclusive club, don’t you know. Only gentlemen are allowed here. Cawn’t have a blawsted gorilla like you bursting in on the gentlemen. My word! Get along now before I call the police.”

There wasn’t time to argue.

With a howl of irritation I grabbed him by the neck and heaved him into a nearby goldfish pond. Leaving him floundering and howling, I kicked the door open and rushed in. I dashed through a wide hallway and found myself in a wide room with big French winders. That seemed to be the main club room, because it was very scrumptiously furnished and had all kinds of animal heads on the walls, alongside of crossed swords and rifles in racks.

They was a number of Americans and Europeans setting around drinking whiskey-and-sodas, and playing cards. I seen Philip D’Arcy setting amongst a bunch of his club-members, evidently spinning yarns about his adventures. And I seen red.

“D’Arcy!” I yelled, striding toward him regardless of the card tables I upset.

“Where’s my dog?”

PHILIP D’ARCY sprang up with a kind of gasp and all the club men jumped up too, looked amazed.

“My word!” said a Englishman in a army officer’s uniform. “Who let this
boundah in? Come, come, my man, you'll have to get out of this."

"You keep your nose clear of this or I'll bend it clean outa shape!" I howled, shaking my right mauler under the afore-said nose. "This ain't none of your business. D'Arcy, what you done with my dog?"

"You're drunk, Costigan," he snapped. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"That's a lie," I screamed, crazy with rage. "You tried to buy Mike and then you had me slugged and him stole. I'm on to you, D'Arcy. You think because you're a big shot and I'm just a common sailorman, you can take what you want. But you ain't gettin' away with it. You got Mike and you're goin' to give him back or I'll tear your guts out. Where is he? Tell me before I choke it outta you."

"Costigan, you're mad," snarled D'Arcy, kind of white. "Do you know whom you're threatening? I've killed men for less than that."

"You stole my dog!" I howled, so wild I hardly knewed what I was doing. "You're a liar," he rasped. Blind mad. I roared and crashed my right to his jaw before he could move. He went down like a slaughtered ox and laid still, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth. I went for him to strangle him with my bare hands, but all the club men closed in between us.

"Grab him," they yelled. "He's killed D'Arcy. He's drunk or crazy. Hold him until we can get the police."

"Belay there," I roared, backing away with both fists cocked. "Lemme see the man that'll grab me. I'll knock his brains down his throat. When that rat comes to, tell him I ain't through with him, not by a dam' sight. I'll get him if it's the last thing I do."

And I stepped through one of them French winders and strode away cursing between my teeth. I walked for some time in a kind of red mist, forgetting all about the fight at Ace's Arena, where I was already due. Then I got a idee. I was fully intending to get ahold of D'Arcy and choke the truth outta him, but they was no use trying that now. I'd catch him outside his club some time that night. Meanwhile, I thought of some-

thing else. I went into a saloon and got a big piece of white paper and a pencil, and with much labor, I printed out what I wanted to say. Then I went out and stuck it up on a wooden lamppost where folks couldst read it. It said:

I WILL PAY ANY MAN FIFTY DOLLARS ($50) THAT CAN FIND MY BULLDOG MIKE WHICH WAS STOLE BY A LO-DOWN SCHUNK.

STEVE COSTIGAN.

I was standing there reading it to see that the words was spelled right when a loafer said: "Mike stole? Too bad, Sailor. But where you goin' to git the fifty to pay the reward? Everybody knows you ain't got no money."

"That's right," I said. So I wrote down underneath the rest:

P. S. I AM GOING TO GET FIFTY DOLLARS FOR LICKING SOME MUTT AT ACE'S ARENA THAT IS WHERE THE REWARD MONEY IS COMING FROM.

S. C.

I then went morosely along the street wondering where Mike was and if he was being mistreated or anything. I moped into the Arena and found Ace walking the floor and pulling his hair.

"Where you been?" he howled. "You realize you been keepin' the crowd waitin' a hour? Get into them ring togs."

"Let 'em wait," I said sourly, setting down and pulling off my shoes. "Ace, a yellow-ivered son-of-a-skunk stole my dog."

"Yeah?" said Ace, pulling out his watch and looking at it. "That's tough, Steve. Hustle up and get into the ring willya? That crowd's about ready to tear the joint down."

I CLIMBED into my trunks and bathrobe and mosied up the aisle, paying very little attention either to the hisses or cheers which greeted my appearance. I clumb into the ring and looked around for my opponent.

"Where's Grieson?" asked Ace.

"E'asn't showed up yet," said the referee.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" howled Ace tearing his hair. "The boneheaded leather-pushers will drive me to a early doom. Do they think a pum-moter's got nothin' else to do but set around all night and pacify a ragin' mob whilst they play around? These thugs
is goin’ to lynch us all if we don’t start some action right away.”

“Here he comes,” said the referee as a bath-robed figger come hurrying down the aisle. Ace scowled bitterly and held up his hands to the frothing crowd.

“The long delayed main event,” he said sourly. “Over in that corner, Sailor Costigan of the Sea Girl, weight 190 pounds. The mutt crawlin’ through the ropes is ‘Limey’ Grieson, weight 189. Get goin’—and I hope you both get knocked loop-legged.”

The referee called us to the center of the ring for instructions and Grieson glared at me, trying to scare me before the scrap started—the conceited jassack. But I had other things on my mind. I merely mechanically noted that he was about my height—six feet—had a nasty sneering mouth and mean black eyes, and had been in a street fight recent. He had a bruise under one ear.

We went back to our corners and I said to the second Ace had give me: “Bonehead, you ain’t seen nothin’ of nobody with my bulldog, have you?”

“Naw, I ain’t,” he said, crawling through the ropes. “And beside . . . Hey, look out.”

I hadn’t noticed the gong sounding and Grieson was in my corner before I knew what was happening. I ducked a slug-shot right as I turned and clinched, pushing him outa the corner before I broke. He nailed me with a hard left hook to the head and I retaliated with a left to the body, but it didn’t have much enthusiasm behind it. I had something else on my mind and my heart wasn’t in the fight. I kept unconsciously glancing over to my corner where Mike always set, and when he wasn’t there, I felt kinda lost and sick and empty.

Limey soon seen I wasn’t up to par and began forcing the fight, shooting both hands to my head. I blocked and countered very slouchily and the crowd, missing my rip-roaring attack, began to murmur. Limey got too cocky and missed a looping right that had everything he had behind it. He was wide open for an instant and I mechanically ripped a left hook under his heart that made his knees buckle, and he covered up and walked away from me in a hurry, with me fol-

lowing after him in a sluggish kind of manner.

After that he was careful, not taking many chances. He jabbed me plenty, but kept his right guard high and close in. I ignores left jabs at all times, so though he was outpointing me plenty, he wasn’t hurting me none. But he finally let go his right again and started the claret from my nose. That irritated me and I woke up and doubled him over with a left hook to the guts which wowed the crowd. But they yelled with rage and amazement when I failed to follow up. To tell the truth I was fighting very absent-mindedly.

A S I walked back to my corner at the end of the first round, the crowd was growling and muttering restless, and the referee said: “Fight, you blasted Yank, or I’ll throw you h’out of the ring.” That was the first time I ever got a warning like that.

“What’s the matter with you, Sailor?” said Bonehead, waving the towel industriously. “I ain’t never seen you fight this way before.”

“I’m worried about Mike,” I said, “Bonehead, where-all does Philip D’Arcy hang out besides the European Club?”

“How the heck should I know?” he said “Why?”


“There’s the gong, you mutt,” yelled Bonehead, pushing me out of my corner. “For cat’s cake, get in there and FIGHT. I got five bucks bet on you.”

I wandered out into the middle of the ring and absent-mindedly wiped Limey’s chin with a right that dropped him on his all-fours. He bounced up without a count, clearly addled, but just as I was fixing to polish him off, I heard a racket at the door.

“Lemme in,” somebody was squalling. “I gotta see Meest’ Costigan. I got one fellow dog belong along him.”

“Wait a minute,” I growled to Limey, and run over to the ropes to the astounded fury of the fans, who rose and roared.

“Let him in, Bat,” I yelled and the feller at the door hollered back: “Alright, Steve, here he comes.”
And a Chinese kid come running up the aisle grinning like all get-out, holding up—yeah, you guessed it—a scrawny brindle bull-pup.

"Here that one follow dog, Meest' Costigan," he yelled.

"Aw heck," I said. "That ain't Mike. Mike's white. I thought everybody in Singapore knowed Mike—"

At this moment I realized that the still groggy Grieson was harassing me from the rear, so I turned around and give him my full attention for a minute. I had him backed up ag'in' the ropes, bombarding him with lefts and rights to the head and body, when I heard Bat yell: "For th' luvva—! Here comes another'n, Steve."

"Pardon me a minute," I snapped to the reeling Limey and ran over to the ropes just as a grinning coolie come running up the aisle with a white dog which might of had three or four drops of bulldog blood in him.

"Me catchum, boss," he shorted. "Heap fine white dawg. Me catchum fifty dolla?"

"You catchum a kick in the pants," I roared with irritation. "Blame it all, that ain't Mike."

At this moment Grieson, which had snuck up behind me, banged me behind the ear with a right harder that made me see about a million stars. This infuriated me so I turned and hit him in the belly so hard I bent his back-bone. He curled up like a worm somebody's stepped on and while the referee was counting over him, the gong ended the round.

They dragged Limey to his corner and started working on him. Bonehead, he said to me: "What kind of a game is this, Sailor? Gee whizz, that mutt can't stand up to you a minute if you was tryin'. You shoulda stopped him in the first round. Hey, lookit there."

I glanced absent-mindedly over at the opposite corner and seen that Limey's seconds had found it necessary to take off his right glove in the process of reviving him. They was fumbling over his bare hand.

"They're up to somethin' crooked," howled Bonehead. "I'm goin' to appeal to the referee."

"HERE comes some more mutts, Steve," bawled Bat and down the aisle come a Chinese coolie, a Jap sailor, and a Hindoo, each with a barking dog. The crowd had been seething with bewildered rage, but this seemed to somehow hit 'em in the funny bone and they begunst to whoop and yell and laugh like a passel of hyenas. The referee was roaming around the ring cussing to himself and Ace was jumping up and down and tearing his hair.

"Is this a prize-fight or a dog-show," he howled. "You've rooint my business. I'll be the laughin' stock of the town. I'll sue you, Costigan."

"Catchum fine dawg, Meest' Costigan," shouted the Chinese, holding up a squirming, yowling mutt which done its best to bite me.

"You deluded heathen," I roared, "that ain't even a bull dog. That's a chow."

"You clazee," he hollered. "Him fine blull dawg."

"Don't listen," said the Jap. "Him bull dog. And he held up one of them pint-sized Boston bull-terriers.

"Not so," squalled the Hindoo. "Here is thee dog for you, sahib. A pure blood Rampur hound. No dog can overtake him in thee race—"

"Ye gods!" I howled. "Is everybody crazy? I oughta knowed these heathens couldn't understand my reward poster, but I thought—"

"Look out, sailor," roared the crowd.

I hadn't heard the gong. Grieson had slipped up on me from behind again, and I turned just in time to get nailed on the jaw by a sweeping right-harder he started from the canvas. Wham! The lights went out and I hit the canvas so hard it jolted some of my senses back into me again.

I knowed even then, that no ordinary gloved fist had slammed me down that way. Limey's men had slipped a iron knuckle-duster on his hand when they had his glove off. The referee sprung forward with a gratified yelp and began counting over me. I writhed around, trying to get up and kill Limey, but I felt like I was done. My head was swimming, my jaw felt dead, and all the starch was gone outa my legs. They felt like they was made outa taller.
SAMSON HAD A SOFT SPOT

My head reeled. And I could see stars over the horizon of dogs.

"... Four ..." said the referee above the yells of the crowd and the despairing howls of Bonehead, who seen his five dollars fading away. "... Five ... Six ... Seven ..."


Snap! went something in my head. That voice. Them same words. Where'd I heard 'em before? In the black alley offa the Tungen Road. A wave of red fury washed all the grogginess outa me.

I FORGOT all about my taller legs. I come off the floor with a roar which made the ring lights dance, and lunged at the horrified Limey like a mad bull. He caught me with a straight left coming in, but I didn't even check a instant. His arm bent and I was on top of him and sunk my right mauler so deep into his ribs I felt his heart throb under my fist. He turned green all over and crumbled to the canvas like all his bones hadst turned to butter. The dazed referee started to count, but I ripped off my gloves and pouncing on the gasping warrior, I sunk my iron fingers into his throat.

"Where's Mike, you gutter rat?" I roared. "What'd you do with him? Tell me, or I'll tear your windpipe out."

"'Ere, 'ere," squawked the referee "You cawn't do that. Let go of him, I say. Let go, you fiend."

He got me by the shoulders and tried to pull me off. Then, seeing I wasn't even noticing his efforts, he started kicking me in the ribs. With a wrathful beller, I rose up and caught him by the nape of the neck and the seat of the britches and threwed him clean through the ropes. Then I turned back on Limey.

"You Limehouse spawn," I bellowed. "I'll choke the life outa you."

"Easy, mate, easy," he gasped, green-tinted and sick. "I'll tell yer. We stole the mutt—Fritz Steinmann wanted him—" "Steinmann?" I howled in amazement.

"He warned a dorg to fight Ritchie's Terror," gasped Limey. "Johnnie Blinn suggested he should 'ook your Mike."

Johnnie hired me and some strong-arms to turn the trick—Johnnie's gel wrote you that note—but how'd you know I was into it—"

"I oughta thought about Blinn," I raged. "The dirty rat. He heard me and Porkey talkin' and got the idea. Where is Blinn?"

"Somewheres getting sewed up," gasped Grieson. "The dorg like to tore him to ribbons afore we could get the brute into the bamboo cage we had fixed."

"Where is Mike?" I roared, shaking him till his teeth rattled.

"At Steinmann's, fightin' Terror," groaned Limey. "Ow, lor'—I'm sick. I'm dyin'."

I riz up with a maddened beller and made for my corner. The referee rose outa the tangle of busted seats and cussing fans and shook his fist at me with fire in his eye.

"Steve Costigan," he yelled. "You lose the blawsted fight on a foul."

"Th' heck you say!" I roared, grabing my bathrobe from the limp and gibbering Bonehead. And just at that instant a regular bedlam bust loose at the ticket-door and Bat come down the aisle like the devil was chasing him. And in behind him come a mob of natives—coolies, 'ricksha boys, beggers, shopkeepers, boatmen and I don't know what all—and every one of 'em had at least one dog and some had as many as three or four. Such a horde of chows, Pekineses, terriers, hounds and mongrels I never seen and they was all barking and howling and fighting.

"Meest' Costigan," the heatheans howled, charging down the aisles. "You payum fifty dolla for dogs. We catchum."

The crowd rose and stampeded, trompling each other in their flight and I jumped outa the ring and raced down the aisle to the back exit with the whole mob about a jump behind me. I slammed the door in their faces and rushed out onto the sidewalk, where the passers-by screeched and scattered at the sight of what I reckon they thought was a huge and much battered maniac running at large in a red bathrobe. I paid no heed to 'em.

Somebody yelled at me in a familiar voice, but I rushed out into the street and made a flying leap onto the running
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board of a passing taxi. I ripped the door open and yelled to the horrified driver: "Fritz Steinmann's place on Kang Street—and if you ain't there within three minutes I'll break your neck."

We went careening through the streets and purty soon the driver said: "Say, are you an escaped criminal? There's a car followin' us."

"You drive," I yelled. "I don't care if they's a thousand cars followin' us. Likely it's a Chinaman with a pink Pomeranian he wants to sell me for a white bull dog."

The driver stepped on it and when we pulled up in front of the innocent-looking building which was Steinmann's secret arena, we'd left the mysterious pursuer clean outa sight. I jumped out and raced down a short flight of stairs which led from the street down to a side entrance, clearing my decks for action by shedding my bathrobe as I went. The door was shut and a burly black-jowled thug was lounging outside. His eyes narrowed with surprise as he noted my costume, but he bulged in front of me and growled: "Wait a minute, you. Where do you think you're goin'?"

"In!" I gritted, ripping a terrible right to his unshaven jaw.

Over his prostrate carcass I launched myself bodily against the door, being in too much of a hurry to stop and see if it was unlocked. It crashed in and through its ruins I catapulted into the room.

It was a big basement. A crowd of men—the scrapings of the waterfront—was ganged about a deep pit sunk in the concrete floor from which came a low, terrible, worrying sound like dogs growling through a mask of torn flesh and bloody hair—like fighting dogs growl when they have their fangs sunk deep.

The fat Dutchman which owned the dive was just inside the door and he whirled and went white as I crashed through. He threw up his hands and screamed, just as I caught him with a clout that smashed his nose and knocked six front teeth down his throat. Somebody yelled: "Look out, boys! Here comes Costigan. He's on the kill!"

The crowd yelled and scattered like
chaff before a high wind as I come ploughing through 'em like a typhoon, slamming right and left and dropping a man at each blow. I was so crazy mad I didn't care if I killed all of 'em. In a instant the brink of the pit was deserted as the crowd stormed through the exits, and I jumped down into the pit. Two dogs was there, a white one and a big brindle one, though they was both so bloody you couldn't hardly tell their original color. Both had been savagely punished, but Mike's jaws had locked in the death-hold on Terror's throat and the brindle dog's eyes was glazing.

Joe Ritchie was down on his knees working hard over him and his face was the color of paste. They's only two ways you can break a bull dog's death-grip; one is by deluging him with water till he's half drowned and opens his mouth to breathe. The other's is by choking him off. Ritchie was trying that, but Mike had such a bull's neck, Joe was only hurting his fingers.

"For gosh sake, Costigan," he gasped. "Get this white devil off. He's killin' Terror."

"Sure, I will," I grunted, stooping over the dogs. "Not for your sake, but for the sake of a good game dog." And I slapped Mike on the back and said: "Belay there, Mike; haul in your grapplin' irons."

Mike let go and grinned up at me with his bloody mouth, wagging his stump of a tail like all get-out and pricking up one ear. Terror had clawed the other's to rags. Ritchie picked up the brindle bull and clumb outa the pit and I follered him with Mike.

"You take that dog to where he can get medical attention and you do it pronto," I growled. "He's a better man than you, any day in the week, and more fittin' to live. Get outa my sight."

I was looking over Mike's cuts and gashes, when I realized that a man was standing nearby, watching me.

I wheeled. It was Philip D'Arcy, with a blue bruise on his jaw where I'd socked him, and his right hand inside his coat.

"D'Arcy," I said, walking up to him. "I reckon I done made a mess of things. I just ain't got no sense when I lose my temper, and I honestly thought you'd stole Mike. I ain't much on fancy words and apologizin' won't do no good. But I always try to do what seems right in my blunderin' blame-fool way, and if you wanta, you can knock my head off and I won't raise a hand ag'in you." And I stuck out my jaw for him to sock.

He took his hand outa his coat and in it was a cocked six-shooter.

"Costigan," he said, "no man ever struck me before and got away with it. I came to Larnigan's Arena tonight to kill you. I was waiting for you outside and when I saw you run out of the place and jump into a taxi. I followed you to do the job wherever I caught up with you. But I like you. You're a square-shooter. And a man who thinks as much of his dog as you do is my idea of the right sort. I'm putting this gun back where it belongs—and I'm willing to shake hands and call it quits, if you are."

"More'n willin'," I said heartily. "You're a real gent. And we shook. Then all at once he started laughing.

"I saw your poster," he said. "When I passed by, an Indian baby was translating it to a crowd of natives and he was certainly making a weird mess of it. The best he got out of it was that Steve Costigan was buying dogs at fifty dollars apiece. You'll be hounded by canine-peddlers as long as you're in port."

"The Sea Girl's due tomorrow, thank gosh," I replied. "But right now I got to sew up some cuts on Mike."

"My car's outside," said D'Arcy. "Let's take him up to my rooms. I've had quite a bit of practice at such things and we'll fix him up ship-shape."

"It's a dirty deal he's had," I growled. "And when I catch Johnnie Blinn I'm goin' to kick his ears off. But," I added, swelling out my chest seven or eight inches, "I don't reckon I'll have to lick no more saps for sayin' that Ritchie's Terror is the champion of all fightin' dogs in the Asiatics. Mike and me is the fightin'est pair of scrappers in the world."
PUNCHES

Fight-expert Doc McGee records the latest happenings in the World of Slug.

Well, another year is unrolling and a large percentage of the nation’s boxing talent will be taking their vacations in the military training camps—a healthy situation, as we see it. Who knows what lightning-limbed youngster may emerge from the proving-ground of camp-bouts, to go on to fistic glory? Hats off to the best trainer of them all—Uncle Sam!

It is customary in departments such as this to sign a lot of prophecies et cetera about this time of the year. However, before we make any cracks about who’ll dethrone Joe Louis, or Red Cochrane, or which comer is going to settle the championship matter among middles and light-heavies, let us pause to take a few bows for good guessing thus far.

This department called the turn—which Fight Stories readers can promptly verify by referring to back issues—on winners in such popular matches as:

- Louis vs. Conn
- Louis vs. Nova
- Nova vs. Jim Robinson
- Louis vs. Savold
- Louis vs. Simon

Reports from the current headquarters of Joe Louis’ combination manager-promoter-matchmaker announce that Louis, though he may be wearing an army uniform before this goes to press, is signed to fight huge Buddy Baer for the world’s championship at Madison Square Garden in January. This is a return match, to give Buddy an opportunity to pick up a few crullers after the lambasting he took from Joe in Washington. I’ll pick Joe the Champ to stop Buddy in about eleven rounds.

More humor for lovers of fun. Melio Bettina, the sober-faced lad from the Hudson Valley, is campaigning as a
ON PARADE

By Doc McGee

heavyweight. Whenever he comes to scratch, the announcer points to Melio and calls him the "former light-heavyweight champion of the world." Regular fans must laugh at this and so do we. Bettina won the alleged title when has-been "Tiger" Fox quit to him in the Garden. The terrible Tiger had but recently left a hospital bed after being repaired after an indiscreet joust with a piece of sharp steel in the hands of an infuriated uptown friend. Fox was on his last legs and Bettina lumbered around just long enough to make the Fox cry quits. So he became champion. And his next bout, arranged by his manager against the advice of many, was with the clever sharpshooter, Master William Conn, Pittsburgh's prancing master. You know what happens. Conn became champion, and now Bettina will always be "former world's light-heavyweight champ." Alas!

In looking over the fistic horizon for 1942, the prospect promises another negro fighter who will climb high. Ray Robinson, one of the finest looking workmen we've seen in many a month, is, for my money, a better fighter for his weight than even Joe Louis. Ray has everything, and never seems to forget the things he learns with each successive battle. Here is a kid who will be a champ with proper handling.

Isn't it about time for Al Weill to bring Godoy up here again from his South American jungle? What punching bags have we got in this country to compare with Arturo. Now there was a man could "take it" to suit any fanatic.

Fritzie Zivic, from all accounts, has shot his bolt. Strange thing about Fritzie and Master Cochrane. Both of these boys went along year after year, just run of the mill fighters, when suddenly Zivic gloms onto a championship. Only to lose it to Red Cochrane, who, from this department's memory, was never a likely prospect for a champ.
With so many of our American boxing stars going into the army, old-timers are reminded somehow of Jack Dempsey. Perhaps because it was the ill-advised Dempsey who, when we went to war before, chose to remain a private citizen. How much simpler it would have been for Jack to have enlisted, served his stretch, dashing around the country telling the kids how to train and picking up some easy dough for push-over bouts. Instead of which, Jack found himself with a couple of million haters who hoped for his annihilation.

Took years for him to win back his popularity.

George Grimsbaw—Seattle: Thanks for your newsy letter. Yes, we think Hostak is a fair fighter, but he'll never measure up to the real good middleweights. That old salt, Ken Overlin, gave Hostak a boxing lesson for 10 rounds recently, winning 9 rounds handily. At that, the officials were charitable in giving Al that one round. This Overlin is quite a guy, yes, sir! You're right about the old-time fighters, and the referees, too. Arthur Donovan—when he was boxing under the nom de ring of Young Mike Donovan—was never a slam-bang, walk in and slug, fighter. In fact, Donovan did not pile up anything like the record of his famous father, or for that matter like innumerable boys whose names have just faded out with time. Donovan fits well into the atmosphere of some athletic club gym where nobody is supposed to get hurt. But as third man in the ring with a couple of fabulously paid fighters, he frightens too easily at the sight of a little gore. Glad to hear from you anytime.

And a happy New Year to every fan. One good suggestion that would help to make it happier for the boxing lovers, would be to stop "stopping" ring contests. Then, on with the dance, 1942,
JOHNSON
vs
WILLARD
April 5, 1915
By JACK KOFOED

A black panther—that was Johnson—stabbing, stabbing. Willard was bewildered, but youth and condition and the hot Havana sun were on his side. . .

The ring was pitched on the race-track in front of the grandstand, and the slope from the edge of the track to the front of the stand was filled with circus seats. All through the morning that had been overcast, and then cleared to a lapis-lazuli sky and a blistering sun, mechanics had worked on all the last minute jobs that crop up before a big fight.

Havana was wildly excited over the prospect of the impending battle. From President Menocal down to the last dirty-faced gamin selling papers in the street there was no other talk than fight talk. The names of Jack Johnson and Jess Willard were on everyone's lips.

The Mariano race-track had been dressed for the occasion with flags and bunting. It had the air of a fiesta. For one day at least, Havana was the sporting capital of the world.

At eleven o'clock it was found that no bell had been provided. There was an excited scurrying to and fro. An automobile flashed off to the city to bring back that very necessary adjunct of fistic warfare.

By this time the early comers began to arrive. A squadron of gaily uniformed Cuban cavalrymen rode onto the track, and took their places close to the ring. They added a dashing note of color to the already brilliant scene. Off behind the track rose the green hills and towering palms. No more gorgeous setting for a heavyweight championship battle had ever been seen.

It was a little past noon when a blare of bugles announced the arrival of the President of the Republic and his staff. Trailing behind were officers of the military, diplomatic attachés, the aristocracy and wealth of the island, as well as hundreds of American tourists.

There was much talk of the last-minute doings of the rivals. Both, it appeared, had been up early, walked about, eaten breakfast and given out statements to the press. Johnson, the big negro champion, was reported to be serenely confident. Willard, it was said, expected to take a beating for fifteen rounds, and then wear down his older rival. Johnson was an 8-to-5 favorite, and there was plenty of betting at those odds. There were many who liked the chances of the Tall Pine of the Potawattomie. His enormous bulk, his great reach and well developed uppercut were factors not to be lightly passed by.

Johnson drove up to the track at 12:25 in an automobile with his wife and Tom Flanagan. His wide, gold-toothed, good-natured smile was infectious. No man ever went to battle more unworried than he. From his manner, one might have thought him a spectator rather than one of the contestants.

We sat at the ringside in the blazing

At the end of the eighteenth round Johnson had won eighteen.
that ease of manner which comes only with long experience. He was accompanied by Tex O’Rourke, Walter Monahan and Jim Savage. Johnson was handled by George Monroe, Sam McVey, Dave Mills and Bob Armstrong.

The preliminary bouts were over. Everything was ready for the big event. All over the United States crowds gathered before newspaper bulletin boards. This was the moment everyone had waited for since the day Johnson had cut James J. Jeffries into red ribbons at Reno.

Announcer Jim Mace and Referee Jack Welsh climbed into the ring. Mace’s task was a mere gesture. Everyone knew the contestants as well as they knew themselves. There was the usual huddle in the center of the ring as the referee gave the men their instructions. The seconds cleared out. Johnson and Willard returned to their corners. A silence that could almost be heard fell over the crowd.

The vast difference between the men was very noticeable as they waited there an instant in the blazing sunshine. Johnson, tremendously muscular, looked almost squat, but nimble as a ballet-dancer, as he poised on the balls of his feet. The famous “golden smile” was still in evidence. He cast a quick glance at his wife who was sitting in the fourth row, a tender, reassuring glance.

Willard, dwarfing his big opponent by his own incredible size, hairy-chested and sombre, was still palpably nervous. He knew that Johnson was thirty-eight years old, and had neither lived wisely nor observed training rules. He could see that there was a betraying band of fat around the black man’s middle, and understood that in a long fight his own youth and better condition were vital factors. Yet he could not shake off his nervousness. The champion’s confidence in his own superiority was evinced in his carelessness.

Someone yelled to Johnson, “You’ll get yours today!”

Jack laughed down at him, almost insultingly.

“Well, there’s good money in it.”

Then—almost startlingly loud—the bell!
THE champion glided out like a panther. He stabbed Willard with his left—stabbed, stabbed, stabbed, and then suddenly upcurt a vicious right to the heart. Jess swung awkwardly and missed. His nervousness had not left him. He missed again. Those who had bet on him looked serious. If this first round was any indication, it was an ice-wagon horse against a Roseben. Willard didn’t land a blow. Johnson went back to his corner without even breathing fast.

The second round was ever more one-sided. Jack continually feinted Jess out of position, and hit him at will. The contrast between them, so far as boxing skill went, made Willard look pitiful. He was a toy in the hands of the champion. He couldn’t do anything right, but apparently he had not been hurt by Johnson’s blows.

During the next three minutes Jack switched to the body. He landed a terrific right-hander to the pit of the stomach. Willard said, “So that’s the way you do it, hey?” And then he tried to counter, but missed badly. Who ever said this fellow had a chance to win the championship? All through the fourth round Johnson laughed at Willard’s clumsy efforts, and hit him right and left whenever he chose. It wasn’t a fight but a boxing lesson.

A Cuban sitting next to me said, “We shall be horribly disappointed if Senor Willard loses. He is such a pleasant, modest fellow. Just a big boy, you know. His idea of affluence is to have four phonographs in his room—one in each corner so he can turn one on without getting up, no matter where he sits. Funny, is it not?”

It wasn’t funny, though, the way Johnson outboxed the big fellow. Willard was rattled and performed like an amateur. Smashes to the body had him in distress. In the sixth he was battered to the ropes. His lip was badly cut, and in the clinches Jack rasped the wound with the laces of his gloves. Then Johnson switched back to the stomach, and punched with both hands.

It wasn’t until the eighth round that Willard appeared to regain some of his confidence. At any rate, he shook himself loose from his nervousness, and began to do a little fighting on his own account. He hadn’t won a round until that time, and plethoric and unimaginative as he was, the Tall Pine realized that he couldn’t win a championship by being at the receiving end all the time. So he started by poking out that long left hand of his, and jabbing Jack Johnson right in the middle of the nose with it. That appeared to spur him into further action. He slapped a few right-handers to the body, and, even though he didn’t take the round, at least he inspired his backers with a bit more hope. They hadn’t any to speak of, so far.

But now the whole complexion of the fight was to change.

This didn’t mean that Jess stepped out at once and started walloping the champion of the world all around the ring. His renewal of confidence didn’t go that far. Willard lacked mental agility quite as much as foot-work. He felt that Johnson couldn’t hurt him, and he could do a little punching without the fear that a counter might knock him stiff. So he let his blows go more often, but they continued to miss.

Jess took the aggressive. He ploughed in, and was battered about the stomach, but kept swinging. One of these well-intentioned wallops split Johnson’s mouth. The champion’s golden smile turned to crimson. An ugly light came into his
eyes. The farce had become more serious. Jack retaliated with a vicious right chop that set the Tall Pine to wavering. No one could take too many liberties with him.

Willard continued his attack. He kept coming in through the tenth round. In the clinches he tried to spread his weight on Johnson, as his seconds had told him to do. The whole job appeared to be the long-drawn one of tiring the old champion into submission. Once in a while Jack would flare out with a real attack, and jolt the Tall Pine with his uppercut. But Willard had tremendous resistance. No matter what he took he wasn’t hurt.

The crowd took to deriding Johnson. They hooted and jeered. Johnson, the smart old egg, must have felt himself burning up, but decided to put some of that talk into reverse action. When he and Willard clinched—and they clinched often—he whispered insults, and shouted retorts to the crowd. Big Jess was talked into a red rage. He wanted to tear his opponent to pieces with his hands. The madder he became the easier target he was for the champion.

Between rounds his seconds eased him out of his anger. His poise returned. No need to lose his head or waste his breath. All he had to do was play the waiting game, and Johnson was his meat. Despite all the punishment he had undergone, the big fellow was fresh, considerably fresher than the champion. I don’t mean to say that Jack was actually weary, but some of the spring had gone out of him. You can’t get away from age, no matter how you try—no matter how you bulwark it with courage and skill.

The Cubans yelled hysterically and consistently for Willard.

“Old man, old man, old man!” they chanted at Johnson during the rest between the eleventh and twelfth rounds.

That annoyed the champion. He was sensitive about his age. Thirty-eight really was old for the prize-ring. A man of those years, who has been fighting as long as Johnson had, feels himself a veritable old man of the sea.

“Old man,” they shouted again.

Jack turned on his stool, and called at those at the immediate ringside:

“Just watch the old man!”

To make good his boast, the champion leaped out for the twelfth like a huge, enraged cat. He chased Willard from one side of the ring to the other, lacing him with both hands.

Jess was bewildered and shaken. He didn’t know how to escape the attack. He couldn’t block the punches that seemed fairly to rain on him. Johnson was a sharpshooter, and this big novice was like a toy in his hands. It was shameful the way Johnson plastered him.

“Old, hey?” the champion kept saying.

“I’ll show ’em how old I am.”

He staggered Willard with a sharp uppercut, and drove him back to the ropes under a hail of blows. The challenger did not appear to know what it was all about. He was outclassed in everything; even in the ability to match John son’s scornful retorts. Just a lumbering oaf, able to take a beating and stay on his feet. Willard had no other status at this stage of the bout.

In the fourteenth, Jess, his stomach red from punishment, kept rushing and missing. Johnson slammed him in the body, viciously. Willard laughed, and said, “Is that all the harder you can hit?” but there was no real conviction in his voice. Those blows hurt. There were stabbing pains through him.

The champion continued that sort of attack. In the sixteenth his enemy was unsteady from punishment. He wavered a little, but came charging back in his usual ineffective style. Even his ardent admirers began to doubt that he would wear Johnson down. It looked as though he would be beaten off his feet before he could achieve that result.

Still, his courage and determination were admirable. He kept charging, but his leads were picked off by Johnson with almost ridiculous ease. In return he was jolted with both hands. He wobbled several times, but recovered himself.

At the end of the eighteenth round the champion had won eighteen. He had done most of the work—and all of the damage. He had shown himself to be a better boxer and a harder hitter. But the net result of it all was that he was tired and gasping from his efforts, while the Tall Pine, though well thumped, ap-
peared to be strong enough to go on indefinitely.

Johnson decided on a change of tactics. He would be worn out sooner than Willard by these methods. He'd better stall around, conserve himself, and see if Jess wouldn't tire. It was the reasonable and intelligent thing to do, but it spoiled the show.

The next six rounds were dull, indeed. Jack stayed on the defensive, doing practically no hitting, holding and stalling at every opportunity. Willard did all the work, but didn't succeed in hurting the champion very much. Though his blows were ineffective, because Johnson blocked or dodged or rode with them, they had a very appreciable effect. Jack became more and more tired. He could hardly keep going.

His big body, with its intimation of a paunch, was drenched in sweat. It was terribly hot. The sun beat down out of a cloudless sky. To Johnson it must have seemed that he was working in front of a furnace. Willard's bulk in the clinches became almost intolerable. The only thing that seemed worth while in the whole world was rest. And rest was one thing it was impossible to get.

They kept going, but so slowly that the crowd jeered. They hooted at both men. The great championship fight had fizzled off into the dreary exhibition of two big men clinching continually. This was not what the ringsiders had paid twenty-five dollars a seat to see. They wanted action, blood—and they were not getting it.

Only the ring-wise caught, in this painful exhibition, the pre-view of an early knockout. Experts in condition could appraise the contenders from what they were doing now. The spectators might be bored, but this was all to be expected—and would lead to a very definite and dramatic denouement.

The complexion of the battle had changed. In the earlier phases it was Johnson who did all the work. Now the tired black giant found little to do. Willard crowded him, forcing the fighting; pawing in Jack's face with his ponderous left and clouting him with a vicious right uppercut.

Things continued at the same slow tempo. The crowd became more and more restless. It wanted action. The fact that Willard was beginning to take the lead mollified it, but not enough. A man doesn't pay real money to see a fight and then content himself with anything less than a punchfest.

If this match had been scheduled for any distance up to twenty-five rounds, Johnson couldn't have failed to retain his championship. By any method of figuring he had won twenty. In a twenty-five round limit it wouldn't have mattered that he was wabbiling and getting weaker by the second.

Almost at the start of the twenty-fifth, the Tall Pine walked into Johnson and almost caved him with a terrific right under the heart. Jack sagged, caught himself and clinched. Jess clubbed him on the jaw with a hard left. A less experienced campaigner would have been primed and ready for a knockout then and there, but the old champion was a consummate defensive boxer. He protected himself until the bell, but as he went wearily to his corner he knew that it really didn't matter. He had come to the end of his string. There wasn't much more to be done. So sure as they were in Havana this two hundred and forty pound young giant was his successor as champion of the world.

At the end of the twenty-second round Johnson had sent McVey for Jack Curley. McVey found it hard to locate the impresario. Curley was busy somewhere around the track, and it was not until the end of the twenty-fifth that he bustled up to the ring.

Jack looked old and worn. The muscles of his face sagged. His arms rested wearily on his knees. He looked across the ring at Willard. That young giant was smiling now.

"What do you want, Jack?" Curley asked.

The champion turned. "Tell my wife I'm tiring," he whispered. "Take her out. I don't want her to see the finish, Mister Curley."

Curley looked at him curiously, moving off to the fourth row seat, where Mrs. Johnson's bright hat was visible. Just as the bell sounded she rose, and followed the promoter down the aisle. She cast one backward look, as the
ebony-skinned giant rose wearily from his stool.

Then she hurried out of the track.

JACK came slowly from his corner. Willard bobbed him back with that mast-like left hand of his. The champion seemed to have difficulty in getting his hands up. Jess poked him again, and then stepping in, smashed a terrific right to the heart.

Johnson went back against the ropes. His skin turned the pale gray of ashes. His chest and stomach muscles heaved spasmodically. He was badly hurt. The strength was draining out of his tired arms and legs. Do you realize what a choked, suffocating feeling follows a hard blow under the heart? Jack experienced it then. For an instant he seemed panic-stricken.

Then he clinched.

His face was a study. The eyes were closed. The muscles of his cheeks sagged like an old man's. The lips were partly open, showing the gold bridgework of which he was so proud, stained with blood. It was the face of a man already hopelessly beaten; the face of a half conscious man, who is trying—and failing—to brace himself against a fatal blow.

Johnson's knees were shaking with weakness. The reporters at the ringside spoke crisply to their telegraph operators, "Get ready for the flash—Willard by a knockout in the twenty-sixth!"

The giants broke from the clinch. Jess hit the old champion with a left hook, and then laid his 240-pounds into a smashing right-hander to the point of the chin.

It was a punch—and the Tall Pine of the Potawatomi could hit!

Johnson went down flat on his back. His eyes were glassy. His huge body, looking like black marble under its film of sweat, quivered.

The twenty-five thousand spectators screamed with Latin excitement. They bellowed Willard's name to the blue skies. They showered imprecations on the fallen champion—this champion so many millions of people wanted to see beaten. The telegraph keys rattled like mad—and thousands of men, standing before bulle-

tin boards from New York to San Francisco, shouted: "Johnson's been knocked down!"

The referee started his count.

"One—two—three—"

Johnson's body twitched. The torrid sun burned down in his face. He partly rolled away from it, lifting his glove to shield his eyes from the glare.

"Four—five—six—"

Willard, standing easily by the ropes, looked down at the stricken body with a grim smile. This, then, was the man of whom he had been afraid; the cause of his nervousness. This was Jack Johnson, by the eternal!—the man who had knocked out the invincible Jeffries. There he was, stretched out by a Willard punch. Jess tightened his right fist with convulsive joy.

"Seven—eight—nine—"

One second more now. One second more and he, Jess Willard, would be heavyweight champion of the world. One more second—it seemed an hour—that second—would it never pass?

"And—out!"

Champion of the world! The one white hope who had succeeded! Successor to Sullivan, Corbett, Fitzsimmons and Jeffries! A potential millionaire! These thoughts may have swept through the Tall Pine's slightly dazed brain, but they probably didn't. It usually takes a little time to realize the fact that one has reached the consummation of one's desires. Jess doubtless understood that he had knocked Johnson out, but the significance of that feat eluded him.

Welsh lifted Willard's right hand.

A roar burst from the crowd; a hoarse, excited bellow that carried in it a certain terrible triumph. Those closest to the ring sought to climb in; to pat Willard, to shake his hand, to share vicariously in his thrill. The new champion might have been pulled apart by his admirers except for the intervention of the Rurales. It was a near-riot.

They beat back the sweating, cheering fans with the flat of their machetes. They formed a circle around Willard, who towered high over them, and bucked a way through the human flood. No one paid much attention to the crestfallen Johnson.
I FELT sorry for the beaten champion. It was true that he had been a wild, incorrigible fellow. He was wanted by the American police, and was in practical exile from his country. Still, it was easy to understand the conditions that had shaped his destiny. An ignorant stevedore on the Galveston docks, Jack Johnson had been projected into the heavyweight championship, with all the money and fame that title implies. The big fellow didn’t have the balance to keep him from pinwheeling straight into trouble.

No matter how hard-boiled he was, this must have been a bitter moment for Jack Johnson. He had been hooded and reviled throughout the bout. He had laughed at that, but he could not laugh when he was completely ignored. That hurt more than anything else. Only a man who has been used to the continued notice and applause of the mob understands how sharply they can be missed.

Worse than that, he was still an exile. The United States was closed to him. Jack told newspapermen that he intended going to Martinique, and then to France, where he could raise pigs and chickens, and have peace. But we all knew he wouldn’t do anything of the sort. Peace and quiet were exactly the things he didn’t want. Johnson had been born for the hurly-burly.

As Jack sat moodily in his dressing-room, with his left eye puffed shut and his mouth rather badly cut inside, Jess Willard, the new champion of the world, was escorted back to Havana in triumph. Every automobile bore a white flag to indicate the Tall Pine’s victory.

Willard had cuts, covered now with court-plaster, on his cheeks, eyes and ears. Always disdainful of sartorial effects, the champion wore his black sombrero, a somewhat stained white sweater and baggy blue trousers.

Havana, which had been deserted during the fight, was ablaze with lights and music now. This was a gala event, one not soon to be forgotten. The favorite had won! The king was dead! Long live the Tall Pine!

I sat in Willard’s room that night. Usually lacking in vivaciousness, he now fairly bubbled with it. For the first time the realization that he was champion of the world—and what it meant—came to him. He talked of his wife and youngster, six thousand miles away; of future bouts and theatrical engagements and other lucrative contracts.

A whole new life had opened up before this man. He was transformed.

I couldn’t help thinking of the beaten champion. He had been paid thirty thousand dollars, while Willard received practically nothing for this fight in Oriental Park. But that represented the last important money Johnson would ever get. He was thirty-eight years old, a fugitive, an ex-champion, an unhappy man. He couldn’t go where he wanted most to go. The old glamour of his championship would no longer ease his path in foreign countries.

In short, when Referee Jack Welsh lifted Jess Willard’s right hand in the signal of victory, he rang down the curtain on Jack Johnson’s active life.

Out in the streets the noisy celebration continued. Here in Willard’s room was all the glow and good feeling that follows so smashing a triumph. But somewhere a big black man was sitting, gloomily considering the mess he had made of his life.

Johnson deserves to rank with the greatest heavyweights of all time. He could box and hit and think his way out of trouble. He had speed, strength and brains. But only in the ring. Outside of it he was still a kid, beset by problems he couldn’t understand, hungry for fun and willing to pay for it.

Somewhere in Havana, that warm, star-gemmed night, he was considering that price, and probably for the first time in his life realized that it was too high—that he had been a fool and a waster.
Stand-In For The Champ

By Barney Barnett

Pop Donlan, one-time Tenth Avenue Terror, plays out a hundred-proof Hiberian hunch.

THE welter champ was showing off for the gallery. It was his last public exhibition before his Madison Square Garden engagement. In addition to the good-sized crowd that had invaded the training quarters at fifty cents a head, a number of newspaper men had run up to Portchester to watch him in his last public workout.

The champ was in excellent humor. He had finished his stunt with the bags. Now he had taken on a third sparring partner for the fifth round of his exhibition bout.

Warmed up, the champ, under the watchful eye of his manager, was administering stiff punishment. Though he wore the usual heavily padded gloves to protect his hands, he was shooting over ruthless hooks and uppercuts that brought a murmur of excitement from the spectators. Back and forth across the ring and from corner to corner the champ drove the hapless youth who was paid so much a week to play chopping block for him.

Old Pop Donlan felt a twinge of disgust. The bout was too one-sided to appeal to his Celtic sense of justice. Somehow it savored of ancient Rome to Donlan. The sparring partner was under orders. He couldn't lash out and fight back. He had to pull his punches, absorb the punishment and at the same time endeavor to remain on his feet. Undoubtedly the champ could have knocked him out in a fair and even bout. But in this exhibition the sparring partner was the paid puppet who formed a background against which the champion became a glamorous figure.

A flurry of applause brought Pop Donlan's shrewd old eyes back to the ring. The champ, under a furious attack, had driven the sparring partner back into a neutral corner. They were close to Donlan. He could see the sparring partner wince under the barrage of the champ's heavy body blows. A trickle of claret crawled down from the youth's tight lips. His left eye was shadowed with a purple welt. Yet his gaze was bright and antagonistic. Donlan knew what he must be thinking. It was the hardest thing in the world to take a beating and not fight back.

Donlan looked the sparring partner over with some mild curiosity. He was a decidedly unprepossessing individual. His hair was thick, uncouth and reddish. He had a pinched, pale face, a crooked nose and a square chin. A spattering of freckles was on his face and shoulders. Donlan grew more interested. Anything Irish invariably drew his attention. Unless he was greatly mistaken, the sparring partner came from the beloved sod of Donlan's homeland.

It was almost over. Alex the Greek was giving the champ the office. The manager's uplifted finger told the champ to knock the sparring partner out.

The champ inclined his head and whipped across a vicious left. The sparring partner rocked on his heels. A straight right to the kidneys drove him back against the ropes. His tight lips twisted in momentary agony. Again the left and the right.

Pop Donlan showed a flash of admiration. The sparring partner could not be anything except Irish. He wouldn't drop, wouldn't go down, face to the canvas, and sprawl there for the edification of the crowd. It was as if sheer will power kept him on his feet, a wavering, stubborn target for the blows crashing against his vulnerable points.
“Guts!” Pop Donlan said to himself. “The lad’s got ‘em.”

Yet it was a physical impossibility for anyone to definitely withstand the champ’s offensive. Donlan shook his head. The sparring partner could have saved himself a lot of unnecessary pain by dropping, going through the formality of being counted out. He stood there reeling, trying to block, unable to strike back, for a full minute. Then, futilely trying to cover up he staggered out from the ropes.

The champ’s left smashed against the peak of his jaw. A right bounced off the taut skin above his diaphragm. The sparring partner’s gloved hands dropped. His knees buckled and he collapsed to frantic applause.

The champ grinned at the gallery, waved a hand and let Alex envelop him in a bright colored bathrobe.

A couple of the training camp’s handlers dragged the sparring partner out of the ring. The crowd started for the exit. The newspaper men surrounded the manager. Pop Donlan arose from the camp chair and started toward the door that led out into the street beyond.
“Hello, Pop. What are you doing up here? Say, you old-timers get around a bit!”

Donlan looked up at Bat Sweeney, a handbook man who had his headquarters in the Times Square district, and was always to be found watching any important final workout. Pop remembered him from years back. Sweeney never seemed to change. His hair was a little gray, perhaps, but his eyes remained as sharp and alert as ever, his clothing as loud and his cigar at its same old jaunty angle.

“Going down in the bus?” Donlan inquired.

“Better than that, old-timer. I've got a car parked around here somewhere. Ride home with me, Pop.”

“I will that,” Donlan answered. “And with pleasure.”

“Still living in the Bronx?” Sweeney asked, once he had located his coupé and Donlan was beside him. “Must be pretty lonesome now that your daughter is married, hey? Why don’t she live with you, Pop?”

Donlan smiled. “I don’t believe in it, Bat. The younger folks like to be by themselves. Ray wanted to after she and Johnny came back from their honeymoon, but I said no. I know how it was when I got married.”

Sweeney chuckled. “That was a long time ago, Pop. About the time you fought the London Terror at Coney Island.”

“What a memory you’ve got, bucko,” Donlan chided. “I suppose you were there that night. Forty rounds it went before I took the terror out o’ him. Forty rounds! It was a man’s fight, Bat. Nothing fancy or refined about it, neither.”

Donlan brooded over his lost glory while the coupé hurried down the Boston Post Road. It was always that way with him. A chance word, a reference or suggestion, and the dead years lived again in memory.

Donlan shook himself. It wasn’t good policy to bring up what had happened decades past and muse over it. It was, he often told himself, an unfailing sign of age. And he wasn’t old, old in the sense of physical infirmity. His heart and mind were young, young as those of any lad.

“What are you doing, now that the work on the bridge is finished?”

Bat Sweeney referred to the Hudson River span where Donlan had been a steel-spinner. With the final completion of the heavy cables, Donlan’s share in the work had come to an end.

“Not much of anything,” he confessed. “I've got a nest-egg put away and there’s my insurance. It ain’t as if I had to take a job away from somebody who needs it more than me.”

“That’s bad,” Sweeney said. “I mean, you sitting around, with Ray married, and nothing to occupy your mind.”

“I've been thinking,” Donlan said thoughtfully. “Thinking of sort of getting back in the game again. I’ve been keeping an eye peeled for some likely youngster I could take under my wing and make something of.”

“That’s the idea, old-timer,” Bat Sweeney agreed.

“Which reminds me,” Donlan continued slowly. “And who was it sparring with the champ? The lad with the red hair the champ knocked out?”

Sweeney twisted around. “Him? That’s Eddie Finley.”

“Finley? Could it be he’s related to the Brooklyn Finley’s?”

“This egg,” Sweeney retorted, “is related to the Sing Sing and Auburn Finley’s. He’s a bad actor, Pop. He’s as crooked as they come. He lies, cheats and would double-cross his best friend in a minute. I happen to know a little something about Eddie Finley because I wrote off a lot of bets on him last year. He was a comer once.”

“Then how is it I’ve never heard of him?” Donlan asked.

“Maybe you did, old-timer. Eddie Finley used to scrap under the name of Young Fitzgovern.”

“Young Fitzgovern is it?” Pop Donlan nodded to himself. “So he was Eddie Finley? And do I remember him?”

“You ought to—if you follow the game?”

“It seems to me,” Donlan continued, “Young Fitzgovern was handled by Artie McCabe.”
“Until the bout with ‘Sailor’ Kerns,” Sweeney put in. “That was the go I wrote the bets down on. Art picked Eddie up when he was only a tramp. He fed the kid, clothed him and tried to make something out of him. The fight with Kerns would have meant a whole lot to Finley. What did he do? I’ll tell you. For a grand he crossed Art McCabe just like he crossed everybody else. For a thousand bucks he finagled himself out of his one chance to be something. I’m surprised at Alex the Greek, letting him work up there. If Eddie couldn’t take it, he’d be starving to death.”

The outskirts of the Bronx loomed up over the border of Pelham. Pop Donlan moved further back against the leather upholstery. So Eddie Finley, the welterweight champ’s paid chopping block, was Young Fitzgovern. The old man nodded sagely to himself. He stirred when Sweeney brought the coupé to a stop before a narrow apartment house around the corner from the Jerome Avenue subway.

“Thanks, Bat.”

“Take care of yourself, old-timer. I’ll be seeing you.”

“That you will!” Donlan assured him, turning away to climb the carpeted stairs that led to his quiet, lonely flat.

The rooms were haunted by the cheery ghost of Ray, his daughter. Donlan seemed to see her everywhere. It had been a wrench when she married and went housekeeping with Johnny Quinn. She and Johnny came up every Sunday and took him to their place for dinner. Sundays were Donlan’s red-letter days. They made the week bearable.

Donlan turned on the light in the kitchen. He started to get his own dinner. Soon a frying pan spluttered, a pot with potatoes boiled, and the aroma of good, strong coffee tanged the air.

His thoughts moved from the absent Ray to the afternoon at Portchester. For some reason he couldn’t dismiss the picture of Eddie Finley with his thick, uncut red hair and pinched face. Again and again he saw Finley in the storm of the champ’s punches.

“Guts!” Donlan said to himself.

When he finished the meal, washed the dishes and put them away, half imagining Ray was coming in to see if he had been neat, Donlan went into the living-room and dragged out his “files.” The old man carefully kept the sporting pages of his favorite evening newspaper when they contained ring dope that interested him. Ray had always laughed at him. Donlan went through the old newspapers until he found what he wanted. Then he stuffed some Rose of Killarney into his corncob pipe, kicked off his boots and settled back to read the year-old accounts of the fight at the Queensboro Stadium between Young Fitzgovern and Sailor Kerns.

TWO nights later Donlan sat in the gallery at Madison Garden and watched the welter champ knock out his opponent after one minute and twenty-nine seconds of the seventh round.

It was a good fight, the type of combat the fight fans liked. Boxing science was replaced by rough-and-tumble slugging. It was a fight from the first gong, and the champ had defended his crown with the proper skill and ferocity.

The customers felt they had their money’s worth and Donlan agreed. Yet he could not help thinking the champ’s opponent had not taken more punishment during those six rounds than Eddie Finley had that afternoon at the Portchester training camp.

One morning toward the end of the week Pop Donlan dropped in at Chick Brannon’s gymnasium in Harlem. The place was a popular rendezvous for the lesser lights of the prize ring. Entering young fighters trained at Brannon’s. Many a topnotcher who had battled his way up from the rank and file could trace his beginnings back to the Harlem gymnasium, the paths of Central Park where he had first done his road work on frosty mornings, and Chick’s tight-lipped advice.

Pop Donlan greeted a number of old friends and looked the place over slowly. Almost the first person he saw was the same battered young man who had gone down under the welter champ’s furious attack in Portchester.

Eddie Finley, bundled in a faded blue sweater and baggy trousers, was hunched
up in a corner chair, yawning over a morning newspaper. Donlan nodded to himself and a minute later arranged it so he dropped casually down into the wooden chair beside Finley.

A swarthy young lightweight had climbed into the gymnasium ring to limber up. Chick Brannon, big, bluff and sarcastic, leaned negligently against one ring post, watching.

The lightweight mixed with a youth of his own age, size and weight. Brannon yawned and shook his head.

"You won’t do, kid. Not with that left. You advertise it a week before you sell it."

"But look what I did to Izzy Shapiro, Mr. Brannon."

"You won’t do, kid. Not until you’ve learned to sock with it. Climb down and take a bow. You’re due for a lot of lessons."

Eddie Finley yawned. Pop Donlan glanced up at him.

"By the way, you’re Young Fitzgov-ern, aren’t you?"

Finley nodded.

"That’s me."

"I thought so," Donlan murmured.

"What about it?" Finley inquired, with quick suspicion.

"You used to be a good fighter," Donlan went on. "Of course, I knew the way you double-crossed Art McCabe. And I know you’re mighty sorry you did, now. A thousand dollars. What did you do with it? Blow it in and have a good time? If you had the same chance over again, I guess perhaps you’d be a little wiser."

"Maybe."

Donlan inclined his head. "Maybe is right, lad. Look, now. You might have heard of me. Pop Donlan is the name and Johnny Quinn’s my son-in-law. Johnny, the next light-heavyweight champion."

"I’ve heard of you," Eddie Finley said.

"Sure you have. Be after listening to what I’m going to say. It’s only right a man of my age should have something to keep his mind occupied. I’ve been thinking. With all my knowledge and experience, why shouldn’t I get hold of some smart young feller and make something out of him? It’s done every day of the week. The only trouble," Donlan confided, "is to get some lad who’ll be on the level. I was thinking about you, Eddie Finley."

The one beside him folded the newspaper and discarded it. He lowered his chair to the floor. For a long minute he stared into Donlan’s blue eyes. Then, as if remembering something, he quickly averted his gaze.

"I can give and take it," Finley half mumbled. "The only trouble is everybody thinks I’m crooked. I did job Art McCabe,‘ he admitted defiantly, "but that wasn’t all my fault. The lob who handed me the steer promised I’d get more fights with bigger purses. Art’s cut of the take only left chicken feed for me. You know how it is."

"Yes," Donlan answered, "I know how it is."

Finley’s shifty glance lifted. "All I want is a chance to come back. I’m on the square now. No more funny stuff. Believe me, I’ve found out it doesn’t pay. If you wanted to give me a chance I’d go right through the line for you. Take the champ, for instance. I’ve been his sparring partner for the last month. I know that baby’s style better than he does himself. Build me up, get me a bout with the champ, and I’ll promise to knock him cuckoo before the fifth frame."

"Listen, Eddie Finley," Donlan murmured softly. "Come out and have a bit o’ lunch with me and we’ll talk this over."

A FEW days after that, Bat Sweeney, crossing the hub of the universe at Forty-second Street, ran into Donlan coming out of a corner cigar store. Sweeney grabbed the old man’s arm.

"What’s the matter, Pop? Going into your second childhood or something? I hear you’ve signed Eddie Finley?"

"And who told you that?"

"Chick Brannon. Was he kidding?"

Donlan shook his head. "No, it’s the truth, Bat. I’ve got Finley under my wing."

"Yeah? Well, look out he don’t pull all your pin feathers out. Pop, you must be nutty. A boy like Finley and an old-timer of your experience. You just must naturally love trouble."

"The lad can fight," Donlan said.
"Sure, and he can cheat, too. Look, Pop. I know the kid’s a real socker. You’ll build him up and make something out of him. For a while he’ll be on the level. They always are—at first. Then, when you’ve got him on edge for a big tilt, he’ll up and cross you as sure as there are little apples. Watch and see."

“And what,” Pop Donlan asked mildly, “do you be after thinking I’ll be doing when Eddie Finley is playing fast and loose with me?”

“I don’t know. Do you?” Sweeney asked blandly.

Donlan laughed. “Not yet. But I ain’t worrying. They say Providence looks out for the Irish.”

“You’ll need a lot of looking after,” Sweeney retorted, before he shook his head sadly and disappeared in the passing throng.

The same night, after Donlan had washed and put the dishes neatly away, there came the familiar hurry of footsteps on the stairs, the impatient tap of slim fingers on the door, and Ray Donlan came in. She was a new Ray, a glowing Ray, with her wind-tossed tawny hair, her starry eyes and red lips. These same lips implanted a quick kiss on Donlan’s rough cheek. Ray gave him a hug for good measure and grasped him by both shoulders.

“What’s all this I hear about you managing a crooked boxer, Pop?”

“Now who told you that?”

“Never mind. The main thing is I want to find out if it’s true."

It was obvious that son-in-law Johnny had informed her. Johnny, the next light-heavyweight champion. Johnny Quinn, with his finger on the pulse of pugilistic affairs.

Donlan grinned.

“If you mean I have got Eddie Finley under an iron-clad contract with an even percentage of the profit—yes. Ray, the lad is good. When I say good I mean he’s very good. I spied him up in Portchester one afternoon not so long ago. I—”

“But he isn’t honest, Pop!” Ray’s tone was troubled. “He’ll trick you. You’re an old man—”

“An old man is it?” Donlan roared. “I’ll have no child of mine tell me that. The way people talk, anybody who didn’t know me would think I had one of me feet in the grave and the other on a roller skate!” Donlan lapsed into the heavy brogue of his mother tongue whenever he was stirred. His shrewd eyes flashed.

“So it’s you that’s telling me I’m a doddering old numbskull, Ray? By the serpents of Saint Patrick, I’ll show you and everyone else that straight or crooked, Eddie Finley can’t deceive me!”

Ray felt a little reassured. As Pop Donlan suspected, it was Johnny Quinn who had come home with the news. She perched herself on the arm of the Morris chair she had sat in so often as a child and surveyed her father through half-closed eyes.

It was true Donlan looked fit and able to take care of himself. Steel-spinning had given him the lithe, sinewy figure of a man in the late thirties or early forties. His shoulders bulged under his flannel shirt; his forearms were thick and heavily muscled and his fists were big and hard.

Ray could picture him as the old Donlan of the Corbett, Fitzsimmons, Ruhlin and Peter Maher days. This surprising father of hers appeared to have located a metropolitan fountain of youth. She laughed.

“Well, I feel a little better about it. Pop, I’ll have to skip now. I promised I’d go to the movies with Johnny.”

“And how is my son-in-law?”

“If you can ever tear yourself away and come down and see us, you’ll find out for yourself.”

“I expect to be pretty busy from now on,” Donlan told her. “Busy with Eddie Finley.”

“Making him honest?” Ray flashed.

“Making him a champion!” Donlan answered.

FOR a month Pop Donlan went ahead slowly with Finley. Every morning he had him working at Brannon’s Harlem gym. Donlan, who had nothing but contempt for many of the modern training methods, coached and pointed Finley according to his own ideas. Donlan turned the leaves in the book of time. He went back to another day when he had trained diligently and earnestly. A great be-
liever in road work, Donlan had Finley on the Park paths every morning, regardless of the weather, clicking off a five-mile workout. He brushed up Finley’s boxing and foot work but concentrated mainly on an aggressive, rushing style of fighting similar to the Dempsey technique.

Donlan believed the first duty of a fighter was to fight. He couldn’t tolerate any prolonged boxing session where two highly skilled disciples of swat fenced and fiddled, slapped each other with light, rapier-like thrusts and hardly worked up a sweat by the end of the last round. The great fighters of fistic history had been those who fought from the first round to the count of the referee. Fighters who rushed in and slugged grimly away until the battle was over.

Eddie Finley responded to that kind of instruction. The boy had the killer instinct. Pop Donlan had been sure of that the afternoon he had first seen the tight-lipped mouth and vehement glare in Eddie Finley’s narrowed eyes.

He went ahead slowly and methodically, aware his old friends were secretly sympathizing with him. Even Ray and Johnny had tactfully dropped the subject of Finley. When Donlan took his Sunday dinner with them, neither his daughter nor son-in-law mentioned his protégé. It amused Donlan sardonically. Some day soon he would darn well show them all.

Some day soon—

Finley’s bow under the Donlan management took place at a Newark fight club. Donlan, superstitious as all true Irishmen, abandoned Finley’s previous fighting sobriquet. Young Fitzgovern gave way to “Tiger” Regan. Donlan liked the suave sound of “Tiger” on his tongue. He liked it better when the semifinal came up and Finley stood the crowd on its feet for a flaring instant. The echoes of the gong heralding the second round had hardly died when Finley propped his badly-beaten opponent up, savagely measured him and knocked him out with one ferocious right hook to the button.

If Donlan anticipated any trouble in matchmaking because of the Finley-Art McCabe episode, he was pleasantly disappointed. The high powers of boxing had never blacklisted Young Fitzgovern. A fighter’s private difficulties with his manager were things beyond their ken. If Young Fitzgovern had been concerned in a crooked bout, no wind of it had blown to their official ears, no complaints had been made and there was nothing against the new Tiger Regan boxing in the State of New York.

Donlan signed him for a preliminary at the Garden and watched Finley finish his man in the third stanza. A few of the sports writers liked the way Finley administered the knockout drops. At least one sheet carried an account of the prelim with a flattering word for the Tiger. Donlan, reading it, was relieved to find its author had not, as was the habit of some newspaper men, muck-raked into the past.

“Well, and what do you think of Eddie Finley now?” he asked Bat Sweeney the morning after the Madison Square adventure.

“Same as before,” Sweeney replied. “The kid’s too smart to try the monkey-business yet. He’ll go on the same as he did with Art until you’re in sight of the big dough. Then, all of a sudden, you’ll find yourself out one fighter and a lot of money.”

Donlan laughed. “Here ye, Bat, me boy. Is it that you sit up all night gathering pessimistic ideas? Don’t you see anything honest in anybody? And don’t you be knowing that thieves can mend their ways the same as tailors can mend your coat?”

Sweeney’s alert gaze roamed over Donlan.

“Listen, Pop,” he said sententiously, “did you ever see a white blackbird?”

AFTER Finley’s debut at the Garden, Ray Quinn broke her silence regarding Finley and asked questions, anxious, pointed questions.

Donlan answered them enthusiastically. He was out gunning for the champ—that same merciless individual who had battered Finley into insensibility at a nod from Alex the Greek. A few more fights, Donlan pointed out, a crack at the contender and then the challenge to the champion. Alex wouldn’t turn him down.
The champ’s manager never refused a bout where the cut was right. And, Donlan said, the division of the purse would be right. No matter what the small end of it was, the main thing was the title and the melons to be picked in the future.

“Pop, do you really think Finley’s turned over a new leaf?” Ray inquired.

“What does Johnny think?”

Ray colored faintly.

“Well, Johnny—”

“I know,” Donlan interrupted grimly. “Johnny’s like Bat and Chick Brannon and all the rest. He thinks the lad is just marking time. Listen to me, Ray. I’ve spent money having this boy looked up. I’ve investigated his family and his whole record. He comes from out Ohio way. His father’s dead but his mother’s still living and there’s nothing against him—outside the McCabe matter—any more than there was against me when I was his age. So don’t you go thinking things. Bat Sweeney tells me there ain’t any white blackbirds. ’Tis true, no doubt, but a lot of them mayn’t be as black as they’re painted.”

In rapid succession Tiger Regan won his next four engagements. Then came his crack at the contender for welterweight honors.

The bout took place early that spring for the Milk Fund at the Yankee Stadium. It went nine bitter rounds, nine rounds of furious fighting that delighted the crowd at the Stadium. In the end Finley, who had taken punishment sufficient to have made a referee stop other fights, waded in, found the contender in no better shape than he and knocked him out with his now famous right to the jaw.

A week after that, Tiger Regan was signed to meet the champion in September.

Donlan, realizing the supreme importance of the encounter, worked on Finley with the same slow, methodical care. Still using Chick Brannon’s gymnasium as his headquarters, he planned to carry Finley through the summer without having him go stale or prematurely attain a razorkeen edge that would wear off before the September night of the big fight.

He nursed Finley along zealously, watching him, guarding him, caring for him as some gem connoisseur might a valuable uncut diamond or priceless jewel.

Early that August Donlan pitched his camp in the foothills of the Catskills. It was a pleasant spot, but Eddie Finley was not destined to enjoy its beauties. Donlan plunged him into the whirl of training and set up a rigid guard.

Donlan’s camp was one spot where dollar-a-head spectators were not welcome. Let Alex the Greek reap the harvest of the enthusiastic fans. He was taking no unnecessary chances. A hideout for outlaws could have been no more secret than Eddie Finley’s Catskill encampment.

Ray and Johnny Quinn went up for two week-ends. Ray could make nothing of Finley. He remained, as had from the first, an uncommunicative, sullen person. Ray didn’t like his shifty, evasive eyes or his deep silences. Johnny, on the other hand, was enthusiastic. He put on the gloves with Finley and confided in Ray after the few rounds they boxed.

“This guy’s good, honey. You needn’t tell your father, but he had me guessing more than once. Good thing he was wearing the pillows. He sure packs dynamite in his set of knuckles.”

“But I’m still worried,” the tawny-haired Ray confessed.

Johnny Quinn laughed. “I guess that crooked business has all worn off now. A guy would have to be pretty dumb to bite the hand pushing him up the ladder.”

POP DONLAN broke camp two nights before the championship fight and went back to the city. He put Finley up at the Bronx apartment, avoided all newspaper men and continued to play watch dog. But his vigil was broken sometime during the afternoon of the day before the fight. Then a telephone call drifted in from a Fordham hospital and Pop Donlan learned that he was a grandfather.

He hung up the telephone with a shaking hand, reached for his hat and loomed up in the doorway of the living-room where Eddie Finley sprawled, reading about himself in a morning newspaper.

“Whist, bucko!” Donlan cried unsteadily. “I’ll be leaving you now for a while. There’s another Donlan in the world by the name of Quinn. Faith! I forgot to
ask whether it was a boy or a girl!"

That was toward mid-afternoon. When Donlan went back to the apartment at
twilight there was no Eddie Finley in
the living-room to greet him. A little
later the telephone hummed and at some
minutes after eight o'clock the front
doorbell rang. Donlan opened it and Bat
Sweeney walked in.

"Look, Pop. I hate to rub it in, but
I might as well break it and get it over
with. Finley's crossed you."

"You're crazy," Donlan growled. "He
left a note for me. He's gone over to
Chick's to get some stuff out of his locker.
All the while I've been after watching
him like a hawk. No one's as much as
whispered a word to the lad."

Sweeney saw that beneath Donlan's
bluster the old man was worried. He
hated to do it, but it was necessary.

"Pop," he began slowly, "I warned you
a long time ago. You can't change
the leopard's spots and you can't make a
blackbird any other color. Once a crook
always a crook. I happen to know for a
fact Eddie Finley was up in Alex the
Greek's hotel suite no more than an hour
ago. Alex ain't taking no chances. I
don't know how much it is but this time
it's probably a lot more than a grand.
Anyhow, you can bet your Sunday suit
and throw your vest in that they've got
to him good and proper!"

Donlan's faded old eyes dwelt specula-
tively on Sweeney. He drew a breath
and shook his head. "I don't believe it,
Bat. I haven't worked with Eddie all
this time not to know the boy. Black-
bird, sure—at first. But not now, Bat.
And listen. Don't you be going and giv-
ing too long a price on Eddie Finley for
the fight tomorrow night."

"What do you mean, Pop? Have you
something up your sleeve?"

"That I have."

Sweeney pricked up his ears. "What,
Pop?"

"Me elbow!" Donlan replied. He
chuckled. "Get along with you, Bat. You
ought to know by this time I'm old
enough to take care of myself."

When Sweeney left, Donlan arranged
himself in the Morris chair. He took
off his shoes and stretched out comfort-
ably. For a minute his thoughts cen-
tered about Finley and the news Bat
Sweeney had brought. Then, curiously,
the fight game with its excitement, noise
and drama, faded from his mind. In its
place came a picture of a hospital room.
He saw Ray looking up at him from the
white pillow, saw her Irish eyes all aglow
with mother love. Donlan smiled. The
prize ring had given way to the shrill cry
of a young baby. Donlan lifted the index
finger of his right hand and looked at it.
It was to that finger Ray's son had clung
with pigmy strength.

"Husky!" Donlan said to himself. "A
good husky young one. He's got the mak-
ings of a champ already and he isn't a day
old!"

Somewhere a door opened in the apart-
ment. Footfalls sounded, Donlan jerked
his head up.

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Pop."

Donlan nodded. "Come in, Eddie. Did
you get the stuff out of the locker? Come
in and sit down. I'm wanting to talk with
you."

THE next night Pop Donlan watched
through the lower ropes what experts
agreed was the greatest fight for a cham-
pionship title seen in New York for many
a year.

The welter champ had the first five
rounds solidly to his credit when the scales
of combat began to slowly swing in the
opposite direction. When the sixth round
came up, Tiger Regan reeled out from
his corner. The odd cut under his left
eye, which the newspaper brigade noticed
he had worn into the ring, had been
patched up. For five rounds the champ
had made it a target. He had half closed
the eye, but Finley, despite the pain and
swelling, took the sixth round by a nar-
row margin.

In the seventh frame he savagely ham-
ered his way through to a knockdown.
Twenty seconds before the bell ended
that round, Finley caught the champ with
a short uppercut that hurled him to the
ropes. A left and a right dropped the
champ, but he was on his feet at the
count of nine, desperately hanging on in a
clinch.

Finley came out for the eighth surpris-
ingly fresh and fast. The tide of battle
had swung altogether around then. Finley took the play away from the champ. Following up the advantage gained at the bell in the previous round, he pressed in, hooking and jabbing. Again he floored the champ for the count of nine. And again the bell saved his opponent when Finley had him propped up and measured for a knockout.

The buzz of excitement deepened while the crowd waited expectantly for the tenth-round warning whistle.

Donlan crouched beside Finley, administering to him. The old man spoke no word. Finley sat on the stool, bent stiffly forward. His one good eye was fixed vehemently on the other corner. His lips were drawn back over his teeth. Pop Donlan nodded with satisfaction. Countless times he had seen fighting faces like that. No advice or instructions were needed.

When the bell clanged, Finley shot out from his corner. Apparently the champ had benefited by his breathing spell. He looked fresher, stronger. But Finley knew what lay behind the veneer.

The champ boxed at long range. He had evidently been told to keep from getting in close. With a snarl, Finley backed him across to a neutral corner and worked at the body. A left glanced through the champ’s guard. Finley bobbed and weaved. The champ was short with two straight rights to the head. Eddie Finley backed away, and the champ, forgetting his instructions, rushed in to fight.

It was the opportunity Finley wanted. Muttering something the watching Pop Donlan could not hear, Finley lashed out a left. He drove it to the kidneys and crossed with a right hook.

The champ’s head snapped back. Then, while the other was off balance and in that fleeting second of hesitation and chance, Finley leaped in. The killer instinct flamed in his sweat-stained, bruised and contorted face. Deliberately he led with his vicious left and smashed his right glove over.

Both blows registered. The champ pitched forward as if struck by lightning. Roaring pandemonium swept across the ring in an ever-growing wave.

The referee’s arm mechanically rose and fell. Donlan, knowing it was all over, was aware of Johnny Quinn standing on a chair—a shrieking, undignified Johnny who acted in keeping with his new, parental rôle.

Donlan turned away and climbed into the ring. It was all over now. All finished except for him to lead his champion through the howling crowd and downstairs to the dressing-room.

SOME ten minutes later Bat Sweeney encountered Donlan in the corridor.

“Pop, you’re a wonder! Old-timer, I take my hat off to you. How about a bite of something to eat? I want to talk to you.”

“I’m sorry,” Donlan said, “but I’ve got to get up to Fordham—to the hospital. I promised Ray I’d tell her all about the fight, and I’d better because Johnny’s in no condition. Besides that, I got to fix Eddie’s eye up. You saw it. It’s a bad lamp the lad has.”

“Tell me something,” Sweeney requested. “What happened to that eye?”

Donlan smiled ruefully. He shook his head. Then he led Sweeney a little way off from the dressing-room door. There was distress written on his kindly, wrinkled face.

“Bat, I gave Eddie that shiner! I gave it to him last night when I accused him of selling me out. Bat, I had a crazy idea. I could straighten Eddie out with these two hands of mine. So I set out to give him a beating—”

“What did he do?”

“Just wound his arms around his head and took it. But I was wrong.

“Just a while ago I found out Eddie did go down to Alex the Greek’s but not to take. He went down to give. The lad wanted to show them he was on the level now; wanted a crack at Alex’s nose. Bat, I’m getting stupid in my old age. I should have known—”

“But how could you know, Pop?”

Donlan squared his shoulders. “That afternoon up in Portchester should have told me. You can’t lick an Irishman and then buy him off when he has a chance to fight back. It ain’t in the blood, Bat—and I failed to remember it!”
THE SOCK-ABSORBER

By Pat Stagg

Trial-horse Butch Hogan was a mugg, a never-was. But like a bolt from the blue came the "cosmic" secret of champions!

Butch Hogan, the battle-scarred old palooka, stood there gaping idiotically. Out cold on his feet. Frozen-eyed goofy, his face a garish splotch of crimson in the swirling blue fog of tobacco smoke.

Smack! Wet leather exploded on unguarded jaw-bone. Butch crashed to the canvas. The ref's arm rose and fell, tolling off the count. And the crowd howled like Alaskan timber wolves gone mad at the kill.

How they roared! Good old Butch! Kayoed again. But what a battle, while he'd lasted! Game as they come. Butch stirred, opened his eyes. The pack thundered acclaim. Not for the victor, who was already leaving the ring, but for Butch, the palooka, the great-hearted trial-horse, the pork-and-bean buster of ballyhoo bubbles.

Sure, he was a mug, a never-was! But he slugged till he dropped. And the kids coming up, the fresh fledglings bidding for headlines—they had to be darn good to beat tough old Butch.

He was an institution, a finishing school. If they hurdles old Butch, it was their diploma into the big-time. Butch himself had never hit the big-time because it was taken for granted that he was just a trial-horse. And because Butch never had ambitions that way. Or any other way, for that matter.

Butch's seconds lugged him to his corner. Skeeter Mott briskly massaged the back of his neck. Somebody jammed the hell-bottle hard against his nostrils.

The acrid fumes stung Butch back to life. He pushed the bottle away, threw his bathrobe loosely over his shoulders, and danced into the center of the ring, acknowledging the roar of applause with the proverbial pantomimed hand-shake overhead.

Then he ducked through the ropes and into the pathway leading to the dressing-rooms below.

A rubdown and shower freshened him. He grinned painfully at the puffed and discolored apparition that smirked back at him from the mirror.

"Wotta lamp! And, Cheez, izzat nose all mine?"

Skeeter Mott chuckled. "Wait'll the gang gets a load of that!"

Hogan turned savagely on his manager. "Yeah? An' howja like to own the twin to it? Another crack like that—"

"You ain't gettin' sensitive, are yuh, Butch?" whined the Skeeter, retreating fearfully.

"'Naw, but what's idea of stickin' me up against a tough monkey like that tonight? Not that I couldn't lick 'im easy—"

"Sure, if you'd trained on something besides Joe the Barber's chair. I toldja he's good, but—"

Butch snorted. "Bottle yer chin before I put the slug on ya. C'mon, let's blow to Maxy's." He gave a final tuck to his green-and-orange tie, pressed down the strip of surgeon's tape on the deep gash over his eye, and stepped out into the street with his sparrow-ribbed little manager hurrying in his wake.

"Hi, Butch!" An alert asphalt-baron greeted him, grinding up to the curb.

"Maxy's as usual? Tough ya lost."

"It ain't the first time," snapped Butch.

He hated sympathy. And a fight was just a fight now. After the first two hundred battles it didn't matter much whether you won or lost, kayoed the other mug or got slapped to sleep yourself. All in the racket. Most times you didn't even feel a headache after a kayo. Just a little woozy, tired. And it only took a couple of drinks to fix that up.
Maxy himself, greasy-haired, sleek, effusive, greeted them. Waiters and patrons of the night club melted before him as he piloted Butch and the Skeeter to a ring-side table on the edge of the dance floor.

"We're all broke up over yer losin', Butch," Maxy wheedled. "Listen, even the awkister. They're playin' that number for ya, Butch—'He's a jolly good feller!'"

"Aw, scram, Maxy. I ain't sobbin'. I come here for a blow. Bring up th' drinks!"

Maxy scuttled through a gilded door. Butch looked the crowd over boldly. Bright eyes smiled at him. Carmine lips called invitations to join other tables.

Butch nodded coolly. Plenty of time to mix—later. He'd have a few snorts with the Skeeter first. Give his swollen map a chance to trim sail. Not that he'd look like Little Lord Fauntleroy at his best. Not with his permanently battered-in nose, scar-twisted lips and scrambled ears. Those marks of battle would never disappear.

But he'd look less like he'd just come off second best in a cross-roads argument with a fast freight if the swelling of tonight's bout went down a little.
The music softened suddenly. The Skeeter was talking to him.

"If you'd only keep off the liquor, Butch, you could be champ," the Skeeter was whining. "Looka the way you handled that yap for seven heats—until yer wind gave out an' he slogged yer one in the basket. I ain't astin' yer to train, Butch. No roadwork or sparring partners. Just the liquor, Butch, an' yer champ—"

Hogan scowled blackly, twirling the ice in his glass. "Liquor, huh, Skeeter? Just lay offa the liquor, huh? Say, you, get this an' get it final! I'm a mug, savvy? A palook. I'm good fer half a grand anytime, 'cause they know I'll slug till I drop. An' as long as I last, you get yer cut, see? But that's all there is; there ain't no more to Butch Hogan. Palook first, last and all the time. An' you clamp the lid on that whinin' about me trainin' and becomin' champ or yer gonna get somethin' real to whine about. Get it?"

"Sure, Butch. Not another squawk. I was just figgerin' you might be gettin' five grand instead of five fish—"

Hogan raised his glass and drained it. "Gimme that bottle. It's all I got between beatin's. Get me?"

"Sure, Butch."

**HOGAN** began to expand. The dizzy, weak feeling he had when he entered gave way to a tingling sensation. He gulped another drink. The fever-rhythm beat of the orchestra fell urgently on his ears.

He arose unsteadily and pushed his way brusquely through the throng of dancers. A starry-eyed girl, whirling in the arms of a flame-thatched husky, caught his eye.

Sober, Butch might have hesitated about interrupting that carrot-topped figure. He knew it was Tony LeFarge, the Red Terror. The sports scribes were ballyhooing him as the uncrowned light-heavy champ. He was hot in line for a shot at the title. And Butch had seen him work—a two-fisted slugger, and clever.

But all he saw now was the girl. She'd smiled at him. A smile that rippled clear through him. Butch wanted to dance with her. He caught LeFarge roughly by the shoulder, almost sending him sprawling.

"Cuttin' in, Red," he grinned.

LeFarge gaped at him, open-mouthed. He was dreaming. This wasn't happening to him, the Red Terror. Not this lop-eared, fourth-rate palooka trying to bust in on him!

Butch and the girl were already half a dozen steps away. She giggled at him admiringly. "You gotta nerve!"

"Yeah?" retorted Butch, in his best conversational vein.

Then came LeFarge. The Red Terror hurled couples helter-skelter from his path in a headlong rush. Butch grinned. A scrap, was it?

"Guess they's company comin'," he chuckled.

It came in a swarming flurry of bare knuckles. Butch felt hot metal claw his cheek. LeFarge's ringed finger slashed a furrow down his face. Butch tasted the salt claret trickling by his mouth. He stabbed a left into LeFarge's nose. The Red Terror drove him back, pounding savagely.

The crowd moved out of range. A few shouted wildly. Mostly they hung silent on the spectacle of professional fighters battling out of the ring. Maxy trembled in horror on the edge of the impromptu arena, protesting shrilly, wringing his hands.

The Terror was hitting Butch three to one as they fought grimly, silently, crashing against chairs and tables. Butch knew that. But he gloried in the realization that he was smashing LeFarge just twice as hard. He was taking all the Red Terror would give him without being hurt. Or hurt much.

"C'mon, you ten-cent terror!" he mocked.

Suddenly they were down. Hogan felt himself butted in the midriff, then hurtled backward to the floor—with LeFarge on top. With an effort, he wrenched free. The Terror flung himself forward again, flogging both fists into Butch's already swollen face.

Hogan felt his exhilaration ebbing. He was mad. Mad clean through. Worse, he was weakening rapidly. There was only one chance—to get in close. Boxing, he was lost. Slugging was his game.

Butch waded in. He beat a murderous tattoo on LeFarge's belly. The Terror skipped back, lost his balance on the slip-
perry dance floor, half stumbled, his hand out to break the fall.

Butch swung. It was too easy. A short right, uncorked with elbow hooked, with every ounce of his 175 pounds behind it. LeFarge sprawled cold on the floor.

BUTCH straightened his tie. "Gimme a drink—fast!" he snapped. Maxy thrust a glass into his hand, and Butch drained it thirstily. The crowd buzzed like hornets.

"He kayoed the Terror!"
"What a sock! Wham!"
"He'll be out for a week!"
"And LeFarge the uncrowned champ!"

Butch went over and sat down with the Skeeter. His manager goggled at him, mouth agape.

"But Butch! Why, say—that was LeFarge, the Red Terror. The—the—"
"Yeah," said Butch, suddenly tired. "I know. Gimme a drink."
"Sure, Butch, sure. But—"
"Let's get outa here before the cops bust in. C'mon. We'll scram."

The night air felt fresh and clean. Butch sank wearily into the cushioned seat of a taxi. His head was whirling. He ran his hand over his twice-bludgeoned face. It felt like a sponge.

He didn't remember when the Skeeter got out, nor did he recall the drive up Broadway and out to the beach cottage on Long Island where he stayed during the summer.

He stumbled against something in the doorway. A basket, with a bundle of clothes in it. Butch lit a match. He blinked at the bundle, and then a low exclamation escaped him.

"Cheez! It's—it's a brat!"

He regarded it solemnly. What was the big idea of people leaving their kids around like that? They'd oughta know better. Suddenly cold fear gripped him. Something in his throat.

It was a tiny kid, all alone. Unguarded for hours. Maybe starving! How long did it take a kid to starve to death? He'd better act fast. A can of soup. Or did babies eat soup?

"Cheez!" mumbled Butch aloud. "I wonder if they do?"

He lifted the bundle into his arms. He fumbled for the light inside. Swiftly he looked at his late caller—a golden-haired kid with April-sky blue eyes. And suddenly Butch could have shouted to the heavens for joy.

For the kid, the crazy little devil of a brat, was chuckling up at him in silent ecstasy! Laughing with flashing dimples at him!

"Cheez!" said Butch reverently.

NOBODY could figure Butch Hogan after that brawl with the Red Terror at Maxy's.

The fight scribes got wind of it and played it heavy. They kidded him at first. Said he ought to go into the ring "stiff" after this and train on Tom Collinses.

Then they got a little sore. They thought he had the big head when he told them, through Skeeter Mott, that he was going to campaign for the title and wouldn't be available for any offers for at least two months.

That was a laugh! It knocked 'em into the aisles. Butch Hogan, the tide-water palooka, talking about the championship. Just because he'd shellacked Tony LeFarge when they were both fried to the eyebrows in a rough-and-tumble night club brawl. What a howl that was!

Nor did Skeeter Mott, for all his pleading with Hogan to lay off the liquor, exactly go wild with joy over Butch's crisp announcement that he'd reformed.

The Skeeter had felt particularly pleased with himself. For hadn't he, on the strength of the scrap at Maxy's, squeezed a whole grand out of the Garden promoter for Butch's next battle?

The birds sang. The world seemed remarkably bright and cheery. The sun danced on the rippling waters of Long Island Sound and cast something strangely akin to poetry into the shallow heart of Skeeter Mott. He turned the doorknob, the good news already framed on his lips.

What was this? The door locked? Skeeter Mott couldn't figure that one out. The door was never locked. Even when Butch was away. He started to turn back when a weird noise halted him.

"Da-da. Uppity-uppity, Whoooooo!"

The Skeeter stopped cold. Ice water raced through his veins. He shuddered.

He must have been mistaken. The wind—

Then the Skeeter knew. He hadn’t been wrong. He knew that voice. Butch was in there and Butch had gone nuts. Sluggoofy. Balmy. Poor old Butch! Ready to cut out paper dolls with round-edged scissors.

The Skeeter groaned. But at least Butch didn’t sound violent. He rapped timidly.

Hogan opened the door just enough to poke his head out. He regarded Mott queerly, as though he were frightened of something.

The Skeeter retreated. He understood. When guys went nuts they often got funny ideas that somebody was after them. Acted scared to death.

“It’s just me, Butch. Skeeter Mott. You remember the old Skeeter, yer old pal, doncha?” he pleaded.

“Scram!” growled Butch.

“Sure, Butch. I’m goin’ now. Just dropped around to tell yer I got a grand fyer next scrap.”

“You got a grand?” Hogan’s scowl vanished. He squeezed through the narrowest possible opening of the door and closed it quickly behind him. The Skeeter felt faint. His worst fears were confirmed now. For Butch Hogan had a fancy pink apron around his waist! Butch Hogan had a fancy pink—! The Skeeter moaned hollowly.

“A grand, huh?” Butch went on. “Well, that ain’t enough, see? I want two grand when I go back. In about two months. I’m trainin’. Goin’ after the big dough an’ the title. Get it?”

“Yeah, Butch, sure,” said the Skeeter, heavily. “I got it. You wanna be champ.”

“I’m gonna be champ! Get it?”

“Sure, I got it, Butch. A course yer gonna be champ.”

His eyes hung fascinated on Hogan’s apron. Butch in nursemaid frills. Talking baby-talk to himself. Poor, punch-drunk old Butch!

“Whatcher gawpin’ at?” Butch snarled.


“Sure, I’m feelin’ okay. Never better. I’m trainin’. No more brave-maker. No more Maxy’s. Up at six. A five-mile hoof up the road, shadow boxin’ eight rounds, punchin’ the bag afternoons. Got the bag rigged up there by the shack, see?”

“Yeah, that’s fine, Butch, that’s great.” The Skeeter sighed again.

“What’s eatin’ ya?” demanded Butch, suspiciously. “Ain’t I doin’ what yer always ast?”

“Sure, Butch. It’s great, I’m tellin’ yer. I’ll get my duds an’ move out tomorrow to help yer train.”

“You’ll keep away from here!” roared Butch, reddening. “I don’t need no help, see? You do the managin’. Me, I’m the fighter. Get it? I’m the fighter. I’ll tip ya off when I’m ready. Now scram—fast!”

The Skeeter scammed. As fast as he could leg it. There had come a wild, homicidal look into Hogan’s eye when he’d mentioned joining him at the cottage. Crazy as a loon! Yes, sir!

Poor Butch!

And Skeeter Mott would have thought he was crazier than any loon if he’d looked into the shack a minute later. For there was Butch, a hard-boiled product of Cauliflower Alley if there ever was one, down on his knees. Making sounds like an idiot. Shaking an ivory rattle in front of a wide-eyed little brat!

And Butch was saying, shaking his gnarled fist at the kid:

“Yeah, an’ get this, see? You’re my kid. They quit ya cold. Left ya with a note saying you was Georgie. An’ they couldn’t afford to keep ya. So you’re mine, get it? I’m gonna be champ an’ send ya to collitch. An’ yer gonna be president of the United States. Yeah, an’ I’ll smash anybody cold that votes against ya, get it? Why, you pug-nosed little monkey, I believe you’re laughin’ at me! Scram!”

He lifted the baby high in the air, singing, “Uppity-uppity-uppity. Ooooooo!”

Poor old Butch!

BUTCH HOGAN’S return to the squared circle after a two-months’ absence created little comment.

He fought his usual spot, the semi-windup. The matchmaker grudgingly lived up to his promise of a “grand” on the strength of the ballyhoo over Butch’s kayoing LeFarge in the mixup at Maxy’s. But he stuck him in against Mike Sheridan, a highly-touted youngster, in the belief that
Sheridan would knock him silly and back to the $500 class.

Butch stopped him in two heats.

Next came Joe Baker, the toughest slugger on the market. The big shots were side-stepping Baker. He hadn’t dropped the nod in twenty-two starts. Most of them he’d won via the kayo route.

Butch slaughter ed him in four.

He hung the chill on his next three opponents in short order before the scribes finally began to buzz. They didn’t pretend to understand what had come over Butch. They put it down chiefly to confidence gained by his kayoing the Red Terror, LeFarge, at Maxy’s.

He seemed to go crazy in the ring. He smashed them all down, battered them to the canvas, with a kind of an undeniable frenzy.

“As though inspired,” one writer put it, and took plenty of razzing for letting that phrase slip out.

“Old Butch Hogan inspired!” the gang in the press-box howled. “Listen to that!”

A humorous writer on one sheet pounded out a phoney interview with Butch Hogan in which Butch related how he had discovered the Fountain of Youth. Another ran a cartoon of him rising from the scrap-pile of has-beens and reaching for the championship crown.

Butch shied away from all interviews. He was scared to death that his secret would get out. He couldn’t tell them he was doing it for the kid—for Georgie—and that somehow the kid had made life seem all different. They’d laugh him out of town.

He fought his way up the ranks, and still the scribes and fans refused to take him seriously. They cheered their lungs out for him. But he was still Butch Hogan, the palooka, the fighting fool he’d always been, the tough mugg the newcomers had to get by to hit the headlines.

It wouldn’t last. It couldn’t. He was just making a last dazzling flare before dying out and fading into the limbo of gladiators whose days were over.

Then the Garden signed him to fight Tony LeFarge, the Red Terror. It was the “natural” of the season. Particularly after the affair at Maxy’s. And the winner was down in black and white for a crack at the champ and the crown.

Butch could hardly believe it when he read the terms. His end was twenty-five grand, win, lose or draw.

That was enough to put the kid through college! Put him through in style, with plenty of clothes and a nickel-plated sport roadster. His kid! Little Georgie.

Butch worked as he had never worked before for the big bout. He rented a camp at Speculator. He pounded the road for mile on mile. He felt a surging joy as he left his sparring partners and trainers panting far in the rear. They couldn’t stand the gaff of his pace. They wilted while he raced on, his lungs no longer heaving and bursting and black spots flickering before his eyes as they had at first. Now each breath of cold, wine-like October air filled him with the driving power to go on indefinitely.

Good old-fashioned roadwork and plenty of it. Sometimes Butch chuckled to himself. He could scarcely believe it was himself, Butch Hogan, the mugg whose training had always been limited to a slick shave and a strong dash of bay rum.

After the morning jaunt, he rested. A light lunch. At two o’clock anywhere from six to ten rounds of sparring with the big pillow gloves while the regiment of sports scribes looked on and made wisecracks. They couldn’t get over the idea that he was still the old palook, and it was comic to see him working so hard now that it was too late, when his youth was gone and his ring days just about over. Nearly thirty-five, wasn’t he? And going after the title!

Butch left them to write their sarcastic dispatches right after the day’s routine was ended. The scribes tried to cross-examine him about where he went. Butch snarled then, warned them to keep their noses out of his private affairs.

Tod Lowry, of the Globe, tried to get the low-down. He trailed Butch to a secluded house ten miles away and spotted a trained nurse through a window before Butch nabbed him and poked him. He came back daubing red from his nose.

The next day Hogan cut his schedule and hurried away at noon after raging through his whole staff of sparring partners. None of them lasted more than two minutes.
The wires hummed that Hogan was drawn fine. Right on edge, as indicated by his irritability.

Butch cut his last scheduled workout before the fight entirely. He sent word that he had hit the peak and didn’t want to risk going stale.

Only the trained nurse and doctor saw him pace the floor of the secluded hide-out all that night, wild-eyed, muttering, trembling.

“Diphtheria,” the doctor said, bending over little Georgie’s crib.

“It ain’t bad, doc?” Butch pleaded.

“He couldn’t—”

“I’m afraid it’s very serious. But he’s making a great fight of it. He’s got your heart, all right. Not a speck of yellow in him.”

Butch couldn’t bring himself to look at Georgie. The blue eyes that had laughed at his fears when they first met on the cottage doorstep nearly a year before were closed now. The golden hair framed the chubby face in damp curls as the fever mounted.

On the day of the fight the doctor told him the crisis would be reached sometime that evening.

“Ya mean, doc, it’s—it’s either he wins or the—the long count?”

The physician nodded. Butch raged. He swore he wouldn’t leave the house until he knew. Skeeter Mott called by long-distance. Butch cursed him savagely. The whole show was off. They’d have to postpone it. The Skeeter pleaded hysterically. Butch hung up.

“You can’t do anything here,” the doctor told him. “You’ll be better off in the ring. I’ll let you know as soon as the crisis is reached.”

Butch stormed.

But he finally gave in. The doc was right. He couldn’t help. He called Skeeter Mott and told him, heavily, that he’d go through with it.

Georgie’s condition was unchanged when Butch finally tore himself away.

They fixed up a signal. A boy was to be stationed at a telephone in the arena. When he got the word, he was to go up into the darkness of the gallery and flash a light. The flashes would mean Georgie had passed the crisis safely. Three flashes—

But there couldn’t be three flashes.

Georgie, his kid, couldn’t die. It was impossible. Things didn’t happen that way. Impossible, that was all.

Butch Hogan came as close to praying as he knew how.

TONY LEFARGE, the Red Terror, entered the ring a 10-7 favorite. Even at those odds, few laid it on the line for Hogan. The customers only remembered Butch as the old trial-horse, the battered mugg they’d seen sprawled in the resin dust a dozen times against far lesser men than the Terror.

It was just a good warm-up for LeFarge before he fought the champ. Butch would give him a terrific mauling while he lasted. But it was down on the cards for the Terror to cop.

Even Butch seemed to know he was out-classed, hadn’t a Chinaman’s chance. He looked drawn and white when he ducked through the ropes into the glare of the flood-lights overhead. Taut-nerved, shaky. The old smiling confidence, the easy manner, was gone.

With lowered eyes, he shuffled his feet in the resin box, ignoring the shouts of good wishes from his friends in the packed house. He stared dully at the floor while the referee jabbered the rules in the center of the ring.

The gong!

Butch shambled out like a sleep-walker. He plugged listlessly at LeFarge’s flitting figure. The Terror peppered him with stinging lefts and rights without a return.

Skeeter Mott screamed crazily: “Kill ’im, Butch! Kill ’im!”

The crowd began to stamp the floor and booh. Somebody thundered, “In the bag!”

The referee yanked Butch out of one of his numerous clinches and warned him to fight. Butch nodded his head dumbly.

It was the Terror’s round by a mile.

In the second, the drum of feet rose to a roar like charging cavalry. Butch wasn’t even trying. The Terror was crashing both fists to the head and body without a retort. He danced around, stabbing Hogan again and again.

Even LeFarge was puzzled. He was afraid to set himself to use his heavy artillery. He skipped around warily, flashing a rapier left, worried. Hogan was stalling, waiting for an opening.
"The mugg is fakin'," he complained to his seconds at the end of the stanza. "Got somethin' up his sleeve. Waitin' for me to step in."

Skeeter Mott shrieked in Butch's ear: "Wake up, Butch! Wha's eatin' ya? Butch! Butch!"

Hogan stared dazedly around the gallery, as though he were wondering what it was all about, what all those thousands of close-packed people were doing up there. Somebody in the press-row cracked: "He's slug-nutty. Clean off his tick."

The Skeeter whirled. "He's not! He's not, I tell ya! Watch 'im go now!" But he knew he was lying, that Butch no more realized he was in the ring than he could fly.

The ten-second buzzer sounded. The Skeeter slid through the ropes and peered with chalk-white face at Butch shambling out to the slaughter.

LeFarge began to open up. He rocked Hogan from pillar to post. Butch fell away, covering his chin. The Terror jabbed him a thousand times, sneered at him. "Thought you was good, huh?"—*bam!*—"But this ain't Maxy's, see?"—*thump!*—"An' you're gonna pay for that lucky punch—plenty!"

He ripped a stunning smash to Butch's lips. The claret spouted. Hogan blinked. He raised his guard to protect his face. The Terror shifted to a murderous belly attack. Butch's knees wobbled. He lurched dizzyly against the ropes under the rain of blows.

The bell saved him.

**SKEETER MOTT** worked frantically over him in the rest period. "He's got three rounds on ya, Butch! He's killin' ya! Butch—"

Programs, newspapers showered into the ring. The crowd hooted and whistled. A bull voice roared: "Hogan, yer yella!"

Butch shuddered oddly, like a man waking from a nightmare.

"Yella?" he mumbled. "Yeah, I guess he's right. I'm layin' down. Quittin' cold. An' the kid—"

The doc's words came back to him: "He's making a great fight of it. He's got your heart, all right. Not a speck of yellow in him."

The crazy idea seized him that if he quit, the kid, Georgie, would quit fighting too.

Butch shot from his corner with a savage roar. Yellow, was he?

The crowd sat petrified for a split second. Then they broke into pandemonium. Butch, good old Butch, was making a fight of it at last! Fight? A slaughter!

He was swarming on LeFarge like a raging maniac. Smashing, plunging, reeling. Driving both fists like flashing pistons. Rushing the Terror pell-mell off his feet, flogging him against the ropes, slugging, slugging, slugging... .

LeFarge scampered. The man was mad! Stark crazy! Leaving his face unguarded, not even blinking as the Terror knifed his crimson-smeared map with desperate counter punches on the run. The Terror tried to keep cool, to fight this maniac scientifically. But he was smothered by the cyclone of Butch's flailing, chopping fists. He fell back, looking anxiously at his corner for help. But his seconds only gaped. They couldn't tell him what to do. Nobody could.

Butch won the fourth, fifth and sixth by tremendous margins. The crowd cheered, roared, bleated. The fever of manslaughter gripped and turned them to savages.

Clang! The seventh—

Hogan had only one eye open now, glaring like a beacon in a fog. The other was closed, bulged like a spoiled peach. But still Butch kept coming.

LeFarge countered weakly. The ring swam before his eyes. His body was sick. He gasped for breath between terrible punches that had painted his belly and sides a solid crimson of welts.

Butch had him, groggy and helpless, sagging on the ropes. The fans leaped to their feet, bellowing for the kill. One more punch—just one more, Butch!

Suddenly the tumult died to a whisper. Why, what was this? What under the sun! Was Butch really crazy? Gone suddenly mad? They gaped at him, stunned.

Then they got it. They understood. LeFarge must have nailed him one last desperate punch. Knocked Butch out cold on his feet with it! For there he was, staring glassy-eyed up at the gallery, as though he'd seen a ghost.
They thundered at LeFarge. But the Red Terror had already seen. He summoned his last ounce of strength in a leap for the befogged Hogan.

Butch sagged to the canvas like a sack of wheat under the impact. Slowly the referee’s arm rose and fell, rose and fell.

“One! Two! Three!” But he could have counted a hundred. Butch was cold as a cucumber.

The crowd went crazy. What a climax! Good old Butch! Kayoed again, but how he’d slugged—until that freak haymaker stopped him!

They hung around to give him a great ovation when he got up. But why didn’t he? Why did he remain there, prone, unmoving, with his face in his arms? He couldn’t still be too groggy to climb to his feet.

What the—! Get a load of that, would you? He was crying. Old Butch, the hard-boiled palooka, lying there sobbing! Could you beat that?

Oh, sure, it was tough, all right. Just when he seemed to have won, when another punch would have finished the Terror.

But what of that? He’d been kayoed before. It wasn’t anything new to old Butch. He’d been kayoed a dozen times before. And taken it without a murmur. The gamest loser in the racket.

And there he was, still lying sprawled with his battlescarred old mugg in his arms, crying like a baby. Hard-boiled Butch, bawling!

They began to file out. A few of them wondered vaguely what those three flashes up in the darkness of the gallery, just before the knockout, had meant.

But they didn’t think much about it. The big kick was Butch bawling that way. Imagine! A tough old palooka like Butch!
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cled, on your toes every minute
with all the up-and-at-'em that can
lick your weight in wildcats? Or do
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the help that has already worked
such wonders for other fellows,
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