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A novel of merry mayhem

by **LARRY HOLDEN**

The Life and Battles of

TONY ZALE

THE LADY LIKES BLOOD

A rousing red-knuckle novelet

by **BILL ERIN**

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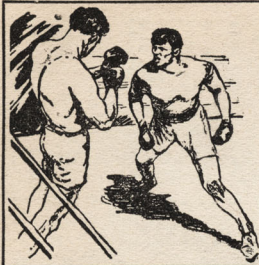
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FIGHT STORIES

20c Per Copy

Fall (Aug-Oct.) 1949
Volume IX, No. 6

Jack O'Sullivan, Editor

A BOOKLENGTH PRIZE-RING NOVEL

ONE FIST WAS IRISH! Larry Holden 4

The fighting blood of a thousand Irish warriors coursed through the rugged frame of tough Barney Nolan; sprung him to the fistic heights, and then flung him down onto the canvas . . . into oblivion, as a ring battler whose fiery temper outweighed the power of his gnarled fists.

TWO FAST-MOVING NOVELETS OF THE RING

AN HONEST FIGHT EVERY NIGHT Tom O'Neil 53

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Clem was a pug with a big heart. For \$130 he'd die happy.

"LIKE A STICK"

By Jack L. Kurtzer

WE were sitting around the television set. It was Friday evening, and Friday is fight night, and there we were around the set, watching a couple of tankers in a prelim from St. Nicks. The fight was slow, and what little action there was wasn't enough to keep us interested.

"God, what stiff's." It was Sam who spoke, and we grunted our agreement.

"You'd think they was in one of those dance-athons, you know, where to win all you gotta do is you should just stay on your feet and keep moving. They look punchy, but they can't be punchy." Here he looked around, having his little joke. "No, they can't be punchy unless the ref has been hitting 'em."

"And look at the size of these stiff's, too. I know a kid half their size that could'a beat 'em both in the same ring. Remember the kid, Bernie?"

Bernie said, "Yeah, a sweet kid."

"Remember his name?"

Bernie thought a moment. "O'Brien?"

"No, but close," said Sam, enjoying himself in the role of quizmaster.

"He was from Boston and he was Irish," said Bernie.

"Yep, he was, he sure was, Bernie," he again paused, prolonging his triumph. "Kelly, that was it, Bernie, Kelly. What a kid, a sweetheart."

He lit a cigarette. "Kelly, yeah that's it." Memory hung in his voice like the smoke in the room. "A skinny kid, nothing to him. Just like this he's built." He held up his forefinger. "A stick, that kid. You never saw a stick like him. He climbs into the ropes, this finger of a kid, and he looks as though he's gonna be sick, right in the ring there. He's like a sheet. Like a ghost he looks, eh Bernie?"

"Yeah," Bernie said.

"Well, the kid walks around, calm-like. That didn't jibe with his looks. You'd think to look at him he was scared plenty. But he ain't. He just walks around calm-like. Dumb, I figger. Too dumb to be scared."

"He's fighting some Eye-talian, this Kelly kid, and the kid looks at the Eye-talian who's takin' his robe off, and he is deadpan. The Eye-talian is built like he's been eatin' rocks, he's bulging with

muscles, and I figger, too bad for the kid. He's even too dumb to be afraid, the kid."

"Then he takes off his robe, and he's even skinnier than before, a regular stick, the kid. Too bad, I feel sorry for him."

"They go to the center of the ring, the ref gives them the instructions, they go back to their corners, and all this time the kid don't change his expression. Deadpan, that's him. The bell rings and he comes strolling out of his corner, walks to the center of the ring, and, what's he do, the kid . . . he pulls a John L. Sullivan. Yeah, he stands there with his body stiff, his left straight out and his right cocked in front of him!"

"Well, the Eye-talian is stumped. He's never been up against this before, but he does the only thing he could do. He comes within range and begins to spar. Bing! It's all over. Yeah, the kid's left . . . it couldna' moved three, four inches, like lightning it went. And the Eye-talian he's down. Out. Stiff. The crowd goes nuts, but the kid doesn't bat an eye. Just puts on his robe and climbs through the ropes. We still couldn't believe it, could we Bernie?"

"Nope," said Bernie.

"It all happened so fast, and the kid, was so skinny, so dumb lookin', his style so funny. He was a natural that Kelly. Would'a been great."

"Would'a been? Whatta ya mean, would'a been?" Joe asked. "What happened?"

Sam was staring off into space, a dreamy look in his eyes. "Yeah, he would'a been great, that Kelly," he said, "But that damn crowd. They knew how skinny the kid was, but they was nuts, over-excited, ya know, and what do they do, these nuts, but yell, and crowd, and push to get near the kid. They just closed in on him and beat him on the back, and pumped his arm, and let him know how great they think he is. But he's still calm, still deadpan. Then suddenly he ain't deadpan any more, his face is all screwed up, and he looks even worse than before. The poor kid."

"For God'sake, what happened, already?" yelled Joe, impatiently.

"What happened? Why with all the hand shaking and pushing, some jerk broke the kid's arm! I told ya he was skinny. Like a stick he was. Just like this, he's built." He held up his forefinger.

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(FROM A LETTER BY E. S. JORDAN, DETROIT, MICH.)

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IT DOESN'T PAY to put up with a broken-out face. Your very success in business, love and social life may depend upon your looks. *Handsome and a good appearance usually start with the condition of your skin.* Nobody likes to look at a face that is blemished by blackheads or pimples. **WOMEN ARE ATTRACTED TO MEN WHO HAVE SMOOTH, CLEAR, HEALTHY-LOOKING SKIN.** Business executives don't choose men whose complexions are against them. Don't take chances with your success in life when this inexpensive Viderm formula may help you.

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Squeezing pimples or blackheads to get rid of them is a nasty, messy business—but that isn't the worst of it. Doing so may also be injurious and leave your face with unsightly, embarrassing blemishes. There is, now, a much easier, safer, cleaner way to help you rid your face of ugly, offensive, externally-caused skin troubles. *You merely follow a doctor's simple directions.*

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ONE FIST WAS IRISH!

By Larry Holden

The fighting blood of a thousand Irish warriors coursed through the spirited frame of rugged Barney Nolan; sprung him to the fistie heights; then flung him back onto the canvas . . . into oblivion . . . as a ring batter whose fiery temper outweighed the power of his gnarled fists.

SAMMY SLOAN grumbled, "It's about time you decided to fight again, Barney." He laid his fountain pen across the top of the papers and pushed them across the desk.

Goldie Goldstein stood at the window, looking down into the dark, steep Tacoma street. "You should have fought right away after that Canuck died. It wasn't your fault. His brains was floating before he climbed into the ring with you."

Barney Nolan said, "Shut up about the Canuck." He bent over the desk and his pen scratched on the paper.

He did not want to be reminded of that fight with the Canuck, Dupre. Maybe he hadn't killed him. The doctor said one punch would never have done it. A fighter can take only so many punches in his career, and when he's soaked up his

quota, he's finished. Dupre had gone beyond his quota. Goldie was right. Dupre's brains had been floating before he stepped into the ring that night.

Barney grimaced and kept his head down, as if reading the agreement to fight Sailor Molloy. It wasn't the actual death that bothered him, though Heaven knows that was bad enough. It was that Dupre had looked so much like Vince—tall, black-haired, lean-faced—except that Dupre had two eyes and Vince had only one and a black patch where the other had been. He had looked just like Vince as he came out of



Barney was a madman. The referee had to wrestle him back to his corner.

his corner, grinning a little crookedly as if tickled by some derisive secret. What tormented Barney was the gust of rage that shook him when Dupre's long, ex-

with excitement, "Fifty-three seconds! What a battle!" Three hours later Dupre was dead.

Sammy and Goldie exchanged a quick,



perimental left speared his cheek. His temper had exploded and he had hurtled into the Canuck, ripping with both hands.

He remembered nothing about the brief fight except that when the red mist had lifted Dupre lay twitching on the canvas and some hysterical woman at ringside was shrieking, "Ohgodohgodohgod," over and over again, and Barney's second was pounding him on the shoulder and yelling

significant glance, and Sammy said quietly, "I suppose you're fighting because you need something for that raspberry farm of yours again. What is it this time?"

"Truck needs a new motor."

Sammy shook his head.

"I don't get it," he complained, "I don't get it at all. You're maybe the best light-heavy in the whole state of Washington, but you only fight when you need some-

thing for the raspberries. The last time it was a roof for the barn, three months before that it was a mower. Why don't ya get smart, Barney? Let your brother manage the ranch. Vince knows as much about it as you do. You could make enough in the ring in two years to buy all the raspberries in the world."

Barney said shortly, "The ranch needs two of us."

But that wasn't all there was to it, and the three of them knew it. Left to himself at the ranch, Vince wouldn't have raised a sweat, much less raspberries. Vince was the older of the Nolan boys, but without Barney he was no good for anything. Half the time he was no good for anything, anyway, and doggedly Barney kept things going.

That had started when they were kids. Vince was ten, Barney was eight. Old man Nolan was a tough Irishman, and the two boys had to do their chores every day, or else. The "or else" hung behind the kitchen door and stung like blazes when it snapped across your backside. Vince had been as little fond of chores then as he was now, and the minute the two kids were out behind the barn. Vince would light into Barney and beat the bejayses out of him until the younger boy, stubbornly fighting back the tears, did the chores for both of them. That was just fine for Vince, but there was only one thing he forgot, and that was Barney's red-Irish temper. Barney fought back until he was bloody, but Vince was bigger and stronger, and it always ended the same way with Barney lying flat on his face with Vince astride his shoulders, grinding his face into the ground.

"**N**OW will ya chop that wood? Now will ya fetch up the water? Now will ya pitch down the hay?"

And Vince always gave him a final cuff across the ear, even after Barney nodded, grinding his teeth.

The end of it came abruptly, with violence and blood that wasn't Barney's. Vince was supposed to go down to the river pasture and bring up the Nolan's three cows, but the minute they were behind the barn he slapped Barney across

the back of the neck and grinned:

"Get gawn, half-pint, and no backtalk."

For emphasis, he planted the broad of his foot against the seam of Barney's pants and sent him sprawling to his hands and knees across the stony ground. It was the indignity of that contemptuous kick that blew the lid off Barney's temper. He grabbed up a handful of stones and flung them into Vince's jeering face. For a moment there was an awful silence, then, when the blood spurted, Vince let out a shriek that could be heard the entire length of the Puyallup Valley, clear to the base of Mt. Rainier in the chilly distance.

Vince clapped his hand to his face, ran in howling circles, then lit out for the farmhouse, yelling at the top of his lungs. He had reason to yell. A sharp stone had split his right eyeball as if it were a grape. There was never even a prayer that the sight of that eye could be saved.

Old man Nolan wasn't fooled for a minute. He knew what had been going on between them, but he had the idea it would toughen Barney to fight his own battles, but with Barney's mother it was different. Vince was her first born, her favorite, and she never let Barney forget for as long as an hour what he had done to his brother. And neither did Vince. That was Vince's way. That was the cross he nailed Barney to.

Barney's red hair and fierce blue eyes gave the clue to the hot temper that burned inside him, but from that day on he kept the lid clamped so tightly on it that sometimes you could see him shake from the force of it, but he never let go. One glance at his hard, leathery face would tell you that here wasn't a man you could take liberties with.

And no one except Vince had seen the safety blow off that temper until Barney's fight with the Canuck, Dupre. Even Barney could not explain that to himself. Everything had let go at once that night.

Only Goldie Goldstein would have been brash enough to mention that fight to Barney, but Goldie was notorious for stepping on people's toes. And he was the only one in Tacoma who didn't know why Barney took care of Vince the way he did. He wouldn't have understood it, anyway;

his reaction would have been a disgusted, "Aw, nuts!" That was the way Goldie was.

He said cheerfully, "Tell you what, Barney. I know an honest guy who'll manage you right. Let your crummy brother take care of the raspberries. . . ."

Sammy cried, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" and hurriedly flapped his hands as Barney jumped to his feet. Only a dope would have talked that way about Vince in front of Barney. "Hold it, Barney," he pleaded. Then, as his quick ear caught the scurry of footsteps on the stairs, he added warningly, "There's somebody coming."

Barney stopped at the corner of the desk, his face tight. The door flew open and little Maxie Mahler darted into the room. He looked at Barney and panted;

"The Henrouille's are after Vince!"

Barney whirled. "Where?"

Maxie gasped, "The gin mill near the Blue Mouse Theatre. There's four of them."

He jumped back out of the way as Barney plunged through the doorway and clattered down the steps. Sammy Sloan looked bitterly at the empty doorway then reached out and slowly tore up the papers Barney had just signed. He swore monotonously and wearily.

"Another good fight up the rainpipe," he scowled. "Barney won't be good for nothing till he gets Vince in the clear. I've seen it happen before."

He sighed and let the paper scraps flutter into the wastebasket.

BARNEY strode into the gin mill and the barkeep gave him a frightened glance. The customers were huddled down at the end of the bar.

Barney snapped, "Where'd they go?"

The barkeep shook his head and said quickly, "I dunno, Barney. Vince lit out through the back when they come in. I didn't hear no fight outside. Maybe he got clear."

Barney turned and ran out. He ran the full six blocks to where the Model A was parked. He didn't hesitate. Vince would head for home. He always did when there was trouble, and four Henrouilles on the prod meant plenty of trouble. They were

French Canucks, fiery and reckless, and there were a million of them in Tacoma. Barney wondered angrily which four of them Vince had tangled with. Or why, as far as that went. The Model A roared east out of the city, along the ditch-like Puyallup River. The moon was bright on the snowy crest of Ranier in the high distance, but Barney saw grimly under the dusty ribbon on unwinding road.

He bounced into the yard behind the house and cut the lights. There was a snort in the fields behind the raspberries and a wild, clattering crash of underbrush, a bony white shape, madly galloping. Barney swore. One of these nights they'd have to get together and hunt down that damn horse. It was running wild and starving, ripping down fences. Some damn fool instead of shooting it had turpented it, and now it was worse than ever. It scared the pants off the women.

But the horse was forgotten in a moment as Barney ran into the dark farmhouse, calling, "Vince! Vince! It's me, Barney." But the rooms were silent. He bit his lip and lighted the lamp in the kitchen. Someday when they had enough money ahead, they'd have electricity. He glanced toward the corner beside the sink. The guns were still there—the rifle, the shotgun, the .44 hanging from the nail with its belt and holster. That alone told him Vince wasn't in yet. Vince would have grabbed for one of those right away. He lit a cigarette and flipped the match into the coal scuttle, then went out and leaned against the side of the house in the dark of the porch.

He was there only about five minutes when he heard the muffled roar of the truck and saw the headlights stabbing the night. It swung in at the end of the fence, bounced over the hump and slid to a stop in a spray of flying gravel. Four men spilled from both sides of the cab. Barney caught the glint of a gun barrel. He flipped his cigarette over the rail and pushed himself away from the side of the house. He stood at the head of the steps, his thumbs hooked in his belt.

Someone yelled, "There he is!" and the four of them surged across the yard.

That was Leon Henrouille. So it was

that gang. With him would be Pierre, Art and maybe Paul—the gang that worked up in the lumber camp, the tough ones.

Yelling, they ran to the foot of the steps—and stopped. They stopped so suddenly that the two behind tramped on the feet of the two ahead. In the shadows, Barney had looked like Vince. They didn't want any part of Barney. They stood scowling as he stepped to the edge of the porch and looked down at them.

"What's going on?" he asked evenly, "What's that gun for?"

Leon glowered. "We want to talk to Vince."

"Go on home and take your gun with you."

"Never mind about the gun. We wanna talk to Vince."

The door opened behind Barney, and he heard Vince's heavy breathing, as if Vince had been running. Alone, Vince would never have faced the Henrouilles, but with Barney there he stepped boldly out and said in that cocky voice of his,

"Go ahead and talk to me." He laughed.

A growl rose from the four men grouped at the foot of the steps. Leon took a step forward and said;

"Don't you try to stop us, now, Barney. We're taking Vince back with us. He's been fooling around my sister long enough."

"Your sister!" Vince laughed again, "I wouldn't be seen dead with your sister."

Barney took one step down. "You heard him," he said harshly, "Now get out of here."

Leon said stubbornly, "Everyday my sister comes out here to pick raspberries for you. She don't get home till midnight. She's out with Vince. . . ."

"Me and a dozen other guys," Vince jeered. "Don't blame nothing on me."

Barney said, "Get in the house, Vince," without turning, without taking his eyes from Leon's angry face. "Now you guys get out of here and get fast. Go ahead, beat it!"

Leon hunched his shoulders then with a snarl, swung a wild, looping right at Barney's head. Barney chopped his chin with a short left and leaped down the steps as Leon fell back into the arms of his broth-

ers. Pierre swore and stooped for the gun. Barney kicked it into the darkness and straightened Pierre up with a hard right to the chin. He stepped in, chopping viciously with his fists as the other two swung heavily, crowding him back against the porch.

Vince yelled, "Hold 'em, Barney, hold 'em a minute!" and the front door slammed. Vince had gone in after a gun.

Barney yelled, "No, Vince!" and ducked as Paul Henrouille sprang at him. He brought up his fist and felt the jaw go loose like a bag of marbles under his knuckles. Leon grabbed him around the waist, but Barney clubbed himself loose with raking blows across the side of Leon's head. He flung Leon into Pierre and leaped at Art Henrouille. He caught him full in the mouth with a straight left, and buried his right in his stomach as the Canuck went back on his heels. Pierre grabbed at his legs. He kicked himself free and sprang back up the steps. He flipped the blood from his eyes with the back of his hand and hooked twice into Leon's dark, lunging face. Paul had run around to the side and was climbing the rail of the porch with the crank of the truck clubbed in his right hand.

Barney scooped up the doormat, flung it into his face and drove a hooking left to the side of his face. Paul moaned and dropped to the ground. Barney whirled as Pierre dived at him, arms outstretched. He knocked him down, slapping him on the back of the neck with the flat of his hand. He took him by the belt and collar and flung him off the porch. He rolled in the gravel walk and lay still.

Art was sitting on the grass with both hands to his ruined mouth; Leon was crawling toward the truck on his hands and knees and off in the shadows to the side of the porch, Paul Henrouille was whimpering softly.

The door opened and Vince stood there with the shotgun cradled in his arms.

"Beat it!" he said arrogantly. "Come up here with me, Barney."

Barney looked at him and reached in his pocket for his handkerchief. He swabbed the cut over his eye, wiped the blood from his nose and mouth. He took

three stiff steps off the porch, stooped for the Henrouille's gun and flung it across the road into the underbrush.

As he mounted the steps again he said bitterly to Vince, "Don't you know better than to fool around with our own pickers? Go inside and put that gun away."

A half hour later they heard the Henrouille's truck cough to life and clatter back down the road toward Tacoma.

II

BARNEY was at the side of the barn nailing together some raspberry crates the next morning when Sammy Sloan's Packard swept into the yard. Vince was down at the berry shed making sure the pickers hadn't lined their boxes with twigs or leaves.

Barney was proud of his berries. They were the biggest in the Puyallup Valley, and he got top rates for them at the cannery. Packers, they were, packed in little boxes for the luxury and hotel trade. The smaller berries were called canners and went into jams or jellies.

Sammy climbed out of the car as Barney straightened up and wheezed across the yard, shooing off a belligerent gander.

"I don't know why I'm doing this for you, Barney," he complained, "Don't ask. You never do nothing for me but come down to the Arena whenever you need a little dough to fix the farm." He waved his hand at the blond-faced Swede who had followed him from the car, "This is Lars Widlund. He'll take care of the farm while you're gone."

Barney's eyes narrowed and he scratched the side of his jaw with the claw of the hammer. "While I'm gone?" he said, "Gone where?"

"Away," said Sammy succinctly, "Away, on account of you're in trouble. Just what the hell," he demanded, "did you hit them Henrouilles with last night? Two of them's in the hospital and the other two don't care if they never get out of bed. There's a warrant out for you."

Barney said, "So what? They came here looking for trouble and they got it."

Sammy wagged his head. "There's no so what about it, Barney. Please believe

me. I'm your friend. Look, I'm here—I'm talking to you like a father. You have to go away for awhile, Barney. Till it blows over."

"Thanks for coming out, Sammy, but. . . ."

"Now it's 'buts' I get," Sammy sighed. "Look. In Tacoma there are more Henrouilles than Smiths. That's votes, that's influence. They want to put you in jail. Is it reasonable that one man can't beat four men without using an ax? Ask me."

Barney picked up his half-finished crate and stood it on the saw-horse. He took two nails from his pocket. "They're bluffing," he said, "They'd be laughed out of Tacoma."

"If they took it to court," Sammy agreed, "but maybe they won't take it to court. You see? Maybe they just put you in jail while they get Vince. They don't want you, Barney. They want Vince. They're pretty sore with Vince right now. Sore enough to kill him, maybe. Don't be mad with me, Barney, but Vince is not a nice boy. He was not nice to that pretty little Henrouille girl. If they get Vince there will be trouble for everybody. Vince will be hurt. When you come out of jail, you will say, 'Can I let them Henrouilles get away with that?' You have a bad temper, Barney. You would be in worse trouble. And the Henrouilles would be in trouble. I like the Henrouilles. I like little Jeanne Henrouille. It would be much better all around if you took Vince and went away for awhile. Lars here is a good man. He will grow good raspberries for you while you are gone. Won't you Lars?"

Lars said stolidly, "I am good farmer, you bet."

Barney clutched the hammer until his knuckles showed yellow-white across the back of his hand. Sammy saw the red temper raging behind his eyes, but Barney fought it down as he always did when there was something concerning Vince. He threw down the hammer and nodded.

"All right," he said between clenched teeth. He took a breath and held it. The flaming words died sputtering in his throat. Only his glance toward the berry shed, where Vince was joking with the pickers,

showed that the ancient guilt still burned inside like radium.

Sammy threw his plump arm across Barney's big shoulders and urged him toward the house, saying eagerly, "You go to Aberdeen where a friend of mine has a shingle mill. You take your truck. People will think you go to Yakima for the apple picking, or maybe even to Seattle for the boats. My friend will give you jobs. The mill is working twenty-four hours a day. They need men. You have an engineer's license. You will be paid well. That part you leave to Sammy. I call him on the telephone. You will not lose a penny. You will see. No one will think you go to Aberdeen. You leave everything to Sammy, Barney."

Barney roared, "Vince!" and ran into the house, unbuttoning his shirt as he ran. There was no mistaking the urgency in his voice, and Vince came bounding across the yard. At Sammy's order, Widlund plodded stolidly toward the berry shed, where the pickers were waiting to have their crates tallied.

Fifteen minutes later, Sammy stood in the middle of the road and waved as the truck swirled away in rolling clouds of dust. He took out his handkerchief and mopped his face, muttering a *klulas* that belied the Sloan part of his name. Sammy could swear in eloquent Jewish.

THE mountain rose at the head of the Aberdeen street like a tree-clad wall. The fresh odor of cut lumber was like perfume in the air. To the north the cone-shaped furnace, with the spark-trap at its top, burned the everlasting sawdust with fragrant smoke. A freighter from Newark, New Jersey, was loading lumber at the dock at the opposite end of the street from the mountain.

Three ordinary seamen, all so young that they had not yet tasted the first edge of their first razor, scrambled out to the street and hailed the truck, their thumbs out-thrust in the ever-hopeful sign of hitch-hikers.

Barney said mildly, "We're coming, kids, not going." Their faces fell, and he said shrewdly, "What'd you do, Jump ship?"

They grinned and looked embarrassed and the tallest said, "We want to see the country before we go back to Newark." He said it a little defiantly, as if expecting the usual adult rebuke. "We heard there were jobs in the lumber camps around Tacoma."

Barney grinned. They stood as much chance of getting a job in a lumber camp as they did of growing a beard overnight. Less.

"Tell you what," he said, "They need pickers up in the Puyallup Valley. You go to the Nolan ranch and tell Lars Widlund I said to put you on. I'm Barney Nolan. You'll see a lot of country up there. Every morning you'll look out the window of the bunkhouse and there'll be Mt. Rainier. That'll be something to tell your folks when you get home. Get a hitch to Tacoma. Anybody'll direct you from there."

The kids grinned their thanks. Vince didn't say anything until Barney started the truck again.

"That was a dumb trick," he growled.

"Take it easy, Vince. We were on the road and broke ourselves when we were their age, remember? And we sure appreciated a hand out."

"Sure, sure, but now everybody in Tacoma will know the Nolans went to Aberdeen. That was using your head all right!"

Barney's mouth tightened. That was Vince all over—but hewas right. Sooner or later the kids would blab that they'd seen Barney Nolan in Aberdeen, and even in Aberdeen they had law and order—law and order that would snatch Vince back to Tacoma and the vengeful Henrouilles.

"Where you going now?" demanded Vince sullenly as Barney passed the turn-off to the shingle mill.

Barney's temper rose. "To get you out of your mess, that's where!" he snapped.

Vince laughed bitterly. "Out of my mess!" he said. "Maybe I'm the one who beat up the Henrouilles. Maybe I'm the one who put them in the hospital. I'm the one they're after, is that it? If you'd left it to me, they'd of run like ants when I came out with the shotgun. But not you. Hell no! You're not happy unless you've got your fist in somebody's puss.

That's you! You had to beat them up first. I don't know why I stick with you, anyway," a thin edge of a whine crept into his voice and his fingers lightly touched the black patch over the empty socket of his right eye, "If it hadn't been for this I could of got a good job in the city and the hell with the ranch. They take one look at me and. . ."

Barney said desperately, "All right, Vince."

"Sure. All right for you. You got two eyes. But look at me. Who wants a guy with a black patch in the middle of his face? I can't even get a job in a gas station."

Barney said again, "All right, Vince!"

Vince knew when to shut up. He had made his point and he was satisfied. He had reminded Barney whose fault it was; he could see Barney writhing under the sense of guilt. He leaned back against the seat. He was satisfied. He lit a cigarette.

He stayed in the truck when Barney stopped it at the end of the dock and walked toward the freighter.

BUT when Barney was out of sight over the end of the gangplank amidships, he jumped lightly out of the truck and walked back up the street. That lopsided grin of his dug secretively into his cheek and his eyes danced. He was away from that lousy raspberry ranch at last and he was going to stay away. He was tired of Barney trying to make a hard-working citizen out of him. Barney wasn't smart—that was the trouble with Barney. He could make a million in the ring, a million—and the dumb thing about the whole business was what Barney actually wanted to do. Well—his grin spread—he'd take care of that, too.

He called Sammy Sloan from the drug store.

"Those Canucks dead yet, Sammy?" he asked cheerfully. "This is Vince Nolan."

Sammy's voice went as cold as January ice. "Tell Barney they ain't as bad off like they thought at first," he said, "Why don't you come back and marry the girl, you lousy *schmoe*, you?"

Vince laughed. "You marry her, Sammy. She's okay. Take my word."

"Your word," said Sammy heavily, "I take like I take arsenic." He hung up with a jarring clatter.

Whistling, Vince mounted a stool at the counter beside a fat man with a red, dyspeptic face and ordered a cup of coffee and a jelly doughnut.

"Where can I buy two pair of boxing gloves around here, Joe," he asked the counterman.

The fat man's head jerked up and he grabbed Vince's arm before the counterman could answer. "Me," he said eagerly, "Me, I got boxing gloves. Good calks I got too. You go to the lumber camp, no?"

Vince saw Barney coming into the lunchroom and he shook his head violently and waved him away. Barney looked puzzled but went outside and lit a cigarette. Vince turned to the fat man.

"Just boxing gloves, uncle," he said easily, "If they're any good, I'll give you ten bucks for the set."

The fat man hopped off his stool. "I come right back," he said. He went through the side entrance.

"Who's he?" Vince asked the counterman.

"Him? He's got a second-hand shop next door. Sell you anything. You could of had them gloves for a fin. He's had 'em two years."

Vince winked. "What makes you think he was going to get more than that, anyway?"

When he rejoined Barney outside, he had a thick paper-wrapped package under his arm. He gave a quick, backward glance at the door of the lunchroom and hustled Barney down the street.

"That was the police chief, that fat guy," he whispered, "And you almost walked in on him. They're looking for us, but he was too dumb to realize he had me. They think Leon Henrouille's gonna poop out. Did you get us berths on that freighter?"

Barney's shoulders slumped. "Yeah," he said dully, "We're shipping as ordinary seamen to replace those kids that jumped ship." He clenched his fists, "I'm going back to Tacoma, Vince. I'm not running away. . ."

Vince took his arm and dropped his voice persuasively, "That's just what I

told Sammy Sloan. I called him on the phone right away. Barney'll be back to face the rap, I said. You should have heard him. The air was thick with matzoths."

"I'm going back, Vince."

"Sure. Sure you are, Barney. But not right now. Right now they'd crucify you. Sammy said, tell Barney to wait till after the election. The Henrouilles are on the wrong side of the fence this time. With the Henrouilles out, you'll get a fair shake in court. And anyway, Leon aint dead yet. They're gonna do an operation on him. If he pulls through, you're in the clear, see? Sammy says he'll write to you general delivery in Newark. Now let's get aboard and stay there till we sail."

Barney said hopefully, "Sammy said that?"

"Don't worry, Barney. Sammy'll keep things under control. Just wait till you hear from him, that's all." He patted Barney's shoulder and his grin ran lightly up his right cheek.

Barney got the 8-12 watch with the third mate; Vince was with the second mate on the 12-4, and the third ordinary seaman, a kid of seventeen hired at dock-side, was given the 4-8.

The decks were piled high with stacked and lashed lumber, but Vince got permission from the Chief Mate to rig a small ring on the poop deck. There was hardly room to spar, but when the weather became warmer and the seas smoother as they sailed southward, Barney and Vince put on the gloves everyday. Vince was hard to spar with because of his dead eye, for Barney had always to work to his left, but in no time at all Barney found himself with more sparring partners than he knew what to do with. There was a new one every day when the deck work was done.

Despite the situation in Tacoma with the Henrouilles, Barney was at peace with himself. He didn't have to worry about Vince. He had always looked after Vince, and now there was nothing to worry about. Nothing could happen until they got to Newark.

At first the third mate had been very

friendly, but his manner toward Barney had cooled rapidly until at last they scarcely exchanged a word through the dark hours as Barney stood at the wheel, staring fixedly at the yellow light of the compass in the binnacle while the mate paced the bridge from port to starboard, watching for lights ahead. The mate spoke only on the half hour when Barney had to reach up and sound the bells. There was a break at four bells and Barney was given ten minutes off to go down to the galley for a cup of coffee that tasted as if it had been brewed from dried liver, and in the beginning the mate had always said in a friendly voice;

"Time for the smorgesbord, Nolan. I'll take over." The mate's name was Anderson.

But now he merely grunted, and shouldered Barney away from the wheel after he had struck the four bells. His hostility was unmistakable, but Barney was feeling too good to think much about it. He enjoyed the long, silent hours on the bridge, lifting his eyes occasionally to watch the long, blue Pacific ground swell, or to watch the play of dolphin at the bow or the swift, cutting fin of a following shark waiting for spilled garbage, or just to stand there and look up at the velvet bowl of jewelled sky and feel the life of the freighter under his feet as the heart of the engines beat against the soles of his feet. In fact he did not even realize that the mate's attitude toward him was charged with the electricity of hostility.

The blowoff between them came the night before they anchored on the Pacific side of the Panama Canal. The old tub was ploughing peaceably along through the long swells, listing just a little to starboard—not enough to count—and the air was as smooth and caressing as a blonde's arm around your neck.

UNTIL darkness fell—the sun went down like a fried egg in the skillet of the sea—the mate paced the bridge with angry, staccato steps. He was young, no more than twenty-five, if that, and he had a stern, Scandinavian sense of right and wrong. He felt very strongly about every-

He stopped stiff-legged outside the egg-yolk light of the binnacle and thrust his square hands deep into his pockets and said harshly;

"See here, Nolan, I want to ask you something. You're a professional ain't you?"

His voice had a cutting edge and it knifed through Barney's reverie. Barney looked up with a start.

"What's that?" he said, "I'm sorry, I didn't hear you, Swede."

In the beginning, in friendly comraderie, he had called the mate Swede, and the mate had called him shanty Irish.

The mate barked, "You say 'sir' when you talk to me!"

Barney grinned. "The hell I do. This isn't the Navy." He still thought the mate was joking.

The mate asked nastily, "Do you want to be logged for insubordination? You call me *Mr. Andersson*, not Swede."

Barney blinked, but still grinned. "Yes, *sir!*" he said with amused emphasis.

"Answer my question!"

"I'm sorry, *sirrrrr*, but I didn't hear your question."

"Are you a professional? That's what I want to know."

"A professional what?"

"Fighter, Nolan, fighter! You know what I'm talking about."

Barney didn't know what he was talking about. He glanced at the compass and turned the wheel slightly to hold the course steady.

"I fought some in the ring," he said, "But I'm not what you'd call a professional."

"I thought so," the mate said with satisfaction, "That's just what I thought. That's the explanation."

Barney was no longer amused. The mate's edgy voice had aroused his inflammable temper. "Explanation of what?" he demanded. His hands tightened on the spokes of the wheel. Temper. That was what had always gotten him in trouble. Temper. His fingers relaxed.

"I'm sorry, Swede," he said more quietly. "What's bothering you?"

Andersson's square, hard face moved into the feeble light of the binnacle. "Can

you lick me?" he demanded, "I been in the ring, too. Or maybe you won't take a chance on somebody that ain't a push-over."

The Swede weighed a hundred and ninety, Barney was one-seventy-two. He shrugged good-naturedly as the flood tide of his temper receded.

"Probably not," he said amiably, "You got weight and reach, and that I fought in a ring don't mean nothing."

"Scared?"

"No, I'm not scared!" his temper bubbled again, "What's on your mind, anyway?" A hot spot deep inside, deep where he lived, began to glow. He felt the heat of it rising behind his eyes. "Dammit," he said hotly, "stop hinting around and get it off your chest!"

The mate stood squarely before the binnacle so Barney could see him. Andersson's young face was as hard as saddle leather.

"You and your brother," he said harshly, have been taking the crew over long enough. You hear me? Long enough. I've been watching you back there on the poop deck every night. Sixteen ounce gloves. Pillows! They might just as well expect to knock you down with a feather duster."

"So?"

"You and your brother have been cleaning up. Ten bucks to get in the ring with you they have to pay, fifty bucks they'd get if they can knock you down. Not out—just down. Sounds easy, but it's a laugh, ain't it, Nolan? A big laugh. That bunch of clowns couldn't knock a good professional down if they hit him with capstan spokes. You and your brother haven't left a dime in the deck crew or the whole damn black gang."

The chill that prickled down Barney's back told him that the mate was telling the truth—that Vince had been to work on the crew, that all those willing sparring partners had just been suckers—suckers at ten bucks a throw. You could trust Vince to have an eye out for the easy buck. Knock him down! Those free-swinging comedians couldn't have knocked down a wooden Indian.

But there was still that soft, rotting spot in Barney—no matter what Vince did, it was Barney's fault. Vince wouldn't

have been like that if he'd had two eyes like everybody else, if he didn't have that damning black patch over his right eye socket, if he could but have faced the world squarely instead of having to turn his port side to it continually. A thing like that could gnaw at a man's soul, as it had gnawed at Vince's, who had a deformity through no fault of his own, who had a deformity because of his brother. His brother, his own brother—Barney.

Barney said dully, realizing that he was merely defending Vince, "Nobody made them box with me. They took their chances. The odds should have told them that there was damn little chance of their winning. We didn't pick their pockets."

The mate said sarcastically. "The hell you say!" then grimly, "I talked to the captain about it. He wanted to stop those little boxing bouts on the poop deck, but I talked him out of it. I talked him into letting me put on the gloves with you tomorrow night. Just a friendly exhibition, Nolan. He thought it would be good for morale for the crew to see you flat on your back for a change. What do you say, Nolan—or do you have to ask your shyster brother first?"

Barney said, "Don't worry about me. I'll be there."

Andresson nodded and, without another word, walked to the end of the bridge. At seven bells Barney went aft to the focsle to ready Vince for his watch. Three seamen were playing rummy on one of the lower bunks, but Barney noticed that there wasnt any money up. They watched him silently as he reached up and shook Vince's shoulder. Vince sat up immediately. He hadn't been sleeping. He had been lying there pretending because the crew was giving him the same silent treatment they had given Barney. He turned at the door, thumbed his nose at the three penniless card players and followed Barney out to the deck.

"Crummy bunch," he grumbled, "I'll be glad when we get to Newark."

"Me, too," Barney said nothing about the way Vince had taken over the crew or about the scrap he was going to have with the third mate the following night.

He left Vince in the galley with a cup of steaming coffee, and when he climbed back to the bridge, the second mate was already there in earnest conversation with the third. As Barney took the wheel, the second mate said abruptly;

"It's off. There isn't going to be any bout."

The third mate growled, "The hell it is!"

The second mate swung around. "What do you want to do—lose your ticket?" he demanded fiercely, "The Old Man'll break you if he finds you getting beat up by a focsle bum."

"I won't get beat up."

"That's a chance you're taking. This monkey's a professional pug, and the only place you ever fought was the YMCA. Look, bud," he turned back to Barney, "Be a good guy. Just don't show up with gloves on the poop deck tomorrow night. He," he jerked his thumb at the glowering third mate, "didn't say a word to the captain about this. The Old Man'd never let him go through with it. Don't fight him."

"You'd better be there, Nolan," Andresson said angrily over the Second's shoulder, "Or I'll turn your brother in to the captain for gambling, and he'll see that he gets thirty days or more in clink when we dock. That's one thing the Old Man won't stand for. And you stay out of this," he said to the Second.

The Second snapped, "Okay, okay!" turned his back and stamped to the end of the bridge.

III

THEY were too late to go through the Panama Canal the next day and they dropped anchor just outside on the Pacific end. Barney and Vince went up to the poop deck as usual after chow. The crew lounged around the tiny, improvised ring and jeered. There was a savage, gloating not in their voices as Vince put on the gloves with Barney.

"It won't be long now, Nolan."

"Tonight you get your's."

"See how long you'll stand up when you get a few smart gloves in your kisser."

Barney clinched with Vince and whispered, "Do they know I'm scrapping with the third mate tonight?"

Vince grinned. "It's all over the ship. Look down there."

Down on the afterdeck, leaning comfortably against the stacked lumber was the Chief Mate, the Chief engineer and his two assistants, and perched on top of the lumber was Sparks, the young radio operator. The only officer not there was the captain. By rights the Chief Mate shouldn't have been there either, but he was a little Irishman who dearly loved a scrap and he was not missing this one, even at the risk of a reprimand from the Captain.

Ten minutes later Andresson climbed up to the pop deck with the second mate. He nodded shortly at Barney and barked at Vince, "Take off those gloves." He peeled off his shirt and gave it to the second mate. He wore only a pair of thick-soled sneakers and pants. He had long, heavy arms and a deep, muscle-padded chest.

Barney eyed him as Andresson held out his hands to the second mate, who laced on the gloves. Andresson had twenty on him and maybe an inch or two in reach, but he looked slow—though speed wasn't going to mean so much in that little, pint-sized ring. Not much chance for foot work there.

The bosun, a chubby, stolid Dutchman was timekeeper. There wasn't room for a referee in the ring.

Vince had been shrewdly sizing up the third mate and just before the bosun struck the steel bar, that was to serve as a bell, he whispered gleefully to Barney: "You got nothing to worry about, kid. He's muscle-bound. Look at the way he moves his arms. It's a pushover. Take him fast. Our whole bankroll's riding on this one."

Barney's mouth tightened. So that's how the news got all over the ship—Vince. The second mate must have shot off his mouth some more after Barney left the bridge—but Vince had spread the word. Unless the Captain was deaf, dumb and blind, he must have heard it, too.

The bosun struck the steel bar with a

chipping hammer and cried, "Go!" Barney moved easily from his corner. He had to take only two steps to meet Andresson's lumbering rush. He parried a swinging right and stabbed a light left into the mate's earnest face. Andresson missed with a short clubbing left, hammered a right home to Barney's ribs and used his weight to bull him across the ring to the ropes. Barney stayed inside and close and pumped rights and lefts into that heavy midriff. The mate cuffed him across the top of the head, but Barney had his face against his chest, and Andresson did not know how to pry him loose.

Barney brought up another short right and the mate grunted. Barney pushed him away and danced out into the middle of the ring, keeping his flickering left in that grim, Scandanavian face. Andresson plodded after him. They traded long-range swings. There was a snap and speed in Barney's that the mate would never get, and he was beating Andresson to every punch—and still the mate kept plodding in and plodding in.

Barney felt a stab of pity as he lanced out that straight left again and rocked the bulky mate just enough to keep him off-balance. This wasn't just a boxing bout to Andresson. It was something much more important. It was another skirmish in the everlasting struggle between right and wrong. Andresson, in his bleak, craggy Scandanavian soul, firmly believed that he personified Right and that the flame-haired, cold-eyed Barney was the epitome of Wrong. Right must triumph.

THAT was the way Andresson thought, that was what kept him plodding straight into that light barrage of long rights and lefts. All he wanted to do was get close enough to send in a smashing right that would end the battle—but he couldn't get set. He just couldn't seem to get his feet in position so he could get the full weight of righteous wrath behind his heavy right arm. He blamed it on lack of training; he blamed it on the failing light; he blamed it on the unevenness of the iron-plated deck—he blamed it on everything but the flickering skill in Barney's gloves. He took a right to the

jaw and a left jab on his nose but kept going forward.

If Barney had put any real sting in that left, his nose would have been smeared from cheekbone to cheekbone, but Andre-sson did not know this. He felt only contempt for the lightness of the blow and kept his wide right cocked. But when his chance came, it was so unexpected that he was caught flat-footed.

Barney jabbed with his left, jabbed and jabbed again, and circled to the right, and as he went around his foot slipped on a smear of crude oil. He floundered and grabbed at Andre-sson for support. The mate stood open-mouthed, then with a grunt slammed in that waiting right. It caught Barney high on the cheekbone. His leg slid completely from under him and he went down on the flat of his pants with an almost visible thud.

The crew screamed with delight and even the phlegmatic Dutch bosun became excited and began to count almost as fast as he could sputter the numbers.

"Vun, two, t'ree, faw, fife, zix zeben. . ."

Vince was on his feet snarling "Take it easy, take it easy! Give him time!"

The crew bood.

Up on the boat deck, the captain frowned. How did they expect him to ignore the fight when they howled like that. But he gripped the rail and watched tensely as Barney gathered his legs under him and leaped to his feet as the bosun sputtered, ". . . nine und. . ." The crew settled back with a disappointed sigh as Barney, his temper high, lashed into the bulky mate and drove him back to the ropes with all the sting he could put into his pumping gloves. Andre-sson pawed at him, but furiously he swept the clumsy defense aside and drove a right and left to that square, heavy jaw. Andre-sson's legs began to cave at the knees.

With a start, the bosun realized he was supposed to be keeping time and he beat on the steel bar with his hammer, yelled gutterally, "Hey! Hey! Dots the end of the roundt. Hey! Stop idt!"

As Barney sat down on the crate Vince pushed under the ropes, Vince complained, "What kind of round was that—ten minutes long! Then just when you. . ."

Barney said, "Shut up!"

Vince shut up.

The wait between rounds was almost five minutes long. When the bosun hammered his steel bar, Andre-sson got up heavily and lumbered toward Barney, his hands held a little higher, protecting his head. He had been getting advice between rounds. He looked cautious and slower than ever. Barney stung him with three lightning left jabs and moved in close. Barney's face was white and his mouth drawn down at the ends. He was leaving openings for the Swede—but nothing happened. He didn't want to drop his hands and have his head torn off. There was power in that awkward right of Andre-sson's.

The mate shot in a left that caught him on the ribs. It jarred him. A pale smile flickered for an instant across his lips. He jabbed for Andre-sson's face and the mate shot in that left again. Barney gasped and dropped his guard. The mate swung that looping right. Barney rolled with the punch, taking the weight off it, but he went to his knees, hoping desperately he was making it look like an honest knockdown. Andre-sson would not be satisfied with less.

The poop deck was a pandemonium. Every member of the crew was on his feet and even the Chief Mate had jumped to the stack of lumber to see better, grabbing the pipe from between his clenched teeth before he bit through the stem. Andre-sson smiled sternly as Barney rolled to his side.

The bosun yelled, ". . . nine und ten, you're oudt! You're oudt!"

Vince bent over Barney. "Okay, wise guy, so you took a dive. So we're broke. Nuts to you!" He jumped up and walked away without seeing if Barney needed any help, without lifting him to his feet, without even taking off his gloves. But Barney had seen the hatred in his face.

Up on the boat deck, the Captain's hands relaxed on the rail. He flicked the perspiration from his upper lip. Well, thank God that was over! It was all right now. That third mate was all right. He was a good boy. It would have been a shame to break him—but a mate who's been licked by a deck hand isn't a mate.

A mate has to enforce discipline. If Nolan had beaten him, that story would have followed Andresson around the whole merchant marine, from one job to another, driving from bad berths to worse. The captain shook his shoulders and strode hurriedly for his cabin before anyone caught sight of him there. Praise be that Andresson had won. He liked Andresson.

BARNEY and Vince landed in Newark with only five dollars between them, for Vince had bet even their pay on that fight with the mate. Subtly, Vince's attitude toward Barney had changed. He was friendly, but faintly patronizing, as one scoundrel might be toward a worse scoundrel. He had figured it all out. Barney had thrown the fight. That was one thing you couldn't fool Vince on. He knew prize fighting, and he knew a tank job when he saw one. He had seen Barney go down from a punch that shouldn't even have shaken his hair. Barney had thrown the fight. That was obvious. And what was equally obvious to Vince was that the mate had slipped Barney a couple hundred or so to lay down. And Vince didn't blame Barney a bit. He would have done the same. It was good business. But he was sore that Barney didn't share the two hundred or whatever it was. Well—he kept his grin up there—that was okay. That was chicken feed. In fact, it was money in the bank. He had Barney's number now, and that was going to pay off. And in bigger numbers than a measly two hundred, too.

They took the bus from Port Newark to Penn Station.

"I think we'd better wire Sammy Sloan to have Lars Widlund send us some dough to tide us over till I find a job," Barney said, "We can't go far on five bucks."

"Sure," said Vince sarcastically, "that'd be smart. Why not go out there and ask Widlund yourself—then the cops wouldn't have to come across country to grab you. Suppose Leon Henrouille's dead? The Tacoma cops'll be watching Sammy's mail like hawks, and Widlund's too. The hell with that. We'll go to a hotel, then I'll go down to the post office and see if

Sammy's sent us a letter, like he said he would. You don't want to take chances, Barney. Hell," he said virtuously, "I won't let you!"

Barney believed him because he wanted to believe—he *wanted* to believe in Vince. And, also, he knew he could trust Sammy Sloan out in Tacoma. Whatever Sammy's advice was, it would be good.

He gripped Vince's arm and said quietly, "Okay, Vince."

They registered in a fleabag on Market Street not far from the station, but the sheets were clean if the lobby was not. Vince left Barney there and went straight to the Western Union office and sent a wire to Lars Widlund asking for five hundred dollars. Then he went to the post office, and to his amazement found a letter there from Sammy Sloan. He had thoughtfully lifted Barney's wallet, so he had no trouble claiming it. The letter was type-written;

Dear Friend Barney:

Leon Henrouille is okay now and you can come home but you will be doing everybody a favor if you leave Vince in Newark or even Hoboken. Lars Widlund is making raspberries for you like crazy. It is a good crop. Come back soon. I have a good fight for you all lined up.

Sammy Sloan.

It was signed with Sammy's round, painstaking but unformed signature.

Vince put the letter thoughtfully into his pocket and walked slowly out of the post office. The hell with that. If Barney went back to Washington State the whole grind of working on the raspberry ranch would begin all over again. Nuts.

Scowling with concentration, Vince walked back to Market Street. He stopped in at Grant's Lunch and bought himself two hot dogs and a glass of beer. As he finished his beer, he kept nodding to himself and grinning. He had it all figured out now.

At the drug store on the corner of Broad and Market he bought a box of stationery and a ball point pen, then sat down with Sammy's letter before him and, copying the careful, almost childish form of Sammy's handwriting, wrote:

Dear Friend Barney:

Leon Henrouille ain't dead yet but he is awful bad so my advise is to stay in Nwrk till you hear from me. Get yourself some fights and keep in trim. You can fight under the name Barney Ryan and nobody will be the wiser. Let Vince manage you. He is a louse but he noes the fite game backwards and fourwits and will give you good advise beings he is your brother and all even if he is a louse. But keep punching, friend Barney, and do like Vince says as you will need monney when you return as Lars Widlund don't no beans about razberies. I am working on an angle to get you free from under a murder rap so keep your chin covered. As ever yrs affectly,
Sammy Sloan.

Vince regarded his masterpiece with pride and put it into the envelope from which he had taken Sammy's authentic letter. He sealed it so the small tear on the flap showed hardly at all and put it in his inside pocket. He rubbed his hands together and let that lopsided grin of his run deep into his cheek. Now for the real object of his journey into the city.

He went to the clerk at the tobacco counter and asked, "Say, bud, where do the fighters and managers hang out in this burgh?"

IV

BARNEY was asleep when Vince clamored into their hotel room, boisterously waving Sammy's spurious letter over his head. He sat on the edge of Barney's bed.

"Read it first, kid," he grinned, "then I'll tell you the *good* news. What's he say?"

Barney bit his lips as he read rapidly. His eyes fell to what he thought was Sammy's signature, then read the letter again. He folded it slowly and put it back into the envelope.

"Leon Henrouille's worse," he said shortly.

"Don't worry about it, kid. Sammy'll take care of that end."

"Yeah, that's what he says." Barney took a breath. "I hope. I sure hope. I

didn't *murder* him!" he broke out, "The four of them . . ."

"Sure, sure," Vince soothed him, "All we gotta do is wait, see? In the meantime we do just like Sammy says."

"How do you know what Sammy says?"

"He says sit tight doesn't he?" said Vince innocently.

Barney's suspicion evaporated. "Yeah. Keep my chin covered, he said."

Vince took the letter from Barney's hand and pretended to read it. He put it back in the envelope and tossed it on Barney's lap.

"There you are!" he exclaimed, "It's just a coincidence, but I got a fight for you."

Barney's eyes gleamed. "A fight?"

"What do you think I was doing all this time—running out on you? Hell, I was busy, kid. And I got a fight for you. The guy's waiting downstairs in the lobby. Him and his wife. He's taking us out for chow. Whattya think of that now?"

Barney sprang eagerly from the bed and, standing before the cracked mirror over the rickety chest of drawers beside the window, hastily slid his tie back into his collar. He swung into his jacket.

"Vince," he grinned, "I'd rather fight than eat. Let's get the fight end of it over before we eat."

"I think the guy's hungry. Let him eat and we'll talk to him while he puts it away." He smiled slowly, like a cat with a canary under its paw.

The man waiting in the lobby was short and slight. He wore a soiled trench coat, belted at the waist, and further pulled it out of shape with both hands sunk into the pockets. He had a thin, tired, cynical face, sallow and darkly sagging beneath both eyes. The most striking thing about the woman beside him was the fullness of her wide discontented mouth, the voluptuous promise in her lazy eyes. She was small but deep-breasted and her glance sharpened with sensuous interest when the two tall brothers came from the dusty hallway and strode across the lobby toward them.

The man looked sideways at her and said wearily, "Ah, for gosh sake, Lily, meet them before you start making them."

She put on a full-lipped smile and said through it "Shut up, you little rat."

Vince came forward with his hand out stretched and the man took it imply.

"This is Alec Frazer, Barney," Vince said heartily, "Alec's got a fight he wants to talk over with you while we have dinner. Where we going, Alec? You better take it easy on yourself, because we're broke."

"So you said. Let's go down the Novelty Grill for a slice of fish. That won't bust me."

The woman pinched his arm. "May I come, too, darling?" she said.

"Uh. Yeah. Sure. This is my wife, Helen. These are the Nolan boys, Vince and Barney."

"Barney is Ryan," smiled Vince. "That's his ring name, Helen. Barney Ryan, the best light-heavy this side of the Rockies. And the other side, too. I'll tell you all about it while these two talk business."

He took Helen's arm and led her out of the lobby, talking eagerly while Barney and Alec followed.

Alec didn't say a word during the three block walk to the Novelty Grill, but his hard gray eyes darted from Helen and Vince in front to Barney at his side. After the initial, clinical glance, his eyes discarded Helen and Vince and watched Barney—watched the way he walked, the way he held his head, swung his arms. From the intentness in his gaze, you might almost have thought him a doctor. And in a way, that was true. He was watching for something, and what he saw satisfied him. At the corner of Mulberry and Market, a cab blared a sudden horn, and Alec's eyes stabbed at Barney, who merely waited at the curb, then crossed when the taxi had passed. Alec's thin lips show a brief, tight smile.

They took a rear booth at the Novelty. Both Barney and Vince ate avidly. Shipboard food corroded the palate and, if you were lucky, copper-plated your stomach.

They ate as if they had never seen a piece of broiled halibut before in their lives. Alec stabbed disinterestedly at his swordfish, and Helen was watching Vince too closely to enjoy anything that was set before her.

"That patch over your eye," she said suddenly, "It gives you quite a look, Vince. Piratical, strong, dashing."

Vince touched the patch with his right hand and looked quickly at Barney. "It makes me feel like a heel" he said shortly.

"Well, ain't you?" demanded Alec.

Vince grinned. "Me? I'm just a farm boy." Then, quickly switching, "What do you think of the kid brother, Alec?"

Alec said, "No."

"No? Why not? Ain't he good enough?"

"Too good," said Alec maliciously, "Too good, pal."

"All the better."

"Not for my money, punk." He swung his cynical eyes on Barney, "What's your price for a dive?" he asked.

Vince gripped the table edge and turned white. He said hastily, "Wait a minute."

"Nuts." Alec did not even look at him. "What's your price for a dive, Barney?"

Barney looked from Alec to Vince, back again. "A dive?" he stammered.

"Yeah, a dive. A tank job. You got a price, ain't you? Your brother here said you did. Well, what is it?"

Barney felt suddenly ashamed. He stared straight down into his plate. "There isn't any price," he mumbled, "I don't work that way."

Vince said, "Ha, ha ha." and drew up his mouth. He looked at Alec. "Okay, wise guy, you handle it. You stuck your big foot in it, now get it out."

Alec jerked his chin contemptuously at Vince and said to Barney, "This punk your manager?"

Barney shook his head. Vince flushed. "How'd you like me to manage you?"

Alec asked. "The boys will tell you I'm as crooked as they come. You can believe it or not. Maybe I am. Maybe not. But I'll tell you this much—Abe Salinski wants a boy for a tank job, and your brother here said you were it. I don't think so. Salinski wants a shot at the champ. He's building a rep. He'll pay five C's. What do you say, Barney?"

Vince slapped the table. "I thought I was to handle that end of it," he said angrily.

Alec shrugged. "It makes a difference?"

"You're damn right it makes a difference!"

"But he says you're not handling him. If you're not his manager, how can you handle it?"

Without lifting his head, Barney said, "Get back to the hotel, Vince. Go on, beat it!"

Vince never disputed when Barney used that tone of voice. He laughed uneasily and stood tipping over his chair. He flung down his napkin on the table.

"Okay, jailbird," he jeered at Barney, "See how far you get without me!" His face twisted with the same frustrated hatred he had shown Barney that night Barney had thrown the fight to the mate, Andresson.

He started for the door. Helen Frazer jumped to her feet.

"This party's getting too noble for me," her eyes contemptuously raked Alec's brooding face, "I think you two Boy Scouts want to be alone. Call me up sometime, Alec, when you're in the money again."

She turned and walked defiantly toward Vince, who was waiting near the door with an expectant grin.

Alec said bitterly, "There's a boy who's had woman trouble before."

Barney started to rise from his chair. "Guess I'll be . . ."

Alec put out his hand and stopped him. "Nix, kid, nix. You're looking for some bouts, ain't you? Honest fights, not like this Salinski deal. Give me a shot at handling it for you. I won't cross you. None of my own boys ever took a dive for anybody," he was pleading a little, "I don't handle bums, but if some guy wants a tramp for a tank job, I usually know where to find one. You don't have to sign a contract with me. Just give me a chance."

Barney looked hard at him and Alec met his eyes squarely. Barney nodded. "Okay," he said.

HE WAS in Miehle's Gym at nine the next morning. Alec had a pair of ring shoes and trunks for him and he went back to the locker room to change. Alec had looked at the worried frown between his eyes, had started to say some-

thing, had thought the better of it and let it drop.

When Barney came back from the locker room, Alec was talking to a stocky heavy who was pulling the weights at the side of the big room.

"Here he comes now," Alec said, "There's an extra fin in it for you if you can put him down and keep him there."

The heavy looked at Barney with renewed interest. To him Barney was just another tall, lean scrapper, flaring wide from the upper chest into powerful shoulders. Barney moved with a lazy, deceptive stride. The heavy wasn't impressed.

"You can pay me now," he yawned. "Them tall, skinny ones can't take it in the middle. I'll cut him in half." He took one of the two pairs of practice gloves Alec had under his arm and slid his hands into them with accustomed ease.

Barney came up, looking around with curiosity. "I never trained in a gym before," he said. "Smoky in here."

The heavy looked at Alec in disgust.

Alec said woodenly, "Barney, this is Clapper Wells. He's gonna go a few rounds with you. Make it good. I want to see what you can do."

Barney said, "Sure," and grinned at Wells, who nodded disinterestedly and crawled under the ropes into the practice ring. Barney followed him after Alec laced up his gloves. Wells lounged out of the Corner where he had been leaning, bored, against the ropes.

Barney sparred lightly, the way he always did with Vince, loosening up with those fast little left jabs, dancing around the slow-moving Wells to warm up his legs. Without blinking, Clapper took four lefts to the jaw and side of the face. He languidly raised his guard a little higher and gave Alec a dry, pitying glance. Barney peppered him with a shower of featherweight rights and lefts, moving around a little faster now. Wells waited until he was sure he wasn't going to run into anything solid, then stepped in, taking a light left to the jaw, and hooked a savage right to Barney's ribs. He brought up his left and sank the right again. Barney gasped and went back against the ropes on his heels.

Wells lunged after him, grunting as he threw in a hard left and a harder right. A mist swam before Barney's eyes and he clutched at Wells' arms, but the heavy pushed him away, took a short step backward and drove a straight right flush to Barney's jaw. He hit him twice more with short hooks as he went down. Barney sagged to his hands and knees and swayed, his head hanging. Wells gave him a short glance, then turned on his heel and walked across the ring to the corner where Alec Frazer was biting at his nails.

"I'll take it now, Alec," he yawned. "What a creampuff! He ought to be up by Sunday."

"Yeah? Take a look behind you."

Wells turned. His eyes widened in surprise. Barney was not only up, but his dancing blue eyes said that he was ready for a fight. Wells grinned.

"Well, well," he said, "if the little rubber ball ain't bounced up again. I hate to do it, but let's go."

He put up his hands and let Barney come to him. He saw the left coming and he moved his head a little, intending to roll with it, then bore in with savage hands for the midsection. It caught him on the cheekbone. There was an explosion of sparks before his eyes. A right flushed his jaw from the other side and he grabbed desperately for a clinch. Something ripped into his body and he clung tighter. He threw his weight forward and, locked together, they staggered across the ring.

Wells gasped, "Take it easy, bud. There's only a fin in this for me."

A glove crashed against his chin and he sat down. He stayed there until his head cleared.

Alec kept saying impatiently, "Come on, come on. I could have counted you out twice."

Wells turned his head and thumbed his nose. He'd get up when he was good and ready. His temper began to prick. What a lousy trick! Leading him on like that so he'd run into that powerhouse wide open.

He climbed slowly to his feet and crouched, holding a tight guard. Barney came at him, weaving lithely. Wells didn't throw a punch. He parried and ducked,

waiting, just waiting for a chance to get in close where he could do the most damage.

Barney didn't like it in the middle. Well, that was just where he was going to get it. Barney's left flickered time and again over his guard and they were punches that stung, but it was the right that Wells kept his eye on. He didn't like the left, but he could take it.

Barney was grinning. He was warmed up now and his gloves flickered in and out so effortlessly that there didn't look to be any real snap in them. They seemed to lick out, lightly touch Wells' head and snap back into position for the next blow. When the heavy swung, Barney reached out and touched this thick biceps, just touched them it seemed, and the sting evaporated from the punch. But Wells could tell you what was behind those light touches; so could Alec Frazer, and so could the tall thin man, wearing a rakish derby, who stood behind him.

Barney went in with his hands a little higher, and was just what Wells had been waiting for—a clearer shot at that midsection. He lunged in, pumping with both hands and felt them land.

But almost simultaneously his head rocked from twin explosions that crashed at his chin. Darkness fell with a thunderous rush. When he opened his eyes, Alec Frazer was mopping his face with a wet towel.

"You might of told me," he said bitterly, "Who is he, anyway, Billy Conn's brother?"

"Just a mick from the West. I never saw him fight in my life Clapper."

Wells looked at Barney, who was pulling off his big gloves.

"You got quite a wallop, kid."

Barney grinned. "Sorry I got sore, Clapper. I didn't expect you to tear into me right away."

Wells said ruefully, "Yeah. It's tough. I know just how you feel." He climbed to his feet and as he turned to slip under the ropes, Alec slipped him a ten.

A LEC threw a shapless robe over Barney's shoulders and whispered, "There's a guy over here I want you to

meet. Fran Willis. He runs the fights over at St. Mike's Arena."

Alec introduced them and Willis smiled. "Nice workout, Ryan," then lightly to Alec, "How much did you have to slip Wells?"

Alec snorted. "Since when did Clapper play fish for anybody?"

"Hm. That's a fact," he smiled at Barney again, "No offense, Ryan. I just think of *all* the angles. I got a spot for you tomorrow night in the prelims on my card if you want it. One of the boys is down with a broken hand and I need a substitute."

Alec laughed, bit off the end of his cigar and spat it on the floor. "Since when do you expect to get class like Barney in the prelims?" he jeered.

"And who ever heard of Ryan? Not me."

"Out West, he was the boy who brought in the customers. You just saw what he can do. They loved him."

"As far as I know, he's just another gym-wonder. What can he do when it's for keeps? I'll give fifty just to see how he shapes up."

"Fifty! Why pay him at all? Make it a hundred."

"For a prelim-boy, Alec? Talk sense. Tell you what I'll do—if he shows up tomorrow night the way he did this morning and *if* the crowd likes him, I'll think about him for a semi-final."

Alec threw up his hands in despair, grumbled, but finally said grudgingly, "Who'll he be fighting?"

"Al Moore, a Harrison boy."

"That meatball! It won't go a round."

Willis smiled from Alec to Barney, who grinned back. "I don't go for one-round knockouts," he said, "I've seen too many good boys put away trying it."

Willis winked at Alec. "And he's smart, too," he said. "See you tomorrow night, guys." He walked away.

When he was out of earshot, Alec said gleefully, "Sold him, by heck! Believe it or not, he's one of the toughest onions in the racket."

"How tough is this Al Moore?" Barney asked.

Alec grimaced. "He's got two hands

and one of 'em's a right, and so far he don't seem to care who punches him in the snoot. The kid who was supposed to have fought him didn't come down with a broken hand. He came down with a broken nerve. I happen to know. You'll earn your fifty."

Barney nodded. "Nobody looks good against a palooka. I don't like push overs."

"Talking of push overs," Alec pulled a newspaper from his pocket, "Take a look at this and thank your lucky stars." He pointed at a paragraph in a sport column called *Inside stuff with Jimmy Duff*.

It said, "Mentioning no names, but there's a light-heavy contender around town looking for a push over and offering five hundred, providing that he won't have to push too hard. This department is investigating, and if a fish has nibbled there'll be two of them telling the Commission how come."

"He means that, too," Alec said seriously. "Duff's a tough baby. Am I glad *we* didn't nibble! Salinski won't dare fight a set up now. Duff's the boy who can-put the fear of God in them. Well," he stuffed the paper back into his pocket, "put on your clothes and do a little road work in the park. I don't think you'll need anything more in here today."

Barney hesitated. "Alec," he said, "Look, if you're going to handle me, tank jobs are out from now on. *All* tank jobs."

Alec's eyes lighted. "Kid, all my life I been looking for a fighter—a clean guy I wouldn't be ashamed of handling. Even if he never got to be champ. I think you're it. Know what I mean?"

"Okay. That's the answer."

"That's the answer. You won't have nothing to worry about. Now," his voice took on a note of authority again, "now get dressed and get out there and run a little. You shouldn't of let Clapper move in on you the way you did that first time. We're gonna get a little more spring in those legs. Now get going."

But as Barney turned away, he stammered, "Say . . . uh . . . did . . . did your brother . . . get back to the hotel all right last night?"

Barney stopped. Vince had not been at the hotel when he awakened that morn-

ing and his bed had not been slept in.

But he said, "Yeah. Sure. He was waiting for me."

Alec looked visibly relieved. "I just wondered. He . . . he seemed kind of sore," he mumbled. "Get dressed, get dressed. Waiting for me to dress you?"

Barney grinned and walked toward the locker room, but his grin disappeared the moment his back was turned. Poor guy, he thought, poor guy. He knew what was behind that question. Helen Frazer had not been home last night, either.

V

WHILE BARNEY was taking his roadwork in Branch Brook Park, Alec dropped in to see Jimmy Duff, the sport writer.

"The kid's got everything, Jimmy," he said, "He can box and he can hit. Sure, there are a thousand guys with the same stuff, but he's got something else. You should of seen what he did to Clapper Wells this morning after the Clapper knocked him down for a good count. He finished the Clapper off like it was a personal grudge. He *never* let up."

Duff rifled through the papers on his desk. He had a round, pink face and a little rosebud mouth, but his eyes were gray and intent like those of a hungry shark.

"I hear he was approached to take a fall for Salinski," he said bluntly.

This was one of the reasons Alec had visited Duff. Ordinarily he would have stayed away until Barney'd had at least one fight. "Sure he was approached," he said promptly, "but he turned it down."

"He should have reported it to the Commission."

"Now, Jimmy," Alec said reproachfully, "you know better than that. You know how these things are done—there's nothing to put the finger on. Suppose some hot-shot you'd never seen before and you'll never see again comes up to a fighter and says out of the side of his mouth—'there's a spot for you on the St. Mike card next month. I ain't saying a certain guy'll be in the same ring with you, but if you took the count in the fifth and when you got

back to your dressing room and there was an envelope for you, wouldn't you be surprised to find five C's in it?' That's a typical approach around here. What can you do with it?"

Duff tapped his teeth with the tip of his shears. "Who's this Barney Ryan fighting tomorrow night?" he asked.

"That tough Harrison egg, Al Moore." Then, grinning, "Maybe you think there's a fix on that, too?"

"Could be," Duff said casually, "To build Ryan up. I think I'll drop in and look it over. I can tell when Moore's trying or not." He put down the shears and looked Alec full in the face. "I don't trust you from here to there Alec. This wouldn't be the first fix you've been errand boy for. God help you and this Ryan if I as much as smell fish. Personally, I like you, but I don't like your habits. I don't like the way your hands shake when you see a chance to make a buck. Go down and have a beer and think it over. I got my eye on you."

The enthusiasm went dead in Alec. He couldn't deny anything Duff had said. He could explain. He could tell Duff about Helen, that he loved her, that she had only stuck to him as long as he was in the chips, and in the fight game you were either lucky or crooked—but Duff would only laugh at him. Duff was tougher than the steel in a bank safe.

He stopped at the door and faltered, "I suppose you wouldn't tell me who tipped you off that Ryan was approached for a fix."

Duff said derisively, "Don't be silly."

Alec went slowly down the stairs to the street. He glanced mechanically at his watch, then, with dragging steps, walked up to Broad Street and took the bus.

He didn't really expect Helen would be in the apartment when he walked in, but the smoldering ache burst into tongues of pain when he found the rooms actually empty, the way he had left them that morning. Then he saw the closet and the empty bureau drawers hanging out. Her clothes were gone, even her handkerchiefs and bathing suit. He stared dumbly. He looked for a note, but of course there

wasn't any. Helen would never have bothered to leave a note, would never have bothered to ease the pain. His mouth twisted and he strode for the kitchen. He snatched up the bottle on the table but even while he was drinking, the tears were spilling down his face.

VINCE did not come back to the hotel that night, either. In fact, he didn't turn up until Barney was getting ready to leave for St. Mike's Arena. Barney's eyes jumped wide when he walked in.

It was a different Vince. He was wearing a yellow sport jacket, a coffee brown shirt and brown sharkskin slacks.

"Look me over," he said with a grin.

"Where'd you get the money for that?"

"Take it easy. I didn't hold up anybody. I cleaned up in a crap game," he lied. He didn't intend telling Barney that he had sent to Widlund for five hundred dollars from the sale of their raspberries.

Barney shook his head. "Aw, Vince, you're not going to start that again, are you? You know what it was like out in Tacoma. You were in hock half the time. Why don't you. . . ."

"It was just for the stake, Barney," Vince interrupted swiftly, "I'm off the dice from now on. I got a job. This guy Willis over at the St. Mike's Arena needed a publicity man and I talked myself into it. Not bad, eh?"

"On the level?"

"On the level, kid. You know me, I can talk myself into anything. Say, Barney. . . ." he affected embarrassment, "there's. . . no hard feelings about the other night, is there?"

Barney looked down at his hands. "It was a crummy thing to try, Vince. You know I wouldn't throw a fight."

"Sure. I don't know what got into me," Vince said glibly, "I guess maybe it looked like an easy way to make five hundred, and no one'd blame you for getting beat by Salinski. But just like you say, it was a crummy thing to try. I'm strictly legit from now on. Honest, Barney."

"Okay, Vince. I'm glad to hear it."

Vince threw his arm around Barney's shoulder as they walked toward the door. "Gonna beat this punk tonight, Kid? He's

three-to-one and I got a hundred riding on you."

"Why don't you lay off the easy money, Vince? How do I know if I'm going to beat him?"

Vince laughed. "This isn't gambling, kid. I've seen you fight when you get sore. You'll take him apart. Well," he slapped Barney on the arm, "see you at the Arena."

Barney was faintly surprised when Vince turned and walked down the street, leaving him standing there. He saw Vince turn the corner, and a moment later he heard the grind of a car starting off in low gear, and then he understood. Helen Frazer had been waiting there for him. Vince was heading for trouble again.

Alec was not at the Arena when he got there. He went to the general dressing room and slowly changed into the trunks and shoes Alec had gotten for him. Fran Willis came in, leaned against the door and watched him.

Barney said, "Hello, Mr. Willis. Seen Alec?"

Willis shook his head. "Heard he's having trouble. I'll give you a boy for your corner, but you'll have to slip him a five. Going to give us a good fight tonight?"

Barney grinned. Then, "Thanks for giving my brother that job, Mr. Willis. Vince is smart. You won't be sorry."

Willis said drily, "I hope. See you later, Ryan."

Barney stood in the runway, the shapeless old robe thrown over his shoulders, and watched two young inexperienced middleweights trying to tear each other's heads off. They were both bloody and the crowd was screaming. The bell rang and both staggered to their corners. The referee raised the arm of one and the crowd laughed but cheered good-naturedly. Who cares who wins a brawl like that.

The crowd was silent when Barney jumped lightly into the ring, but it burst into a roar when Al Moore strutted down the aisle, cocky and tough. He was shorter than Barney, but heavier through the body.

The referee, an ex-heavy, gave them the instructions in a hoarse rumble. He was a tough referee and you had to keep punching when he was in the ring. He

didn't seem to believe such a thing as a foul existed.

Moore tried to act just as tough. He had a reputation for being a scrapper, in and out of the ring, and he was trying to live up to it. He grabbed Barney by the arms and snarled at the referee,

"This guy's got a habit of doin' this," he jabbed his thumb at Barneys eye, "He put his own brothers eye out. If he tries that on me, I'll give him everything from the boots up!"

The referee growled, "Get back to your corners and quit the clowning." He gave each of them a shove.

Barneys face was white. His lips were a thin line and his eyes were blue flames as that old fury welled up inside him. Always to be reminded of what he had done to Vince!

Moore bounded across the ring at the bell, coming in low and hard, mauling with both hands. He grabbed Barney and butted and wrestled him back to the ropes, working with everything he had. He fouled Barney twice before the referee parted them. He always did that, and it usually worked. He put the fear of God into his opponents. He even tried to reach Barney over the referee's arms as they were parted, knowing he could get away with it, knowing the crowd was eating it up. It was all part of the reputation he was building. He came sweeping in again and Barney nailed him on the bridge of the nose with that straight left.

Moore's head flew back and he flailed backward across the ring. Barney stalked him. Moore crouched. Blood dripped from his face. He held up his hands but he seemed unable to move his legs. The terror in his eyes was so wild that a sudden hush washed back from ringside into the depths of the auditorium. Barney went in swiftly and Moore, suddenly finding his legs, went skittering down the ropes, fleeing. He had never been hit so hard with a left before.

BARNEY'S face tight and frozen, his eyes icy and flat. He didn't let Moore get three steps before he was on him like a great cat. He speared him with another left and the mouthpiece flew from be-

tween Moore's teeth. Barney straightened him up with a lifting right and drove him into the corner. He stood wide-legged and flat-footed and lashed a savage, two-handed attack, swaying from leg to leg. Moore's head bobbed and his hair danced as the gloves beat suddenly at his face, but he couldn't fall for Barney had him wedged in the corner and the blazing fury kept Barney's hands beating in a frenzy of punishment.

A towel went flying through the air from Moore's corners and at ringside even the reporters were on their feet, screaming and a shrieking woman in the second row was beating at them with her handbag. The burly referee hurled himself at Barney, wound his heavy arms around him and as he dragged him back, Moore fell straight forward on his face. Someone was yelling, "Forty-two seconds, forty-two seconds!" as if his life depended on it.

Barney stood dazed in his corner as the anger ebbed out of him. His hands hung limply at his sides and dully he watched Moore being helped to his feet. The Harrison boy was coming around. He looked over his shoulder, saw Barney standing there and his eyes spread with fear.

As the referee raised Barney's hand he growled, "What dumb yak matched you two? Willis should know better."

The crowd was still screaming when Barney walked alone up the aisle and down the runway to the dressing room. Willis was there, but no Alec.

Willis said tightly, "Alec's home sick. Take your shower. I want to talk to you."

When Barney came out from the shower, towelling himself, he saw a short, fat, pink-faced man talking to Willis. It was Jimmy Duff, the sports writer. They stopped talking and looked up when Barney walked in.

Duff said with peculiar emphasis, "So you're Alec Frazer's boy. How'd he happen to pick you up?"

Barney grinned. "One of those things." "If you're smart, you'll get from under."

Willis protested, "Alec's okay, Jimmy. Give him a chance. Don't try to tell me you thought tonight's go was fixed."

"Hell no. Moore or nobody would take a lacing like that for any money. When's he fighting again?" he jerked his head at Barney.

"Next week. In the final," Willis said so promptly that both of them laughed. "I'll see if I can get that kraut—Heinie Pfaff."

"That sounds more like it." Duff looked appraisingly at Barney. "Come up to the News office tomorrow morning as early as you can. I want some pictures." He started toward the door, turned. "And get loose from Alec Frazer."

He nodded to Vince in the doorway and crowded past him. Willis watched Barney dress and said slowly, "Why didn't you take it easy on Moore when you found out he was a punk?"

Barney's answer was short. "He got me sore."

"I could see that. But I've seen guys get sore in the ring before and they usually got their ears torn off."

Vince grinned, "Barney don't get sore that way. He gets like ice."

Willis ignored him. "Can you go ten rounds?" he asked Barney, "This Heine Pfaff is a tough boy. Nobody's put him out yet."

"Barney's gone fifteen rounds," Vince said.

"Where?"

"Out in . . . in Chicago. And knocked the guy out in the fifteenth, too."

Willis looked sharply at him. It was obvious that he didn't believe Vince, but when Barney said nothing, Willis dropped it.

He said, "See you next Friday," and walked out.

Vince took Barney's arm and walked him down the deserted corridor. Inside the auditorium, they could hear the crowd yelling.

Vince whispered, although there was no need for whispering, "Don't let Duff get your picture in the papers, kid. You don't wanna take any chances till Sammy Sloan gets that mess with the Henrouilles straightened up out in Tacoma. You're going places and you don't want to spoil it by having the cops on your neck."

Barney closed his eyes. In the flush

of victory he had forgotten that Leon Henrouille was, according to Vince, lying in a Tacoma hospital, hovering between life and death. His spirits slumped.

"I guess you're right," he mumbled.

"Sure I'm right."

Vince opened the street door. "See you tomorrow, kid. Sorry I can't go out and celebrate with you, but I got other things to do."

"Things like Helen Frazer?" asked Barney slowly. "You don't have to run around with her, Vince. There are other girls."

"Sure," Vince sneered, pointedly touching the black patch over his empty eye socket, "I can get any dame I want, I suppose."

"I . . . I . . . it isn't as bad. . . ."

"No, no, it's nothing! Nothing at all! Maybe you'd like to go around the rest of your life with one eye. Why not. It's fun!" he said viciously.

"But why Helen? Alec's nuts about her"

"If she don't want no part of him, why should I worry. Stop preaching, will you? I'm getting sick of it. If you want to worry about something, take a look at this," he shoved a letter into Barney's hand, "I wasn't going to give it to you, but you kept asking for it." He slammed the door and left Barney standing on the sidewalk.

Barney turned the letter in his hand. It was from Sammy Sloan in Tacoma. Vince had extracted the original and inserted his own forgery. It said;

Dear Friend Barney:

Leon Henrouille has a fractured skull and they operated. It is life and death. If he dies you'll have to come back before election. Stay where you are till you hear from me on account of I don't want you railroaded to the caboose. He has a 50-50 chance. Don't write me on account they watch my mail.

Sammy Sloan.

Barney put the letter in his pocket and plodded heave down the street toward the bus stop on the corner.

VI

THE NEXT morning he went to see Alec Frazer. Alec was in bed. He looked terrible. There were two empty bottles lying on their sides next to the bed.

Barney sat on the edge of the bed and said casually, "I won last night, Alec."

"Knew you would." Alec coughed as if his throat were dry. He didn't show much interest.

"Willis wants me to fight Heinie Pfaff next week."

Alec's eyes stirred.

Barney went on, "They say he's a hard rock. Heinie Pfaff."

Alec muttered. "Yeah. Too good for everybody but the top-bracket boys, and they don't want no part of him. A lousy match for you. How much you gettin'?"

"Willis didn't say."

Interest began to gleam in Alec's blood-shot eyes. He pushed himself shakily upright and leaned against the headboard of the bed. "You leave that to me," he said with more life in his voice, "That louse Willis. He'll kick in if he wants you. More guys have busted their hands on that knucklehead and got no place." He swung his feet over the edge of the bed and felt for his slippers. "You go down the gym and work on the big bag," he ordered. "I'll see you later."

Barney went out grinning.

They weren't exactly hanging from the rafters of the arena, but there was a good crowd, better than the Friday before, and they were yelling for blood.

Heinie Pfaff was everything Alec had said he was. He was short and slow but as thick-bodied as a wrestler and his small, round head looked like a real knuckle-breaker. He liked to get in close and methodically rip the middle out of you.

Barney went out fast and was three times around the stolid German, stabbing him with that long left, before Pfaff could get set to throw a punch. He threw a long right and Pfaff blinked as it smacked against the side of his jaw. Barney lanced a left to Pfaff's nose and a trickle of blood showed on his upper lip.

The crowd was on its feet instantly, yelling.

"Kill 'im, Ryan!"

"Kill the kraut."

Pfaff was the local villain who had stopped many a favorite son. They hated him for doing it so stolidly, in such a business-like manner with no emotion. Pfaff took another to the side of the head, then suddenly lunged inside, working both short powerful arms. Barney's middle glowed an angry red.

Pfaff grunted contemptuously, "Ja, kill the lousy kraut. Like you kill dot feller out West, hey, Nolan?"

Barney felt himself go cold. "Who told you that?"

"Come on. Fight."

The color drained out of Barney's face. He took two more stiff jolts to the ribs before he tied up the German. For a moment his legs felt rubbery. Pfaff knew about the Canuck, and Pfaff had called him Nolan, not Ryan. But before the referee could come to part them, he pushed Pfaff away with a surge of his shoulders and sent in a straight left that crashed between Pfaff's nose and cheekbone. Pfaff's head went back as if on a hinge and Barney hit him again while his chin was still tilted. Pfaff dropped leadenly to his hands and knees. Barney stood over him, hands ready, until the referee pushed him away and indicated the neutral corner.

The crowd counted joyously and in unison with the referee.

Pfaff was up at nine, but he was no longer the stolid, heavy fighter he had been. He looked around and he backed away as Barney stalked across the ring at him. He tried to cover his head as Barney came in savagely. In a moment he had lost all his ringcraft and he backed into his own corner. Barney nailed him there with another left then, weaving from side to side threw everything he had, beating down Pfaff's guard, bouncing his round head from side to side with the fury of his attack.

Pfaff clutched at him, but his hands feebly slid down Barney's arms and he went to his knees, clinging to the second strand of ropes, his head bowed.

Alec was into the ring and had the robe around his shoulders before the

referee had crossed to raise Barney's hand. Alec's face was pale and his hands were trembling. He rushed Barney up the aisle through the yelling, cheering grabbing crowd.

This time Barney had a dressing room to himself.

Willis came in, smiling and rubbing his hands together, and with him the plump, cold-eyed Duff. Duff was also smiling. He even nodded in a friendly way at Alec.

"Nice fight, Ryan," he said to Barney. "How come you didn't come down to the office? I don't have a picture of you. Don't you want the publicity?"

"He'll be down tomorrow," said Alec quickly; his hands were trembling as he massaged Barney's legs.

The door opened and the silence was suddenly so thick you could almost taste it. Stewie Leonard, Abe Salinski's manager, walked in and took his cigar from his mouth. Duff stared at him with hostility and looked quickly at Alec, whose face had turned deathly pale.

Leonard said in a hearty, commercial voice, "Glad to see you here, Mr. Duff. I think we got a story for you if Mr. Frazer here is as smart as I think he is." He hooked his left thumb in the armhole of his vest and smiled benevolently. "I been thinking we could get a good gate if we matched my boy Abe with Ryan here. Whattya say, Mr. Frazer?"

Alec opened his mouth but the words seemed frozen in his throat. Duff's quick eyes darted between him and flashy Stewie Leonard in the doorway.

"But Ryan's had only two fights here," he purred, "How do you know he'll draw, Leonard?"

Leonard waved his cigar and chuckled. "It'll be all over town tomorrow what he did to Heinie Pfaff tonight. Now the crowd'll wanna see what he can do against a good boy like Abe Salinski. Draw! He'll draw like flies."

Duff shot a sharp, slantwise glance at the frozen Alec. "Do you think Ryan's ready for Salinski?" he asked significantly.

Alec gulped and said, "S-sure he's ready. Ain't you, Barney?"

Barney said, "I'll fight him," but there

was something going on here that he didn't catch. The air crackled with it.

Willis broke into a false, cackling laugh. "Hell, Jimmy," he said "you saw what he did to Heinie Pfaff tonight. Heinie is another boy you can't fix and you know it."

"Sure I know it," Duff dug his hands in his pockets and teetered up on his toes. "And here's something else I know. A week ago there was talk of Ryan here being a set-up for Abe Salinski. And now, just by coincidence, in walks Leonard here and offers the same match out of the clear blue. How come Salinski suddenly decided to fight a rugged scrap after all?" he shot at Leonard.

Leonard shook his head. "These newspaper boys!" he said forgivingly. "All the time they're smelling rats. I think they got rats up their nose. Mr. Duff," he said, his voice sharpening, "you're a real tough feller but let's put up or shut up. You lay it on the table or I'll slap you with a libel suit. You think this match between Abe and Ryan is a fix? Okay. Say so in your paper tomorrow. But you get ready to go to court, because that's where I'll be seeing you."

Duff looked around at the ring of set faces, then nodded once and walked out without another word, Willis licked his lips. He looked at Alec.

"This isn't another fast one, is it?" he asked harshly, "Because if it is. . ."

"It's on the level, Fran. I swear. Would we be such a dope? I'm sending Barney in to murder the guy."

Leonard said, "Ha, ha. He should live through the third round. In two weeks, Fran" he said to Willis. "And rest your mind. When Ryan goes down it'll be a poke in the jaw not a poke in the pocket. Let's go down your office. We talk it up."

Willis bit his lip, glanced at Alec and quickly followed the big, flashy man out of the dressing room. Alec closed the room.

"You ain't hardly said a word," he said uneasily to Barney, "Don't you like the match?"

Barney's eyes gleamed for a moment. "Alec," he said, "I only live when I'm in the ring."

Alec looked up sharply at the intensity in his voice, then stooped to pick up the towel he had dropped.

Barney went on, "When I'm in there swinging, something happens to me. I'm . . . I'm getting rid of something. I dunno," he finished lamely, "Maybe I got a grudge against the world and that's my way of getting rid of it. All I know is that I'd rather fight than eat. Most of the time. It was the same way out on the West Coast," he rambled on, forgetting that he was supposed to keep that part of his past hidden, "I could work just so long on the ranch, but it would keep building up and building up until I had to go down to Tacoma to see Sammy Sloan and have him fix me up with a fight so I could get it out of my system. Know what I mean, Alec?"

"Sure. Dempsey was the same way. Ever see his fight pictures around the time of Carpenter and Willard? Looked like he was mad at everybody. Me, I call it the champeen's grudge. You got it."

"Sure he's got it."

They turned. Vince leaned against the wall beside the door, his hands in the pockets of the yellow sport jacket. Alec's face turned yellow. He walked across the room into the sower and slammed the door. A moment later another door slammed, and they knew he was gone out through the connecting dressing room.

"Why's he blame me?" Vince complained, "I didn't ask his wife to leave him. I ain't keeping her away. It ain't my fault."

When Barney spoke it was as if he hadn't heard these words at all. "Did you win on the fight tonight, Vince?" he asked tightly.

"Win!" Vince grinned, took a sheaf of bills from his inside pocket and riffled them with his thumb. "I cleaned up. You were on the short end of 10-1."

BARNEY was off the table in a swooping stride. He gathered Vince's yellow jacket in his big fist and shoved him against the wall, holding him there.

"You told Pfaff I killed Leon Henrouille!"

Vince gaped, ceasing to struggle. "You're crazy!"

"He said. . . ."

"I don't care what he said. I didn't tell him nothing, Barney. Honest I didn't. Wait a minute," he said eagerly, "If he said anything about a killing, maybe he meant that Canuck, Dupre, that died after his bout with you in Tacoma. But I didn't tell him, Barney. Honest I didn't."

"You're lying. And who told Al Moore that I put your eye out?"

"Not me, Barney. I swear I never opened mby mouth to Moore."

"You're lying, dammit! You cleaned up on both fights. You know I go crazy when somebody throws that in my face. You knew I'd crucify Moore the minute he opened my mouth to Moore." ately. . . ."

Vince detected a note of uncertainty in Barney's voice. His eye gleamed and he said arrogantly, "Take your hands off me! Who do you think you are, anyway?"

Barney tightened his grip, fighting the temper inside him. Vince swore and swung at him. Barney saw the fist coming. He jerked his head to one side and Vince's knuckles split the skin on his cheekbone. The compressed fury exploded in his head and he lunged at Vince with both hands. Vince cried out in terror. Barney's fist caught him on the left cheekbone and shelving cartilage over his eye. He crashed over the chair beside the door and fell to the floor. He rolled on his back and lay still.

The black patch had come off and the sightless socket stared emptily and redly. A small trickle of blood curtained his left eye and ran down his cheek.

Barney crouched, rigid with horror. The blood moved down Vince's cheek like a searching, accusing finger. He felt sick.

"Vince!" he cried in anguish, "Vince!"

He picked Vince up and gently laid him on the rubbing table. Frantically he rushed into the shower for a wet towel. When he came out, Vince was sitting up on the table, his hand to the cut over his left eye. His fingers came away, greasy with blood, and for a moment his face was half mad with fear—the fear of total blindness. But in the next instant

his face changed. He was *seeing*—he was *seeing* the blood on his fingers, he was *seeing* Barney standing there, ashen-cheeked. He hadn't been blinded—but it wasn't relief that showed in his face; it was rage, hatred, cruelty. With a hoarse growl, he leaped from the table and flung himself at Barney.

He *knew* that Barney wouldn't defend himself, wouldn't strike back. He set himself and threw a hard, roundhouse right that crashed on the side of Barney's face. Deliberately he swung his left and cut open the opposite side. Barney groaned, bowed behind his hands and fell back a step. Vince followed him. He hooked his fist heavily into Barney's unprotected stomach, then rocked him with a right and left to the sides of the head again as Barney's hands dropped. Barney was just standing there, leaning weakly against the wall. Another groan was wrenched from him as Vince's cutting fists smashed into his face, first the right eye, then the left. Vince's knuckles hammered his lips against his teeth and his whole mouth went numb. He was hit several times after that, but he was falling, and he was out when he hit the floor.

Vince stood panting for a moment, then straightened up and shrugged his sport jacket back in place. He blew on his knuckles.

"You crumb!" he said contemptuously.

He picked up his patch from the floor and swaggered out.

VII

BARNEY did not go down to the gym for a workout the next day. On the second day Alec came to him. Barney was lying in bed, fully dressed, his face turned to the wall. He did not stir, even when he heard the door close, even when Alec sat on the edge of the bed. Alec lit a cigarette.

"This is a heluva way to train for Salinski," he said mildly.

Barney did not answer.

Alec said, "Sick, kid?"

Still there was no answer. Alec took a few more puffs from the cigarette. He himself was gaunt and there were shadows

of corroding tragedy under his eyes. His hand trembled each time he lifted the cigarette to his mouth.

When he spoke again it was with effort. "I heard that scrap between you and your brother the other night," he said jerkily, "I was out in the corridor. Vince wasn't the one who put Al Moore up to taunting you about putting his eye out, and he wasn't the one who tipped off Heinie Pfaff," he took a breath, "I was the guy, Barney. I tipped them off. Vince told me about it that night I braced you to take a fall for Salinski. Vince said he had you in the palm of his hand. That's what he told me before we met you. He said all he had to do to drive you crazy was to mention his eye, or just bring up the name of that Canuck Dupre. I had Moore and Pfaff tipped off because I hoped you'd rip them apart when they opened their yaps. They thought *you'd* fall apart. I wanted you to be sure to win, Barney. That's why I did it. Don't blame," he spoke with difficulty again, "don't blame Vince for it."

Though Alec did not realize it, this confession only ground salt into Barney's wounds, made things worse. Now Barney realized that he had attacked Vince with no provocation, had come close to blinding him entirely. And for what. For something Alec had done.

He said in a dead, muffled voice, "Get out of here."

"Aw, come on, Barney. This ain't no way. You go a fight with Salinski a week from Friday."

"I'm not going to fight him."

"Sure you are kid. You feel bad now because you bounced Vince around a little, but he had it coming to him. What's he ever done for you? Ruined your life so far, that's what. Made you feel responsible for every crooked deal he got himself into. He's got you all mixed up inside. He ain't worth it."

"Get out of here, Alec. I'm telling you, get out of here!"

Alec threw down his cigarette and jumped up. "Okay," he said angrily, "but you're pulling all of us down with you. You know what Duff's gonna say when he hears the fight's off. That he scared

you out of it, that there was something crooked, and he'll make a stink even the Commission'll smell. I was counting on this fight for a stake for myself," he said shrilly, "I want Helen back, see? I want her back! If I have the dough, she'll come back. I'm not gonna let your lousy brother take her away from me. I want her back! And you're not gonna stop me. You hear? You're not gonna stop me!" He fairly glittered with the brittle rage that wasn't entirely sane. He swore as he wrenched open the door. He slammed it and Barney could hear the trickle of plaster dust behind the loose wallpaper. He closed his eyes and turned his battered face into the pillow. A sense of guilt and doom flooded over him.

Alec was back on Thursday, and with him was Vince, jaunty in a green sport jacket. There was a small bruise on his left cheekbone, but his eye sparkled more brightly than ever. Barney sat hunched in the tattered club chair beside the window.

Alec said coldly, "This . . . Vince wants to talk to you. I'll wait outside." It was obvious that even being in the same room with Vince was agony to him.

Vince sat on the edge of the bed and chided, "Aw, snap out of it, Barney. By-gones are by-gones. I had it coming to me." He laughed. "I'm the guy that should be taking it hard, not you."

Barney looked up. He stammered, "Vince . . ."

"Yeah. I been kind of a louse, ain't I? Always standing in your way, always making you get me out of one mess after another, doublecrossing you," Vince shook his head and looked down at his hands; he clenched them, "I'm sorry, Barney," he said in a low voice, "I was a heel and I'm sorry." He put his hands over his face, but watched Barney between his fingers.

Barney jumped up. He sat on the bed beside Vince and put his arm around his shoulder. Vince grinned behind his hands. It was wonderful. That gift of gab was worth money.

Barney faltered, "Vince!" His hand tightened on Vince's shoulder. It said more than he could articulate.

Vince dropped his hands into his lap and slowly turned his head. His mouth was a crescent of contrition.

"I been a louse to you, Barney," he said lugubriously.

Something bubbled up inside Barney and he shook Vince's shoulder. "Forget it," he said happily, "Forget it, Vince."

"No. I won't forget it, but I'm going to try to make up for it. I'm not gonna stand in your way again, Barney."

Barney jumped up, grinning from ear to ear.

Buttons popped from his shirt as his eager hands impatiently tugged at them. "This calls for a celebration, Vince, I'll buy you the biggest . . ."

Vince gave him a small, wistful smile. "You're a great guy, Barney. But if there's any celebrating to do, I'm paying for it," he could scarcely keep the corners of his mouth still as the laugh struggled for release, "This is on me, Barney. You get shaved and dressed," he patted Barney on the back, "I'm gonna show you a real time. We'll go to the Gilt Edge for dinner, then to the burlesque, and take it up from there."

When Barney went lightly into the bathroom, he opened the hall door.

"You can take off your rubber panties," he sneered at Alec, "It's all fixed. Give me the fifty."

Alec's hands shook violently as he took a fifty dollar bill from his pocket and put it into Vince's outstretched hand.

"Now beat it," said Vince. He closed the door.

He was sitting on the bed again when Barney came from the bathroom, shaved and combed.

"This week ain't done you much good, kid," he said, watching Barney narrowly, "Maybe you'd better call off that bout with Salinski."

"Nothing could keep me out of that ring now," Barney grinned, knotting his tie before the mirror over the chest of drawers.

Vince let out a breath of relief. "Salinski's tough," he warned, "He's tougher than anybody you've fought, kid."

Barney turned, swinging into his coat, "Like John Paul Jones said," he grinned,

"I've just begun to fight."

"A week ain't much time to train."

"It's enough. I had a good rest this week. Maybe that's what I needed. I feel all tuned up like a concert piano. Let's go. I'm hungry enough to eat a wolf."

"Meaning me?"

They laughed and went out arm in arm. Vince had a cab waiting before the hotel. Barney got in first. As Vince was closing the door, a petite, black-haired girl darted across the sidewalk crying,

"Vince! Vince!"

Vince snapped at the driver, "Get going."

The cab leaped from the curb. Barney twisted to look back at the girl standing forlornly on the side walk.

"That's . . . that's . . ." he snapped his fingers, trying to remember.

"That's a little tart named Vera something, that's been chasing me for a week," Vince said quickly.

Barney took a last glance at the small, receding figure. "I could have sworn it was little Jeanne Henrouille," he said.

Vince laughed. "You got the Henrouilles on the mind," he scoffed, "Jeanne was never as skinny as that. You're not worried about Leon Henrouille, are you, kid?"

"What do you think?" asked Barney somberly.

"Well, forget it. I got good news for you. I got a letter from Sammy Sloan, and he says Leon's out of the hospital and he's okay. What do you think of that?"

From the tail of his eye, Vince watched the mute thankfulness flood into Barney's face, then quickly added;

"But Sammy says, stay under cover. The warrant's still out, and Leon ain't quite right in the head. They expect he'll get over that though. Hell, Barney," he shook his brother's arm, "don't forget, there was four of them that jumped you, and they'd be crying out of the other side of their mouth if you was the one that was walking on his heels."

"Yeah. I guess so, Vince. I just don't like it hanging over me, that's all."

"Trust Sammy. He'll take care of everything. But for the time being," he said with a satisfied smirk, "let's enjoy ourself."

BARNEY was at the gym early the next morning. He had a week, just one week to get in shape for Salinski. In spite of what he had said to Vince, those days of brooding lassitude had made him a little soft, had dulled his eyes a little, had taken the edge from his timing.

He ran ten miles a day. Most fighters ran five, but Barney had the legs and wind of a marathoner. He worked on the light bag to develop speed, on the heavy bag for power. He skipped rope to sharpen his foot work.

But mostly Alec worked to fashion his left into a killing weapon. In a back room, he had Barney go against two lightweights with his right arm strapped to his side.

"You're a right-hander," he told Barney, "and that's where Salinski'll expect rock-a-bye-baby to come from. I want you to forget for a couple days you even have a right. Your left's a killer, but you haven't used it enough."

Through all that hard week of training, Alec's expression never changed. His eye never kindled with enthusiasm, and his voice always had the same leaden timbre. His narrow face was still and bleak.

Barney's speed returned, his timing, the fire in his fists. Reporters, who came to watch his public work-outs, left the gym with a knowing glint in their eyes. By the night of the fight, Salinski was only a 5-3 favorite. Of all the sports writers, Jimmy Duff alone remained cynically aloof. Duff was just waiting to pounce.

Barney and Alec had to fight their way from the cab to the back entrance as the fans thronged the sidewalk. They all wanted to touch Barney, and they kept shouting to him as familiarly as if they had known him all their lives.

"Knock him bow-legged, Barney!"

"Kill the bum!"

Barney grinned, mitted them, and followed the two husky cops through the path they made for him. One character in a dirty tweed cap boldly tried to walk in with them, but the cop at the door collared him and he was forcibly pranced across the sidewalk despite his protests;

"Hey, cut it out! I'm wit Barney. Lemme go. He'll make it tough for yiz. Lemme go!"

The cops laughed and left him standing at the curb, shaking his fists.

Alec was pallid and shaking as Barney stretched out on the table and relaxed. He had warmed up with ten minutes of shadow boxing and now he was just lying there, breathing deeply and evenly. Salinski's chief second came in and growled;

"Let's get it over."

And Barney's second began to tape his hands. Alec ducked out to go to Salinski's dressing room to watch the same formality. There wasn't much chance of either using plaster of paris on the tape or slipping an iron in the gloves, not with both knowing Duff was watching this bout with cynical eyes.

Salinski's second left after the job was done and Barney lay back on the table, closing his eyes. He heard the door open.

A strange voice said, "Beat it, you."

He sat up. His own second, wide-eyed, was slipping through the doorway behind a burly man in a dusty derby. Beside the man stood Vince, white-lipped. They were linked together with handcuffs. The man showed a badge.

"Get on your clothes, Nolan," he said shortly, "We're taking a little trip."

Vince quavered, "Barney . . ."

The man's hand came up from his side. He was holding a gun.

"Just get dressed, Nolan," he advised, "I got a warrant here and I got the extradition papers. Assault with intent to kill. They want to see you back in Tacoma. This monkey here," he gave the handcuff a jerk, "he's a material witness or something. Come on, get your clothes on."

Barney's hands tightened. So here it was. "Okay," he said evenly.

Vince wailed, "Barney! Don't let him take me back. They don't want me as a witness. Those Henrouille's just want to get their hands on me. They'll kill me, Barney!"

The detective said stolidly, "Stop blubbing. You get what's coming to you. Snap it up, Nolan. I ain't got all night."

He stepped back as Barney slid from the table. Barney's mind coiled sickly.

"Does he have to come, too?" he faltered, nodding at Vince.

"He's a witness, ain't he?"

"I know, but . . . what he says is the truth. The Henrouilles just want to get their hands on him."

"Cut the stalling."

"Listen. Just listen to me for a minute. I'm the one you got the warrant for. Let him go and I won't give you any trouble."

The detective laughed harshly. "Don't worry about that, bud. You ain't gonna give me no trouble anyway."

"How much?" Barney pleaded.

"How much what?"

"How much to let him go? He isn't really needed as a witness. There were three other Henrouilles there that night. That should be witness enough. How much to let him go?"

The detective's eyes licked quickly around the room. "How much you got?" he asked in a business like voice.

"Five hundred." That was all Barney did have.

The detective laughed again and waved his gun. "Get dressed," he said, "Go on, get dressed and stop talking baby talk."

Vince broke in, wheedling. "Look," he said, "Take the money and put it on Barney to win. You'll clean up."

"Just like that!" the detective jeered, "I heard this guy Salinski is pretty good. They're betting 2-1 on him. And this punk's gonna win just like that. Nuts!"

"They'll kill him if you take him back," Barney said.

"That's not my business. When I get him back there, my job's ended."

"Look," Barney's hands were sweating; "S-suppose I said you couldn't lose if you bet on Salinski. Would you let him go then?"

The detective pursed his mouth. "Well," he said slowly, "like that, eh?"

"Like that."

"Well, now. That's a little different. That's kind of a sure thing, you might say. I put a couple thousand of my own I'd put down on a bet like that. But," his voice rasped, "I'm keeping this punk cuffed to me till I see you flat on the canvas. See you later, Nolan. You're going back no matter what. Come on."

He gave the handcuff a tug, and Vince shambled out of the dressing room.

VIII

SALINSKI came out fast at the bell, warily watching Barney's long left. He worked to Barney's right and slapped in two left jabs of his own. Barney's head jerked twice and he covered automatically, hunching his shoulders a little higher. He flat-footedly retreated before Salinski's advance. Salinski kept always to his right, peppering away with that left.

He stabbed with his left, but Salinski bobbed sideways and hammered him on the ribs with a left. Barney winced. Salinski could hit, he could hit harder than anyone he'd ever met. He covered and retreated slowly. All of a sudden, Salinski ducked his head, went in under Barney's right and dug into his body with both hands. Barney automatically tied him up.

"You're going great," Alec whispered as he sponged him off. "Just take it easy. He'll have to come to your left when he wants to get in with that right of his, then let him have it."

But Salinski seemed to have forgotten he had a right. He kept going in under Barney's right and slamming him with those jolting lefts. He rolled away from every left Barney threw.

He moved a little faster in Round Two. The crowd was yelling for blood, and he wanted to give it to them. He picked Barney's left off in mid-air and slipped in with a right that caught Barney flush on the nose. A razor of pain sliced into Barney's brain and the blood was a shawl over his mouth and chin. Salinski grinned as he ducked under Barney's left and raged at his stomach with ripping hands. Barney doubled under the tornado of pain and Salinski stepped back and calmly cut his face to pieces with slicing hooks. This was the kind of work Salinski liked. Chop them up, then cut them down—but chop them up first.

Barney reeled to his corner and lay gasping on his stool while Alec stopped the flow of blood over his eyes with astringent. Alec was hissing advice, but Barney did not hear him. His body was a torment of pain and his broken nose throbbed, stabbing deep into his head with each throb.

Looking down into the press row, he saw Duff's plump, jeering face, and he knew that he wasn't putting up a battle. He'd have to do better to save Vince.

Salinski came out confidently in the third. He had nothing to worry about now. He had solved Barney's left, and he wasn't afraid of the right. He came in, weaving and bobbing, swinging hard for the body. Barney shuffled his left foot forward and nailed him on the side of the face with a straight right, the right Salinski thought no longer counted.

He went back on his heels and his hands flew up. Barney stepped in, sank a left to the solar plexus and swung a right over the dropping guard. Salinski's eyes went glassy and he dropped to his knees. Barney stared at him with horror, and the referee had to thrust him forcibly to the neutral corner. Barney's heart thudded sickeningly as the referee's inexorable arm rose and fell. Salinski was on one knee at "seven" and up at "nine." The referee siezed his arms, wiped off his gloves against his shirt and stepped back.

Salinski crouched as Barney walked toward him. There was caution in Salinski's eyes and, though Barney boxed weakly, he kept the fight at arm's length for the remainder of the round.

Alec wasn't in the corner when Barney went back to his stool.

The second sponged him briskly and said, "He seen his wife up there and he went back to have a word with her. He'll be right back. He says to keep after Abe with that left. You'll get broke in half, he says, if Abe finds out you got a right. But, jeez, it seems to me . . ."

Barney said wearily, resting his head against the ropes, "Okay okay. Give me a little water."

He went out in the Fourth determined to take no chances of repetition of that almost-disastrous knockdown, but Salinski was not the kind of fighter you could merely block. You had to punch with him. He was too fast for purely defensive tactics, too smart. The moment he found Barney holding back, he rocked him with a volley of rights and lefts. Blood-smearred, lips puffed, one eye half closed from a vicious left hook, Barney went down be-

fore one minute of the round had passed. He took "eight", but Salinski was raging at him the moment he was up.

The crowd was on its feet baying as he drove Barney back into the ropes with a ferocious body attack and pinned him there, rattling his jaw with one-two's, working down to the stomach again. Barney clutched, holding himself together by sheer nerve, keeping himself on his feet only because he knew he had to make it look good. Weakly, he fought back. Through the haze of pain, he saw Salinski's face before him and he hooked a right into it.

The face bobbed and he stabbed at it with a left. Salinski crowded closer, burying his head against Barney's chest. Barney was numbly surprised. Salinski shouldn't have done that. He was throwing away his advantage, because now Barney was able to tie him up and they stood locked until the referee parted them.

He did not know the bell had rung until the referee grabbed him roughly by the shoulder and growled, "Break it up, break it up. Get back to your corner."

He stumbled across the ring. Alec stood on the apron waiting for him. Barney's face was bad, but Alec's was ghastly. The yellow skin was so tight against his skull that his bones stood out in sharp prominence, and his eyes burned deep in their sockets.

Alec's fluttering hands shoved him down on the stool and Alec sobbed, "This slaughterer's gotta stop."

Barney mumbled, "Don't let them stop it, Alec. Don't let them stop it. Not yet."

"Listen," Alec bent over him, his breath hissing between his clenched teeth "It's a frame. There ain't no detective from Tacoma. That was just a mug your brother rung in to make sure you'd lose. Vince's got five grand down on the fight. That 'detective' is just a hot-shot who hangs around the Arena here. Tell him!" he snapped at the second.

The second's eyes followed his pointing arm. Vince was sitting three rows back, smirking, beside the dusty-derbied man. The second nodded.

"His name's Harry Fox. He works the numbers."

"SEE, kid?" Alec snarled, "It was a frame. And I framed you, too. I had you work on that left. I promised Salinski I'd keep your right dead. That's the reason he ain't afraid of your right. I got dough down on the fight too—on Salinski. But," his mouth twisted, "it don't make no difference no more. I just saw Helen and she says she won't have nothing to do with me if I had a million. But I fixed her!" he ground his teeth and his eyes rolled wildly, "She's dead out in the corridor with a bullet in her head." He swept over this as if it was no longer of any consequence, "And here's something else. Look down here. Recognize that girl," a black-haired girl stood beside the ring and stared up with wide, frightened eyes, "That's Jeanne Henrouille, Barney. The little girl from the West Coast. She's got something to tell you. Tell him Jeanne."

"Leon's fine, Barney," her voice trembled, "He's ashamed they tried to beat you up. There's no warrant out for you. And he don't want me to marry Vince anymore. I ran away. Sammy Sloan told me you were here. I saw Vince, but . . . but . . ." tears welled up in her eyes. "H-he had some men he wanted to do business with, and he wanted me to . . . he wanted me . . . to be nice to them . . ."

She seemed to disappear before Barney's sodden eyes and vaguely he heard someone cry, "Catch her!" Alec was snarling at him again;

"Go out and kill Salinski this round, kid. Tear him apart the way he's been tearing you apart. Cut his heart out."

Barney mumbled, "Too late, too late . . ."

"The hell it is. He had you against the ropes that last round and you snagged him with a right and left and had him holding on. Go out and kill him."

Barney heard the bell. He was no longer pain-racked, but he felt sodden and numb. He saw Salinski's snakey left coming over. He moved his head and was surprised when the glove missed him. He jabbed his own left into Salinski's face and was surprised when it landed. It wasn't a hard blow, but it shouldn't have landed. It couldn't go on. It was just luck.

As if to confirm it, Salinski bobbed and came in hard with a punishing attack to the midsection. Barney's body arched away from those stinging gloves, but instead of clinching, he hooked a right and left to Salinski's ribs, then brought up his right and hooked to Salinski's ear—and Salinski was moving away. His beady eyes watched the two red blobs that were Barney's fists. So there was still thunder in them. Well, he could wait. He'd cut him up a little more, take some of the sap of him, then chop him down. The fight was young. He moved to Barney's right on those spindly legs of his. Barney turned slowly.

Something was building up inside him. Something exploded, blowing all the dust out of the corners the long years had made. Now he knew why he'd had to go to Sammy Sloan every so often for a fight. Vince. He remembered the storming fury that rode his gloves, and now he knew why it was. He had always seen Vince there in the ring with him, Vince's jeering face. That Canuck, Dupre, had looked like Vince.

He had known, right from the beginning that Vince was something evil that had to be destroyed, but he had never faced it. He had tried to take the blame himself, to tell himself that *he* was the evil. But Vince had always dirtied everything he touched. He felt suddenly clean and refreshed. He didn't have to worry about Vince anymore.

For the first time, he seemed to see Salinski there in the ring with him—a tall man with thin legs and a chest that was too heavy for him, a man with cruelty in his little eyes, a man with a knowing twist on his slitted mouth. Barney went toward him, up on his toes, weaving. He jabbed with his left and Salinski bobbed as he knew he would—bobbed straight into a driving right. Salinski staggered and rushed for a clinch, but Barney nailed him with a short right and drove him back with a left.

Salinski stood straddle-legged and tried to slug it out, thinking this a short-lived flurry. But Barney was waiting for him. He slipped a right and his left went up in

a short arc. Salinski's legs went watery and he half stumbled and was half hammered back to the ropes. His eyes were unfocussed but he fought automatically. Barney got him into the corner and standing flat-footed wove from side to side as he drove in a savage right and left.

Salinski was out on his feet. His guard was as loose as a torn pocket. Barney could have hit him with anything. But that festering fury no longer drove him. Instead of tearing into him as he had into Al Moore, as he had into Heinie Pfaff, he stepped back and mercifully let Salinski fall to the floor. He helped them drag Salinski to his stool.

As he walked to his own corner, he heard a shout and three loud claps as if someone had slapped two boards together. A woman screamed, and there was the thunder of frantic feet as the crowd at the left side of the ring rushed for the exits.

A blue-coated policeman ran across the ring, tugging at his hip, and leaped over the ropes. Barney's second was standing on his stool, staring over the bobbing heads. His hand trembled at his slack mouth. He looked down at Barney.

"Your brother!" he gibbered, "Alec just shot him, then shot himself. They're laying on the floor."

Barney turned. The crowd bubbled around the spot where Vince had been sitting and three policemen were fighting their way through it. Barney turned away, stooped and picked up his robe. He tried to feel sorry for Vince, but all the others crowded into his mind Helen Frazer, dead from her husband's bullet, Alec, Jeanne Henrouille, Leon Henrouille. How many others had there been?

Jeanne Henrouille sat frozen in the seat at ringside where kindly hands had placed her after her faint. Around her was turmoil as men leaped on their chairs, craning their necks to see better, but she just sat staring straight ahead.

Barney jumped down from the apron. "Come on, Jeanne," he said, "There's nothing for us here." He led her up the aisle.

LEATHER LARCENY

By Larry Sternig

This kid they practically dragged into the ring . . . made him fight . . . made him yellow . . . made him tough . . . made him champ.

THERE was no one watching now. The jeweler was busy at the other end of the counter, and the few customers in the store were engaged in business of their own.

My hand went toward the watch, and then stopped. My heart was beating fast, and my entire body trembled. But the urge was there again, like some demon possessing me, and my hand went on. It went on and closed around the watch.

I was aware, then, of a movement at my side.

But I kept my hand closed and put it in my pocket.

A voice murmured, "I thought you were on parole, Jimmy. Aren't you being foolish?"

I turned. It was Tim Dolan.

I said, "What the hell are you talking about?"

"About the watch you just stole. About a top welterweight going in for petty larceny."

I tried to bluff it out, but Tim merely said, "I could have you searched. A man on parole isn't above suspicion at any time, you know."

I thought of the time I'd spent in that place of the iron doors, and my mouth turned dry. There wasn't anything I could say.

"Come along with me," Tim suggested. "My office is just a few doors from here."

I followed him dumbly, fearfully, hate for Tim Dolan stirring in me, a hate that was to grow from that moment on.

We walked down a half block and turned into a small office building. We went up two



floors to a door marked: T. DOLAN MANAGER—PROMOTER.

He waved me to a chair next to his desk.

He wasted no words. He said, "I haven't had a champ for a long time, Jimmy. Not for over a year."

I looked at him suspiciously. Tim Dolan had a very good name in the fight game. Tim Dolan wasn't the kind to interest himself in a washed-up fighter. Nor would he stoop to blackmail. I hoped.

"I'll take forty per cent," Tim went on calmly. "That's what I always take. You can move out to the farm. You'll be away from temptation there."

"I've got a manager," I reminded him. "And I can't fight, anyway. The commission won't let me."

"You had a manager," Tim said. "A manager who tore up your contract the day you got into trouble. I'll take care of the commission."

"Is this blackmail?"

Tim's eyes were blank. "This is blackmail."

"You could go to jail for that," I reminded him.

He nodded. "We could go together. We could be cell-mates."

"Okay," I said. "You win this round. But if I ever get the chance—" I choked back the threat that rose in my throat.

"I was a pretty fair middle myself once," Tim said. He held out his hand. "I'll take the watch. Be back here in an hour with your clothes."

THE farm was neat and green and surrounded with fresh air. Under any other circumstances, it would have been ideal for me. I stood there on the porch, that afternoon, taking it all in and some of the distraction left my mind.

I was city born and city bred, and I'd known nothing but its clamor and its smoke all my life. I took a deep breath, and my dislike for Tim Dolan dimmed for a moment.

A voice said, "Nice view, isn't it?"

I turned. A girl stood there, a plain girl, but one who created the illusion of beauty because of superb health. A girl with clear eyes and a complexion there are no words for, and a smile that went straight to my heart.

"It is," I agreed. I was staring at her, and realizing it, I blushed and looked awkwardly at my hands.

"I think you'll like it here," she said, smiling. "Dad and I will try to see that you do." She held out a hand. "I'm Tim's daughter, Ellen."

"Oh," I said, and there was a tinge of bitterness in my voice. I barely touched the hand.

I went inside, and up to the room Tim had assigned me. I sat there on the bed, and my mind passed over the day's events. I felt annoyed.

Tim put me on a routine the next day. A routine of road work and bag punching, and swimming. Tim intended to build up the body that prison life had softened.

I went through it obediently. I went through it like a bad child who was being disciplined, and though I knew the situation was ridiculous, I also knew there wasn't a thing I could do about it. Because Tim Dolan had connections, and Tim's word could put me back to that place that gave me nightmares.

I saw little of Ellen, and I was thankful for that. The few times I'd seen her, something strange and new had happened to my heart, and I'd felt a sharp regret over the first day's rudeness.

All that was needed to make this set-up tougher was for me to fall in love with her.

Then a couple of other boys from Tim's stable came up to train, and I had a chance to mix it with them. One of the boys, Vic Grant, was a welter, and a good one.

I mixed with Vic for two short rounds, and took the pasting of my life. Tim saw it all, and a wrinkle deepened between his eyes, and he called a halt.

He told me, "This Vic is good, but not that good. Haven't lost your heart, have you, boy?"

"My timing is off," I said, "and my wind isn't all back. But this Vic could probably take me, anyway. I was never a champ, you know."

"You never had the title," Tim corrected me. He paused. "Don't think all the wrong things about me, Jimmy. There's a chance you may be wrong."

"You can tell me what to do," I said. "But I can think what I please." I turned on that, and went to the showers.

Vic Grant was unlacing his shoes when I came in. He was a short man, even for a welter, with a slugger's build. He said to me, "Tim figuring on building you up, or just till he can peddle you?"

"I wouldn't know," I said.

Vic shook his square head. "Well, it's a screwy set-up. Here I figured I'm really going to get some promotion, and he picks a has-been from the clink."

I looked him over slowly, while the bitterness in me boiled. I looked him over slowly—and said nothing.

When I came out again, after my shower, Vic was talking to Tim, and by the tone of his voice, he wasn't pleased.

I went up to my room.

Tim came in a few minutes later. He said, "I fixed you up for a prelim spot for next week. It's not much, but it's the best I could do. You aren't ready for any big guns yet, anyway."

I asked, "What did Vic have to say?"

A muscle ridged in Tim's jaw. "He said that if he didn't get a crack at the title in

six months, I wouldn't be his manager."

I shook my head. "I mean what did he say about me?"

Tim looked at me for a moment. Then, "He said you were yellow."

I smiled. "Maybe I am."

"I don't think so," Tim said, and left.

I thought back to the night of my crime. For the first time since the trial, I'd be facing a crowd of people. People who knew my story. It had been news, big news a year ago, and they wouldn't have forgotten. I knew enough about fight crowds to fear that.

I didn't mix with Vic in the days that followed. Tim imported a couple of boys and I began to get the range again. But I was a long way from my best.

Ellen drove me in the afternoon of the fight. She'd been civil since that first day, but only civil. Today, she seemed to be going out of her way to be friendly.

She said, "Dad told me—about—about your trouble. And he told me—" She faltered.

"About blackmailing me?"

She kept her eyes on the road ahead. "If that's the way you put it." She paused. "That night, that night it happened. Did you need the money?"

My laugh was short. "I didn't even know there was money in the purse."

She nodded, as though suddenly understanding. "It was at a party, wasn't it? You were excited, nervous?"

"It was at a party," I repeated, as though talking from some grim dream. "One of those fancy parties, where the elite invite a fighter for the atmosphere or something. I walked into a room, and there were some women's coats on the bed. And some purses. I don't know what happened after that. I simply couldn't help what I did. And the purse I took happened to have a lot more money in it than any purse should." I was looking down at my hands, and the shame in me brought a flush to my face.

Ellen's voice was soft. "You mustn't think of yourself as a criminal. You've got to forget that. You—you were sick. There's a word for it, and I think you know it. It's a sickness."

"You think your dad would take advantage of a sick man? You admit that?"

She didn't say anything for a minute, and when she did talk, she evaded my question. She said, "Dad isn't very often wrong about people. I hope he wasn't wrong about you."

IN the dressing room that night, the tenseness that had grown in me the past weeks reached its peak. I could feel it physically, in the tightening of my muscles, in the hammering of my heart. Tim was with me every second, and Tim's eyes were off of me for very few of those seconds.

The call came, finally, and I went out with Tim and a handler. Out, and up the aisle.

I could feel Tim's presence, could sense that he was walking very closely beside me. The handler flanked my other side.

One of the boys was coming down, the winner, and getting a hand. Then the crowd spotted me, and I held my breath, and prayed. There was a silence, a sort of subdued murmur. Then someone yelled, "*Lookit! The man of steal!*"

A laugh went up, a short laugh that dissolved in a bedlam of talk. I kept my eyes on the glare ahead, and the bitterness surged in my taut body.

We went up, and through the ropes, and a part of the tautness melted. For this was the old glare, the old smell, the old noise. This was home.

I looked over in the opposite corner, at my opponent of the evening. A hairy, bulky lad named Stover. A lad who looked like he'd been to the wars once too often.

The ref was introducing us, and I dreaded the reception I expected. But the only sign of the crowd's sentiment was the weakness of applause.

I'd had a crazy notion during the past few days of throwing this fight, just as a way of getting back at Tim Dolan. But I knew now that I couldn't do it.

Maybe I wouldn't have to.

Stover came out with a rush at the bell, crouching, and trying his best to look murderous. I put a jab in his face, and stood my ground. Stover stopped, and began to circle.

I circled with him, kept pushing that left hand in his face, vexing him into a lead. Stover came in under the left, and put a

heavy hook into my middle. I tied him up.

We broke, and I was short with a left. I missed a right, and Stover closed again. This time Stover's hook really shook me. I back-pedaled, jabbing. My chin was buried.

But Stover came in again, and he brought a right to my throat that gagged me.

The lights began to waver as I hung on.

Stover was pummeling my midriff viciously, slamming away with both hands.

Then the lights went out.

I heard a great buzzing in my ears, and the pinwheel overhead seemed to be descending on me. Somebody was calling out numbers. I heard "6."

I rose groggily to one knee at 8. At 9 I was up.

Stover rushed in for the finisher, and I put the remnants of my strength into a whistling right. It landed with a splat on Stover's nose.

The bell.

Tim said, "this guy is strictly a mixer. Keep him clear. He shouldn't be able to get within shouting distance of you."

Stover came out for the second with a very red nose, and a little more caution. He moved around in a shell, and I took the offensive.

I was short with a straight left, and then threw a right that wasn't short. I connected to Stover's eyes with another straight left, and then my right whistled to the button.

Stover went back into the ropes, and I followed him in. But Stover tied me up.

The ref parted us, and we moved to the center of the ring, Stover circling, my left keeping him clear. Again Stover rushed, and this time I was ready.

I put my weight into a straight left, and then crossed a hard right. Stover went back—and crashed.

I walked to a neutral corner, and the thunder of the crowd was sweet music to my ears.

My timing was back this round, and even if Stover should get up, I knew I could take him now.

Stover did get up.

I moved in, and fainted him into a lead. I was set, and really put my weight into a right smash.

THIS time Stover didn't get up.

He was a club fighter, this Stover, and he'd been licked a lot of times. But victory is always sweet. I almost felt normal back in the dressing room.

Tim said, "You looked like your old self for about a minute there. When you are, we'll get you some good boys."

I nodded, my eyes averted.

The next day's papers gave the bout more ink than it was worth. It had what newspapermen call "human interest" and the whole account of my crime and subsequent imprisonment went with it. I winced as I read it, and the hate I had for Tim Dolan was fired anew.

Later that morning, when I came in from a two mile jog, Tim introduced me to a tall, expensively dressed man.

"Dr. Barton is a psychiatrist," Tim explained, "and he wants to ask you some questions."

I didn't like the sound of that, but I submitted grudgingly. For almost an hour I answered questions as honestly as I could.

Later I heard Dr. Barton talking to Tim. I heard the phrase, "*compulsion neurosis*" and "*unstable emotional condition*." I felt like a human guinea pig.

Despite my poor mental condition, however, my physical health was coming back to its former peak. My timing was still bad, but my speed and wind were nearly what they were. I mixed with a better than average lightweight that afternoon and scored often on that fleet target.

Ellen was watching me from the ringside, and she smiled as we finished the round in a flurry of leather. "You looked like a champ for that last round," she told me.

I managed a grin. "I feel like an insect on a slide. Who was that doctor that gave me the third degree this morning?"

"He's one of the best psychiatrists in the country," Ellen said. "And he agreed with Tim about you."

"And what was their verdict?"

She was silent for a moment. Then she said with a smile, "they think you're one of the best welterweight prospects they've seen."

"All right," I said. "I'm a little ooy, and I can't take the truth. Whatever it is, it can't be worse than a purse snatcher."

She made a face. "Whatever it is, you'll know when they're sure."

Suddenly I blurted, "I was thinking—there's a good movie in the village tonight—and—uh—I—"

"I'd love it," she said.

It was a good movie. And there was a great big musical comedy moon hanging in the sky as we drove home. We stood on the porch for a minute before turning in, and the moon combined with Ellen's fragrance was a little too much for me.

My lips came down to hers, and her lips answered.

I said shakily, "I—I've had a girl or two. But not like—I mean, for me, this is it. I knew it since that first day."

She nodded. "Me, too."

I didn't get much sleep that night. The one thing that could happen to make the situation unbearable had happened. I'd have to talk it over with Tim in the morning.

But in the morning, Ellen told me. "You'd better not say anything to dad about us right now. He and Vic had a quarrel this morning, and he gave Vic his contract back."

"I figured that was coming," I said. "And I think Tim lost a gold mine. That Vic will be champ soon."

Ellen nodded. "That's what started the quarrel. Vic's been promised a chance at the title by another manager if he could buy his contract back."

"I'll bet Tim got plenty for it," I said.

Ellen looked at me queerly. "Sometimes I wonder why I love you. He didn't get a dime for it."

I smiled, but said nothing. Loyalty was a virtue I particularly admired, and I loved Ellen all the more for it.

TIM arranged another bout for me the next week. It was a wind-up this time, in a small club, and my opponent was a trial horse who'd crashed many a hopeful to the canvas.

I sent him to slumberland in the fourth round.

And the next morning, I had my talk with Tim about Ellen.

Tim said, "Ellen's old enough to know her own mind. But it'll be kind of tough on her, don't you think, married to a man who

hates her dad?"

I had no answer for that.

In the next three weeks, I had three more bouts, and won them all.

And the night I won my last bout, Vic Grant won the welterweight title.

I told Ellen. "Tim never had a real line on that boy. But I knew. I mixed with a lot of them, and I can tell a champ when I see one."

"Maybe dad was blind," Ellen said slowly. "When it came to welterweights, maybe he could only see one boy."

I grinned. "Maybe—and maybe not."

That afternoon, Tim Dolan asked me. "Would you like a shot at the title? Would you like a crack at your old friend?"

"You're the boss," I said.

"They want you now—in a couple of weeks," Tim said. "In six months you'd be too hot to handle. But by then we might not get the chance." He paused. "Think you can take him?"

"I don't think I ever saw the day I could take him," I said modestly. "But I can try."

Tim shook his head. "That isn't enough. I'll turn them down." His eyes were on the ground. "It might be your last chance at the crown, Jimmy."

"I won't lose any sleep over that."

The afternoon papers carried the story of a manager who'd refused a title fight. It was comparable to a man biting a dog, and good for a column.

I realized then that I'd put Tim on the spot. For it was he who'd refused the fight. I didn't feel too good about that.

I went to him, I said, "accept the fight, Tim. I don't know whether I can lick him or not, but I promise that I'll fight the best fight of my life."

"Whether you can lick him or not, you've got to think you can," Tim said. "But that'll be my job, to make you think that way."

As it turned out, however, it wasn't Tim's job. For that evening Ellen told me something that made my blood boil.

"That night," she said, "when we went to the movie, I stayed downstairs after you went to bed, to do some bookwork for dad. And Vic came in." Her eyes left my face. "He—well, he got a little fresh, and I slapped him. Dad happened to walk in just

then." She paused. "That's why he gave Vic his contract back."

I reached over to hold her head in my two hands. I kissed her gently. "That guy will know he's been in a fight, honey. I promise you."

The next two weeks were a grind, the toughest training grind of my career. For I had a lot to regain in those two weeks, and I'd need all the moxie I ever had for this one.

Two days before the bout, I began to taper off, to prevent going stale. I saw a lot of Tim during those two days, and Tim said to me one afternoon, "I'd like to think you thought enough of me to know I'm honest. I'd like to think you wouldn't need an explanation from me."

I was silent, studying him. Finally, I said, "I do think you're honest, Tim. I guess the whole town knows that." I shook my head. "I've been, well—rattled. Even before that happened, that thing that sent me up, I'd been unsettled, nervous."

Tim nodded. "This urge, this desire to steal. Had you had it before that night?"

My thoughts raced. "Only in my mind, if you get what I mean. I mean, I'd see things in stores and the thought of taking them would come to me, but I didn't think it was serious. I mean, a fellow gets a lot of thoughts he doesn't follow through with. That was one of them. Until that night."

"You should have explained that to the judge," Tim said. He paused. "You know what kleptomania is, Jimmy?"

I nodded. "Uh-huh. And I think I'd rather be tagged a criminal than a nut."

"It isn't insanity," Tim said. "Your unsettled condition had something to do with it. Maybe, we all have a touch of it—something for nothing, that's a pretty common fault. That's why I—blackmailed you. I wanted to keep your mind occupied on the one thing you knew best. And I wanted to get you up here, where it's quiet. I wanted to cure you if I could."

I realized then, that all this should have been clear to me from the first day. I said humbly, "Thanks, Tim. I think you have cured me. But, why? Why go to all this trouble for a guy you only knew slightly?"

"Because," Tim said, "I think you're the best welterweight in the world. And be-

cause—I always want to see the best man at the top in this game."

THE three of us drove in together the morning of the fight, and I felt more physically and mentally fit than I had at any time within my memory. I'd need to be for this one tonight. For I had a lot more respect for Vic Grant than Tim did. Ellen had been right about her dad. Tim Dolan was blind in the welterweight field; he could only see one man, and that was his man—Jimmy Powers.

The manager had released the psychiatrist's opinion of my malady, and the papers had given it a play. I wasn't sure whether to feel vindicated or further condemned. One thing was certain, I was the most publicized welter in the game.

There seemed to be a hundred reporters at the weighing in, and another hundred waiting for us at the hotel. I kept my mouth tightly shut, and let Tim do all the talking. Tim Dolan was a master at it.

In the dressing room that night, Tim shooed them all out. He told me, "Keep clear for two rounds at least. Even if they start to boo. For two rounds, Vic is better than you are. That much I'll admit. After that, he's not in your league."

Grinning, I shook my head. "If I could only fight like you think I can."

Ellen was there, then, for a final word, and I told her, "If I win, tonight, it's because of you. This brawl I now dedicate to you."

She kissed me lightly. "Knock him into the cheap seats, Jimmy."

Then the call came, and we went out toward the lights. The house was a sell-out, jam packed, the biggest crowd I'd ever faced. But there was no tenseness in me beyond the normal tenseness expected for a title bout.

I went up the aisle, with Tim and two handlers, and the crowd's reception was heartening. I had a glimpse of Ellen, as I climbed between the ropes, and she held her small clenched hands aloft.

On my stool, as I relaxed, while Vic's new manager came over to inspect my hands, my eyes were on the man across the ring. A good man, broad and husky, with those muscle bunches in his back that

labeled the hitter. A champion. Tim Dolan had brought him up to this. Tim had brought us both this far, and Tim thought I was the better man. I certainly hoped so.

We went out for the introductions, for the instructions. We went back to our corners to flex. The bell, and we turned.

Vic came in like a tornado. He came in like Dempsey used to in his prime, and he landed two fists to my midriff that actually hurtled me back into the ropes.

The crowd gasped, and then rose with a hoarse cry. It was the fastest opening any of them had ever seen—or I, for that matter. And I was on the receiving end.

Vic came in with his left hooking viciously, and took about three-quarters of my starch in the first ten seconds. I wilted, got my hands inside, and hung on.

The ref broke us, and I got on my bicycle.

For two minutes I kept clear of the charging Vic, kept my left pumping weakly, while my stomach settled, while the crowd howled.

Then I braced up, snapped home a straight left, and was short with a right. Vic tried to close, but I had the range with my left now, and my timing was flawless. I managed to stay clear for the rest of the round, and scored twice with the right.

In my corner, Tim said, "Whirlwind stuff. And he didn't do it. He shot his bolt."

"We hope," I said.

We hoped in vain. Vic stormed out for the second in a flurry of flying leather that sent me into a backward march. It was Armstrong stuff. I rode it out, landing that stinging jab enough to keep the champ cautious, bringing home a short right that stopped him in his tracks for a second.

I moved in lightly, circling a little, looking for a hole for my right. Vic turned with me, contempt in his eyes, and a smile on his heavy lips.

I FEINTED twice and landed a left, tried a right that missed. I moved around him, using the left like a riveting machine, and Vic took it all with a grin.

Angered, I moved in to mix—and Vic brought up a killer from his knees.

I fell forward and hung on, while my head cleared. Vic went to work below. I broke, stepped clear, and tried to paste him with a left. But Vic had smelled blood again, and no jab was going to slow him.

He chased me for the remainder of the round.

The fans were booing at the bell.

Tim said, "I could have been wrong about that guy. But I wasn't wrong about you. You've taken his best punch. You can open up a little now."

I almost laughed in his face at that one. I said, "Did you bring some spinach? What I've got doesn't seem to be enough."

"What you've got will be too much," Tim said.

The third was slower. Vic seemed to think he could win this one when the time came, but there was no hurry. He countered and parried, circling always, moving in a semi-crouch.

I did open up a little. My right was moving in now, short and swift, but Vic was pretty much in a shell, and few of them landed heavily.

I began to set up things with the left, feinting, looking for openings. But Vic wasn't champ for nothing. Vic didn't bite. Vic taunted me, smiling, and Vic moved in toward the end of the round and brought the hook with him. It was a good hook.

I was weary at the bell. I'd taken a lot during those first two rounds, more than I could have taken a month ago, and I realized how far along Tim's conditioning had brought me.

The fourth was faster. Vic began to mix again. But I had his rhythm now, and I beat him to the punch. Vic stepped up the pace, and I stepped with him. For twenty seconds we traded. Then I broke, stepped back—and stopped.

Vic rushed and I met him with a straight right that landed squarely on the button.

Vic went back a half step and toppled.

Vic was up at 9. I didn't rush. I came in cautiously, and brought the left in sharply twice, before trying another right. Vic was still alert. The right was short, and Vic tried to close.

I tied him up at the bell.

Tim said, "That's the Jimmy Powers we used to know. That's the Powers who's

going to be champ. Like Loughran. Like Tunney. Like silk."

The fifth was slow. Vic wouldn't lead, and I couldn't quite penetrate the armor. In the fifth, I could sense a change of crowd sympathy. I'd stood up well those first two rounds, and lived to hand it out. They liked that.

Toward the end of the round, I moved in swiftly, trying a desperate right. It never landed.

Vic put his weight into a right hand blow that landed flush on my jaw. The lights went out, and the canvas came up and hit me.

I didn't even hear the count until it reached 7 and then I rose too soon. Vic came in like a cannonball and landed again.

I stumbled into the ropes at the bell.

Tim and the handlers worked like beavers. Tim was muttering something incoherent, massaging the back of my neck. Then I felt the chill of a cold towel.

Vic came out with a rush for the sixth. He landed heavily with the hook and tried that right again. I moved in desperately, and the right went around my neck. But Vic was beating a sickening tattoo on my stomach. Then the champ stepped clear, and threw his Sunday punch.

Again, I managed to step away from it. Vic came in carelessly, and I threw a right at the blob that should have been his jaw. It was. Vic stumbled back three steps, and went into his crouch.

I moved in slowly, my head a buzzsaw, my footwork ragged. I kept the left pumping automatically, and the right cocked.

I got through that round on all the finesse I'd picked up through the years, and I needed it all.

In my corner, Tim said, "this is the round. This is the one they won't expect you to mix. How are you feeling, Jimmy? Are you up to it?"

"I think so," I said. "And I hope you're right."

So I went out slowly, and waited to see the attack Vic would launch. But Vic had the same idea in mind. We stalled for a full minute, while the fans grew restless.

Then Vic moved in and I answered the challenge. For seconds we exchanged. For seconds I slugged it out with the best slugger in the field. And the slugger came out second best.

Vic was weary when we broke. Vic was wilting, and my left lanced out sharply. Vic tried a wild right, and I crossed over it.

It landed, and for a fraction of a second, Vic seemed to hesitate. It was all I needed. I put my hundred and forty-seven pounds into a Sunday punch. I put all my weight and all my hate into it, and sent it over with a prayer.

It was the one

They carried Vic to his corner, and the ref came over to raise my right arm aloft. Then the crowd poured into the ring.

I saw them all through a mist, because the one that mattered most was coming toward me, a smile on her face and arms outstretched. One more theft, and then no more. I'd have to steal Tim's daughter, but I knew Tim Dolan wouldn't mind this time. . . .

AT YOUR WRIST

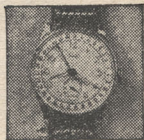
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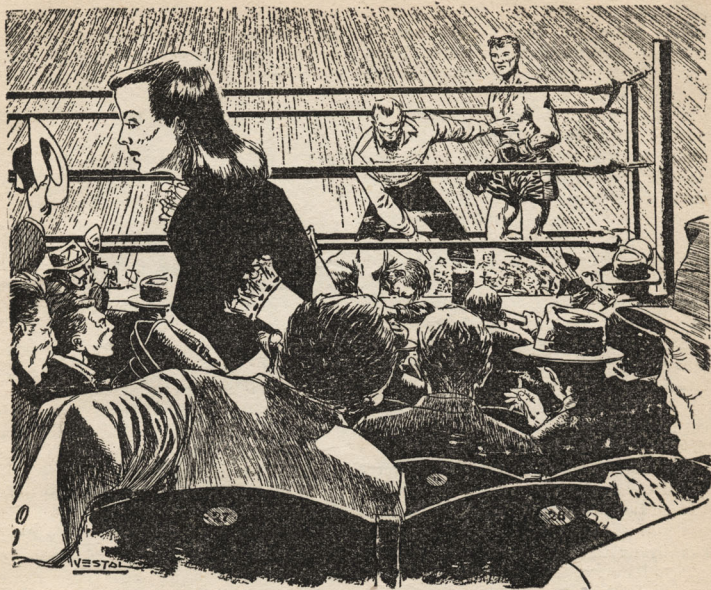
TIME your
DATE . . .

in seconds
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in DAYS

30 DAYS
HOME TRIAL



3 YEARS
GUARANTEE



HOMECOMING

By Francis K. Allan

In a strange city things are different for a fighter . . . a fighter like Joe Corey, anyway. You take the big dive, collect the moola, drink and forget. But tonight Joe was home . . . and the marbles were on the table for everyone to see.

THE LONELINESS and the reality trapped him, finally. The train was gone, and the song of the rails could no longer lull his thoughts.

Here the sharp June sunlight glistened on the sticky asphalt streets. A sucking whine was left in the wake of speeding cars. The tall buildings shimmered in the heat waves. His shirt clung limply to his broad shoulders. There was not a single familiar face. No band was here, no mayor with a gilded key. This was a homecoming for you. And Joe Corey laughed—a rough laugh that ended abruptly.

Sure, this was the way to come home.

Or maybe it was, he thought slowly. In thirty-six hours it would be over. The train would take him back to New York. Between now and then it could be like a hall—like a long silent hall that you walked through. You didn't open the doors. You made no noise. You passed through and were gone. Yes, that was the best way.

It seemed to simplify something in Joe's mind. He lifted his worn suitcase from the curb and moved toward the line of waiting cabs. The sun glistened in his brown sandy hair and deepened the color of his broad rough face. He carried his

coat under his arm. He walked with a stalking grace, his shoulders leading, his heels scarcely meeting the pavement. There was a heavy rhythm and power in his motion.

He sat forward in the cab, rubbing his knuckles with the great palm of his left hand. He saw the new post office, the trackless trolleys, and he kept searching among the strange faces.

How many of them would be there tomorrow night? Twenty thousand? Perhaps thirty thousand, rising out beyond the glare of the ring. They would know him, then. Here and there someone would say, "Corey. Came from here, remember? . . . Sam Krebble, this same guy that's got Dulaney, he used to manage him. He was at the top. There was nobody . . . That was five years ago. Then something happened in Pittsburgh. I don't know. I don't think they ever proved anything . . ."

The fingers of his great hands were twisted tightly together.

The Marsden Hotel was a fat brown structure—a shabby old lady resting complacently on the outskirts of the business district. Joe put on his hat and coat before he went in. The lobby was shadowy and cooler. He saw the poster, thumb-tacked to the bulletin board. The name flamed across the top in crimson letters—**BARON DULANEY**.

Joe looked at the curly blond hair in the picture, at the smooth unbattered face, the level eyes. Below, in smaller letters, was Joe's name. He was glad they hadn't used a picture.

"Ah, Joe!" The shrill greeting turned him around. Little Sam Krebble came panting across the lobby, his tie askew, his suit wrinkled. It might have been the same cigar of five years ago. "To see you, and looking so good!" Sam gasped. His black eyes sparkled as he grasped Joe's hand.

"Hello, Sam." Joe smiled and held the smile as the little guy's eyes darted over his frame.

"Never have I seen you looking better," Sam pronounced.

"I'm allright. For thirty-two, anyway."

"That is but childhood. When you have lived as long as Sam . . ." He wagged his

head mournfully and steered Joe toward the elevator. He explained why he hadn't met the train. He mopped his damp jowls. He assured Joe that his indigestion was definitely worse.

Joe was grateful for the rush of words.

HE followed Sam into the room that had been reserved for him. It was large and slightly shabby. The windows faced west. Beneath the glare of the sinking sun the city rolled gently out into a bluish haze. Sam turned on the overhead fan and the blades generated a monotonous drone. The air remained thick and sticky.

"Dorsey will come in later," Sam was explaining. Dorsey was the man who would handle him tomorrow night, Joe remembered. "It is all arranged at the Downtown Club, if you want anything. And about Dorsey—as soon would I trust myself. That is right, Joe."

"We'll get along. There won't be much to do."

A silence formed, deepened by the drone of the fan. Sam fretted his cigar. Joe massaged his knuckles until they were wet and he rubbed them against his coat. Sam cleared his throat. "You have seen Dulaney?"

"Once, about three years ago. His last fight before he went into the army."

"He is faster, now. Heavier. A left like never before." Sam blinked at him. "For you it will not be so easy tomorrow night, Joe."

"What the Hell, Sam! I know what I came for. Me tomorrow. Maybe Dorati next month, then the championship in the fall. I'm glad it's your show. Anyway," he said more quietly, "twenty-five hundred dollars can buy a lot of rounds from me, now." And instantly Joe felt the impact of the unplanned words. His eyes locked with Sam's. Between them leaped up the recollection of that night in Pittsburgh. The Paski fight. Sam's eyes, electric with outrage, his round face apoplectic, his voice quivering: "Carried him! You carried him! That money should ever mean so much to you that you should turn . . . turn crook! For you and me, it is quits!"

There were countless times thereafter when Joe had tried to understand, to retrace and ask himself his reason. For ten thousand dollars. Why? . . . No, it wasn't just the money; he could make that. Had he wanted to please Silvestri? Perhaps . . . It was all part of the swift new intoxication. New friends. New places. The sudden fame. It had come so swiftly, that rich thick wine.

"Why did you give me this fight, Sam?" The inevitable question slipped from Joe's lips. Sam looked at him straight.

"You are smart. Dulaney will learn from you. And for you—"

"For me, the twenty-five hundred," Joe supplied evenly. "That's okay. I need it. You knew that when you wired me. It'll be a good fight for a while."

"Not just the money for you . . ." Sam began. He stopped and rubbed his chin. He sighed and held out his hand. "But it is time for me to go." He held out his hand. After he had opened the door, he paused. "Yesterday I saw Letty. She was asking . . ." He glanced at Joe.

Joe tightened his fingers. Walk softly down the hall, he was thinking. Leave the door closed. It will soon be over.

Sam frowned. Slowly he closed the door and was gone.

Dorsey dropped in just after five o'clock. He was a stoop-shouldered man of about fifty, with faded wise eyes and a melancholy voice. After they shook hands, Dorsey seemed ill-at-ease. He sat there, creasing a newspaper between his bony hands and blinking at the window. Joe was glad when he left.

He took off his coat, loosened his tie, and stretched out on the bed. He unfolded the crumpled newspaper Dorsey had left. It was the sports section of the *HERALD*. At the left was a box-column, *Looking Them Over With Levitt*. Joe remembered Ben Levitt from high school—a thin hay-haired boy with a touch of wry humor. The column discussed the fight, devoting three-quarters of its space to an examination of Dulaney's maturing skill and power. The final paragraph looked at Joe.

Few fights, it said, have held the irony of this one. Scarcely five years ago Joe Corey's star was in its ascendancy. The

championship twinkled just ahead. Then, on a July night in Pittsburgh, there was exhibited one of the most intriguing fits of chivalry since the era of King Arthur. This ten-round waltz marked both the turning point of Corey's career and the end of his association with Sam Krebble, his manager, and today the manager of Baron Dulaney. Mr. Corey began to take an intense interest in the Full Life, doing his fighting from the west corner of Manhattan's High Top Club. It is rumored he chose a liquid diet. Tomorrow night will be something of a homecoming—

Joe hurled the paper to the floor. A wounded cry broke from his jaws. Why did they have to keep riding him? Why wouldn't they forget?

He covered his eyes with his arm. Something kept squeezing in his stomach, making him hot and breathless. This was a crazy thing! Why hadn't he realized! A beating like this for twenty-five hundred. It wasn't the thing that would happen tomorrow night in the ring. That was easy. It was this—this ripping at his pride. This . . . And Joe stopped and laughed acidly. That was a word! Pride.

He hurled himself from the bed and stalked around the room, shaking his head like a stunned animal. He looked at himself in the mirror. His eyes burned dark and tormented. The skin of his cheeks felt drawn and old. He felt desperately tired and lonely.

PRIDE . . . This time Joe did not laugh. It was true. He couldn't explain it, but he knew it was true. And it was such a fragile thing. Like a scrap of lace, salvaged and laboriously cleaned. Mended with clumsy fingers until a pattern was formed again. But it was still so frail, this pride. And they wouldn't let it alone. If only—

The gentle knock came at the door. Joe turned, his chest rising and falling heavily. Angrily he jerked the door open. "What do you—?" The raw words evaporated. He stepped back. His arms sagged to his sides.

She wore no hat. Just a summer dress, white and soft. From the look in her eyes now, he knew she had been smiling before she saw him. Slowly she smiled again.

"Sam told me you would be here."

"Sam? Oh." He fumbled with his hands. Her smile was ebbing again. Joe gestured vaguely. "Yeah, Sam. He made the reservation." Her quiet blue eyes searched his. Her fingers rested on the door. Her smile had faded. "I'm sorry if . . . Do you want me to go, Joe?"

"I don't . . . No, please. I was just thinking when you knocked. I wasn't expecting . . ." He stumbled back and pushed out a chair. "Sit here, Letty. It's a little cooler under the fan."

She closed the door softly. He could not take his eyes away from her. Had she always been so small, so slender? Her hair seemed so much darker, her eyes so much more blue. She sat down, tucking her legs under. She'd always done that. Joe found himself waiting for the plop-plop of her shoes as she pushed them off.

He sat down. Her job? . . . She didn't work for the oil company. She's been with her father at the store since he fell and hurt his hip. Her mother was fine; she'd wondered if Joe would come to supper.

They talked while the fan droned in the ceiling and the sunlight drained from the windows. They talked carefully of little things. She was living in Crestview, now; it was a new addition, built on the old municipal golf course.

He listened to the gentle lilt of her words. Her face seemed to grow more lovely, more delicate in the shadows. Then he scarcely listened; he thought of the last time he had seen her: two years after that thing in Pittsburgh, a month after he'd lost the Cadillac to Silvestri. It hadn't been a walk-out; Joe knew that, now. It had been the Christmas songs, the toys in the windows. And the bitter emptiness. She had come home. Now, thinking back, Joe was so grateful that she hadn't been there the next year.

It was dark now. Nests of lights twinkled on the horizon of the city. "Let's go back to Dundee's," Joe said. "Remember those lobsters?"

They'd eaten there a lot, the first year they'd been married. But it was gone now. It was called the Crescent Grill, now. Now the walls were white. A nickelodeon wailed loudly. Old Dundee was gone. There

was a lean sleek-haired man behind the cash register.

All the little things were said. They looked at each other. They were silent, and then Letty touched his hand. "Tell me, really, Joe. Tell me how things are."

He wanted to tell her. His throat ached with a yearning. If only he could make her believe. "I tried to think. I spent a long time thinking," he began. "I didn't take a drink. I haven't . . ." He stopped. "It took a long time—"

"Sure it's him, like on the poster, you dope!"

Joe glanced around. There were four of them—the oldest not more than twelve. They stood at the side of the booth, staring at him boldly. "Ain't you Joe Corey?" the one with the freckles challenged.

"Sure, that's me." Joe grinned and held out his hand.

"Like I said!" the kid said triumphantly. "My uncle was there. He seen it!" The words rang through the room. The sleek man was watching. The waitresses were staring. "Said it was a fix and a bunch of gamblers sure cleaned up!"

Joe was frozen. Something horribly hot exploded in his chest.

"My uncle, he told me—" the kid was saying again.

The terrible thing seared into Joe's brain and blinded him. A cry of rage broke from his lips. He leaped from the booth. The kids scattered, yelling with fear, "Joe! Don't let—" Letty cried.

He stopped and swayed like someone jerked from a nightmare. The room was filled with eyes and faces. The kids were gone. He stood there alone in the shame and silence. He couldn't stand it. He lunged toward the door.

"Hey, we're not running a soup line, pal. Pay your check," the sleek man snapped.

"It's all right, Joe," Letty said huskily. "I'll meet you." He didn't wait. He wanted to run—to run so fast that the wind would cool the flame of his face; to run so far that the voices would be lost forever. He kept going, stalking deeper and deeper into the old section of the city. His teeth were clenched, his fists knotted.

The scent of beer came to him. It was

a little hole-in-the-wall bar. He stopped, his chest rising and falling like a bellows. It had been so long . . . Suddenly he didn't care. It made no difference. They wouldn't let you forget, no matter what you did. He walked into the place and sat down at the first stool. He ordered a rye and water. It burned, going down. He ordered another.

"Getting in your last training licks, Corey?" The question was careless, ironic. Joe twisted around and there stood Ben Levlitt, the sports-writer. He was grinning, and his lean face seemed to twitch.

"Get out. Get away from me," Joe whispered.

"How does it feel to be home, Joe?" Levlitt asked dreamily.

ALL the pent-up rage went into Joe's blow. It caught Levlitt's chin and reeled him into the wall. He went down to his knees. The bartender yelled angrily. Levlitt stared with stony contempt. Joe looked at his fist. He rubbed his hand across his eyes. Suddenly he felt sick. A feeling of desolation went through him. Dazedly he turned, fumbled with the door, and went out. He felt heavy and old and terribly tired. His eyes burned and blurred. "Damn them." But the words, too, were tired and empty.

It was nearly midnight when Joe returned to the Marsden. The street was empty and still. Just within the darkened entrance a man moved slightly, seemed to lean forward and peer at Joe's face.

"Corey?" he asked.

"Yeah?" The word was hostile. "So what?"

"If you can spare a minute."

"For what?"

"Let's take a walk in the park." The man kept his voice muted. As his head moved, a reflection of light gleamed on his thick glasses. He was a short man, rather plump, with an oval flat face. "You won't be wasting your time," he assured.

Joe bent forward, trying to recognize him. "What's your name?"

"Charlie. Come on, Corey. I think you'll be interested."

Joe hesitated. There was something cu-

riously compelling in the muted words. Slowly he turned. They walked together across the street and into the darkness of a patch of park.

"I'll talk. You can stop me when you've had enough," the man named Charlie said. "First, would it break your heart to win that fight tomorrow night? Would you mind having a few grand riding on yourself at maybe five-to-one?" He paused and sidled a sharp look at Joe. "It could be arranged. It all depends on you, Corey."

"Is Dulaney for sale?" Joe whispered.

"It's a lot easier than that." Charlie chuckled deeply. "It'll take just about three solid rights while you've got him blindfolded."

"I think you're a little crazy."

"Over a period of years I have disproved that theory. Suppose you listen." His tongue moved over his lips with a moist sucking sound. "My information comes from one of Dulaney's sparring partners; first he heard the story, the background. Later, just by accident, he saw how this thing would work. He tried it again; it worked again. It'll work tomorrow night. Krebble's spotted it, now, but it's something that can't be smoothed out in a few days, see? It's like this . . ." His voice softened deliciously. "You let Dulaney come across with a left. Then—straight up in the air with your left hand, see? Like this, wild like—like you were about to drive a knife down in his face! See it? . . . Then he does it. Covers up like a kid about to get slapped. He throws his right arm over his eyes. You've got the whole lunch-hour to bust him. That's all there is, see?"

Joe stared intently at the shadowy face before him. "Now I know you're crazy."

"The story, the background," Charlie continued serenely. "It happened in France. Dulaney's outfit was pinched off in the Battle of the Bulge. He was in this hole by himself when a kraut climbed into him with a bayonet. He'd been half-sleeping. For just a second Dulaney saw this blade coming down. He tried to cover. It caught him just under the eye. Somehow he nailed the guy, then he passed out. It was cold. He stayed there a long time, he thinks, before they found him. Then he

had fever. Nightmares, when he kept seeing that arm upraised, that blade coming down. You get it? . . . He hasn't whipped it. He will, sure. But not by tomorrow night. Something like that takes a long time. So . . ." Charlie cocked his head alertly. "It takes somebody smart enough to handle him a while, then use this opening. You can do it. And I can get five-to-one on you."

Joe swallowed. His throat was dry. He flexed his fingers. They were stiff. "The whole thing, it's crazy," he said thickly.

"You'll never know until you try it." Charlie tilted his head again. "I've got two thousand to bet for you. It'll bring you ten. All I'm waiting for is your word."

"I don't know. The whole thing . . . I want to think," Joe stammered.

"That's okay. Tomorrow morning will be soon enough. You can call me at this number . . ." He handed Joe a slip of paper. "You know, Corey," he said confidentially, "you don't owe anybody a damn thing. They brought you in here to take a beating. They were looking for a soft touch. Why should you—"

"I'll make up my mind without the sob story, Charlie," Joe said abruptly. "I need to think. I'll call you." He turned and walked back to the Marsden.

HE tried to lie down, to think about it calmly. A tense restlessness surged through his veins. He got up and paced around the room.

Now, if it was like that. Just a flaw like Charlie said . . . Sure, if you spotted an opening, you worked it. You always did that. That was okay. Sure. So what were you thinking about?

Joe tried to understand. There was something tauntingly familiar about this moment—as though he had lived it all at some other time. It was that time in Pittsburgh. "But it's not the same!" he said aloud. "This is something different. This is his weakness. It's nothing I've done. What if things were turned around? Why wouldn't he—"

His eyes found the crumpled newspaper on the floor. There was Levitt's column. He could hear the taunting words again, "How does it feel to be home, Joe?"

He stood very still, his fingers closing into fists. He felt the slow surge of fire reach his cheeks. And he heard the shrill voice of the kid again.

They would be there tomorrow night, their hungry eyes upon him. They hadn't let him forget. What did they care about his pride?

If things were turned around . . . Joe thought of it again and his fingers cut into his palms. "They wouldn't give a damn!" he cried. His heart pounded. His hands were wet. He reached for the telephone.

Ten thousand dollars . . . It would be the start. A store, a piece of land. A chance to get away. No need for this again.

He gave the number. One minute later he replaced the receiver. He turned and stared around the room; he felt cold. He had the strangest feeling—as if Letty had passed through this room and listened. The door was locked. It was only a feeling. Slowly he rubbed his head.

The lights were hot on Joe's bare shoulders. Noise kept flooding down from the crowded darkness of the stands. He shuffled around his corner, flexing his shoulders, filling his lungs deeply. His stomach felt light and airy, and a deep richness of finality filled him. This time tonight . . . This was the last time.

The bell jerked at his nerves, then everything seemed to slide into a measured pattern. He went out slowly to meet Baron Dulaney. Dulaney's face was calm. His gold hair glistened. His eyes were cool and appraising. There was a long pale scar under his right eye.

He stung Joe with a left, crossed with a right, moved off and threw another left. Joe drew a deep breath. The physical contact was strangely reassuring. He went in, his massive shoulders bent, his head tucked in. Dulaney fed a left. Joe smashed his lips with a looping right. Dulaney backed away. Joe breathed hungrily. This was it. This was everything. His muscles seemed to sing.

The round had been at least a draw, Joe knew. He breathed easily. His arms felt long and tough. He saw Charlie and the little man winked. Then Joe saw Letty. She was three rows back and to his

right. She smiled and her lips formed some silent word. A momentary quiet strayed through his brain. The bell rang again.

He followed Dulaney, found him with lefts, rocked him backward with long rights. He stalked him constantly. As the round wore away, a growing exhilaration filled his throat. He could take this kid.

With half a minute left, Dulaney trapped him. The right seemed to explode between Joe's teeth. The ring rose and tilted in his vision. He went down and a great roar swelled in his ears. His legs felt numb and flabby as he struggled up. The bell rang.

Dorsey worked on him frantically. Joe sucked fresh water as it ran down his lips. The stands pulsed with a hungry chant: "Get him! Get him!" Joe stared at Dulaney coldly. The false exhilaration was shattered. His arms felt like wet pillows. He dragged in a deep breath as the bell rang. This time. This round. It would have to be now, he thought fixedly.

Dulaney worked him along the ropes with cruel jabs. The blows were penetrating, now. Joe's lungs began to burn. His ribs ached. He backed away, turning his lips, watching, waiting, remembering. Mid-way through the round the chance came.

Dulaney tossed over a left. Joe hesitated an instant, then hurled his left arm high above his head. With the motion he was taunted by a sensation of utter folly. Then it happened—so instantly and so incredibly Joe could scarcely realize. An expression of stark dismay splashed over Dulaney's face. He jerked. He stumbled clumsily. His right arm went over his eyes. For what seemed like an eternity to Joe, Dulaney huddled before him. Joe's muscles coiled and kicked loose. His right smashed into Dulaney's jaw and Dulaney went down.

A stunned roar broke from the crowd. Dulaney huddled on the canvas, staring at Joe with tortured eyes, eyes that were glazed with dull accusation. The referee was counting. Dulaney started up. The poise and calm had left his face.

Between the rounds Joe's eyes met Sam's. Their impact stung him. The cold

THIRD MAN OUT

Abe Attell, king of the little men some forty years ago, once kayoed the referee of a bout in which he was participating, then stood by while his opponent counted out the ref.

The year was 1913. It was a hot July night, and Abe was battling Willie Beecher at Arverne, N. Y. For two rounds the referee kept pestering Abe for more action. Abe, an obliging fellow, stepped up the pace. Then, in a flurry of infighting Beecher moved his head and the ref received one of Abe's rights squarely on the nose. He hit the canvas and Beecher counted him out.

fury of five years ago was rekindled in Sam's face. He knows, Joe thought queerly.

Charlie was smiling softly. Joe looked at Letty. She sat perfectly still, her eyes fixed on him with the strangest look of wonder. Then, so very slowly, her eyes moved toward Charlie. Finally she looked at Sam. She seemed to be searching for some interpretation.

Midway through the fourth Round Joe caught Dulaney again. He threw up his left grotesquely. He hurled his right into Dulaney's mouth as Dulaney huddled before him. Dulaney fell on his side and his lips began to bleed. Joe walked away.

He saw Charlie. The fat face was radiant. Charlie winked and nodded complacently. Then Joe saw Letty. Her eyes were fixed on Charlie. Slowly they resolved themselves in his. Her face was ashen. Her lips seemed to tremble. Abruptly she rose. Her eyes had found their answer. She stumbled toward the aisle. Something tightened and snapped inside Joe. His throat went dry. Her name tried to reach his lips.

"Fight!" the referee commanded. Dulaney was on his feet again. Letty vanished beyond the outskirts of light. Joe turned to fight. All his heart and urge seemed to have walked away.

He sat in his corner and stared at her empty seat. All around was the ghostly sea of faces. A strange silence cloaked the crowd. Something hard and ugly was dawning into realization out there.

It made Joe cold, and he looked at the empty seat again. The anguish of loneli-

ness strangled him. They hated him, and suddenly he hated himself. This wasn't the thing he'd come back for. Suddenly, in those moments, Joe let himself think clearly.

He hadn't wanted to walk unknown down the hall. He *had* hoped there'd be someone to meet him at the station. In some unspoken way, he had hoped to find something here. He was so very tired, and he'd wanted to come home. This was the last fight, and he didn't want it this way.

Dorsey was pushing him. Yes, the bell had rung. He went out. His arms felt like sacks of concrete. His lungs burned. The mechanical part of his mind kept prompting. "Now. This round. This round."

Dulaney hit him. Again. Again. Joe waited. He hurled up his left. A momentary struggled stained Dulaney's face as he fought to control himself. He lost. He stumbled and covered up. There he waited. There was his chin. This was it.

The sob of anguished decision broke from Joe's lips. His right arm sagged to his side. He closed his eyes and shook his head. Noise, like the sharp rustle of leaves, swept through the crowd. Then Joe looked at Dulaney. The younger man's eyes were wide, incredulous. Joe hit him with a left and the eternal instant was past. Dulaney came in. He slammed Joe back. He worked him along the ropes. He hammered at Joe's ribs.

In the fifth Joe was down. He was down twice in the sixth. His lungs felt like furnaces. His knees shook. Each jab seemed to grind his ribs deeper into raw flesh. The salt of blood coated his lips. The sixth? . . . Four more left. Four more. It was forever. The end of forever. It was where he had to go.

The seventh. Down again. The eighth. Harder to make his knees carry him up. Hard to see Dulaney through the mist. No, this was the referee. Joe shook his head doggedly. He was all right.

Sam's face swam through his vision. Or was it Sam? . . . Something had happened to the eyes. The face was gray and sick. Was he smiling? Joe thought he

was smiling at him. Letty's seat was empty. Dulaney kept hitting him. This was the ninth round, wasn't it? The bell rang. In an instant, it seemed, it rang again.

"You can make it." Dorsey had said that. Joe went out to meet the white wraith that was Dulaney. He threw his tired fists out. Dulaney slugged him. Joe started down, dragged himself up, and bowed his legs apart. He ceased moving and planted himself to stay.

The blows ceased to sting. Nothing could hurt. He was going to last. The terrible sweetness of the realization filled his throat. He wanted to laugh. His lips wouldn't move. He did not hear the bell. He was alone, in the center of the ring. He was still swinging when Sam and the referee pulled him back, and there was an endless thunder pouring out of the stands.

Dorsey got him through the ropes. His eyes began to clear as they started up the long aisle. It was then, and only then, that he realized they were shouting for him, too. They reached out when he passed. This had not happened in a long long time.

Dorsey was tying Joe's shoelaces when Levitt came into the silent dressing room. He walked over to Joe and held out his hand.

"If you want to know," he said. "It was the biggest fight you ever won."

Joe looked at him and understood what he meant. Sam came in with Dulaney. They shook hands and Sam began to chew his cigar ferociously.

"I am glad, Joe," he said. He left it at that. "I am wondering. We will be needing somebody. With what you can teach . . ."

Joe did not hear the last words. Letty had come in. She was standing there with a light shining in her eyes—a light so long ago lost that Joe could scarcely remember it as pride. She came toward him.

"I waited on the ramp, Joe. I had to know, this time," she said softly.

Joe looked at her without speaking. He thought of the things he needed to tell her. And yet, as he kept looking at her, he realized there was no need at all. They both knew he had come home to stay.

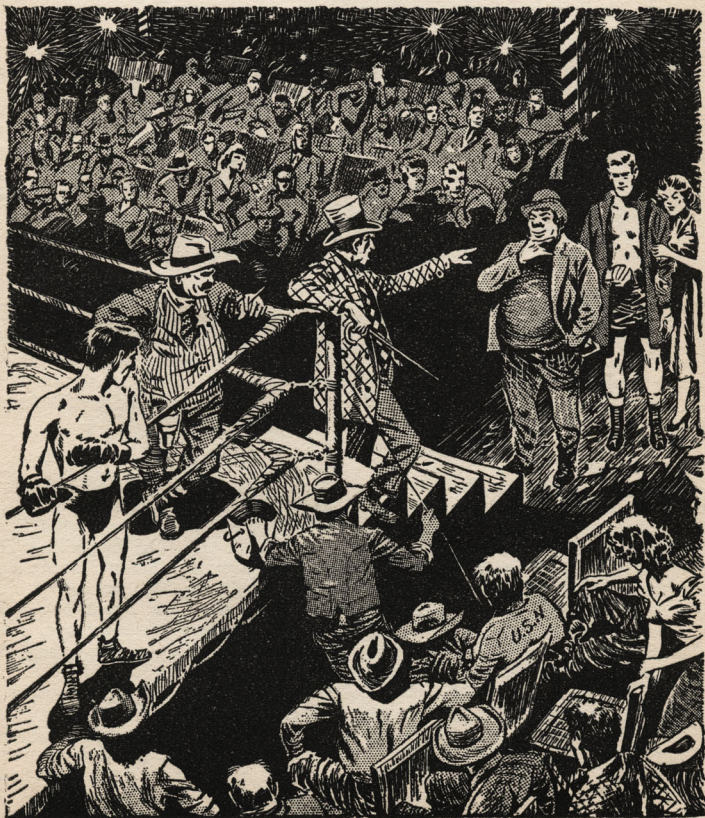
An Honest Fight Every Night

By Tom O'Neil

Pug's knuckles was the diet of Center City. From babes in diapers to bearded giants, rough and tumble was the order of the day. But the greatest show of all was still to come . . . staged by those impresarios of swat: Roarin' Mike McBride and little Rinky Sneed.

CENTER CITY was a fight town. On the south side, beyond the barrier of the railroad tracks, were the coal miners, a brawling, boisterous

crew, partly Irish, partly Welch. The north side was the exclusive property of the steel workers from the mills, hard-jawed Hunkies and harder-headed Swedes.



Caught between these two in a kind of squeeze were truck drivers, railroad men, freight handlers, factory hands, eager to fight to defend their right to live peaceably, no holds barred. Every night was fight night, every street corner an arena, every cop a referee.

The professionals, of course, were the elite.

A good lightweight was held in higher esteem than a councilman, and the mayor wasn't in the same class with the local heavyweight champ, but—a successful manager was king of them all.

But Center City did not have a king. The town was divided into two armed camps.

Roaring Mike McBride, full of boisterous hospitality and Irish whiskey, with his St. Patrick's Arena, was Crown Prince of the South Side. Graven in the marble arch over his ticket window were the words—*An Honest Fight Every night*. And if you doubted it, Roaring Mike would fight you himself, and that would be an honest fight. Roaring Mike satisfied his customers.

And on the North Side, his rival was little Rinky Sneed. Where Mike impressed you with the force of his personality and muscle, Rinky Sneed held office because he was smart. He was smart from the end of his pointed nose to the tips of his pointed yellow shoes. Before Rinky had opened his *Emporium of Swat* (he called it that!) he had looked around him, and everywhere he had looked there was another fight arena.

Center City had arenas the way most people had mice. And that was where Rinky Sneed showed his smartness. His Emporium was not just another Arena—it was a lure for the jaded appetite, a feast for the blood-thirsty. On alternate days, it was true, you could see a straight fight card. But ah! the other three days! Rinky Sneed had the kind of imagination that must have actuated such Roman spectacles as elephant versus rhinoceros, trident and net versus shield and sword, Christian versus lion, or even the burning of Rome itself. Rinky Sneed was ambitious. He wanted to be fight king of Center City.

He did not have lions or elephants, but he did have the Twelve Man Melee, the Blind Man's Battle (six gladiators blindfolded, the gory One-Arm Massacre, in which five men entered the ring with one arm tied behind their backs. He instituted the novelty of two little men fighting one big man; he inaugurated the Kansas Duel, in which the fighters held either end of a four-foot strip of innertube between their teeth, the object being quite obvious.

Ah yes, on such nights gore and teeth rained on the canvas like tears from a poet's pen, and none enjoyed it more than Rinky Sneed himself. Rinky had the tastes of a Nero or a Caligula. Imperial tastes.

His first step toward the imperial throne was the advent of Young Tom Cribb, the Classic Clouter, an immediately popular innovation. An innovation for this day and age, that is, for Young Tom fought under the old London Prize-Ring Rules of 1838, under which anything was permissible except the use of an axe. There was no time limit on rounds, for they ended only with a knockdown. Oh, it was really classic. The gore-gluttons loved it.

And to make it more interesting there was a thousand dollars waiting for the man who could beat the bejimini out of Young Tom, all comers welcome. That was Rinky Sneed's first bid for the throne of Center City.

II

WITHOUT fanfare of trumpet, a tall, wavering figure lurched from the rear entrance of the Emporium. He staggered across the sidewalk, caught at a tree to steady himself, then straightened with visible effort and aimed himself at the next tree, head out-thrust, legs wide. White patches of plaster criss-crossed his lean face, his eyes were all-but-sightless slits in puffy flesh, his lips a pair of blubbery doughnuts.

A small roadster leaped across the street like a kangaroo with a hot-foot, screeched to a stop two feet over the curb, and a girl with a flaming mane of hair

like a crest of fire, jumped from the door and gathered the battered walker in her young and tender arms.

"Dinny, Dinny," she sobbed, "Why did you do it, Dinny? Why did you do it?" She cupped his swollen face in trembling hands.

He tilted back his head to see her between the slits of his swollen eyes, and the grimace that moved his lips was meant for a grin.

"It was a tough fight, Mom," he said as lightly as he could, "but I lost. I'll bet I look it, too."

"Oh Dinny! But why? Why, Dinny?"

"For the thousand dollars, my little passion flower, for the rest of the payment on that gas station, or your old man would never let me marry you, and you know it. Bless his heart, of course," he added quickly for he knew how deep was the love between Nora McBride and Roaring Mike, "Bless his horny heart."

"Oh, Dinny, your poor face," she touched it with soft fingertips, "Here's my car."

It was the blind leading the blind, for her eyes were veiled with spilling tears. He sank into the seat beside her with an "Ah-h-h!" of grateful muscles.

"Dad won't be home from the Arena until after midnight," she told him, "I'm taking you there to put something on your lips . . ."

"If you put on them what I'm thinking, they'd be well in a minute," Dinny grinned.

"A cold compress," she said severely. "And stop your thinking. Thinking you could fight that awful Tom Cribb got you nothing but trouble."

"I still think I can beat him, Nora."

"Nobody can beat him," she said with conviction. "He's beaten' hundreds of men. How many did he beat tonight?"

"Six," he admitted reluctantly. "I was the fourth. But I blacked his eye for him and gave him a cabbage ear that he can cook with the corned beef I made of his nose. With the knowledge I gained to-night I'll stand a good chance the next time."

"I can't see," Nora said primly, "that you've gained anything but a face like

Mulligan stew. I don't want to hear any more fight talk!"

ACROSS the city, Roaring Mike McBride was getting an earful of fight talk, and his guffaws rattled the loose glass in the windows of his office in St. Patrick's Arena and popped a button from his vest just where the white piping came to a V over his generous paunch. Across the desk from him sat white-haired Timothy Lord, sports editor of the Center City News.

"Fight talk, Mike," said Lord, smiling as he tapped the proof of the advertisement spread on the desk between them, "What are you going to do about it, Mike?"

It was a full page ad, mostly in bold-face type.

"FOR THE CLASSIC CHAMPIONSHIP OF CENTER CITY COME ONE-COME ALL

"I, Young Tom Cribb, hereby challenge all the bluffers and loud-mouths who have been poking cowardly fun and otherwise maliciously maligning my claim to the CLASSIC crown, to a

FIGHT TO THE FINISH

"In the ring of Rinky Sneed's Emporium of Swat. Particularly I address this challenge to any fighter in the stable of Roaring Mike McBride, the noisiest braggart in seven wards."

"John L. Sullivan once issued a challenge like that," Lord said reminiscently, "and Gentleman Jim Corbett beat the tar out of him. What are you going to do about it, Mike?"

"Me?" Mike leaned back and roared with laughter, "Nothin', Timmy, nothin'. It's beneath me, that's what it is. I wouldn't send any of my boys against thim clowns of Rinky Sneed. 'Twouldn't be an honest fight, like I pride meself on giving. 'Twould be a massacre."

"This Young Tom Cribb is supposed to be pretty good, Mike."

Roaring Mike disposed of Young Tom Cribb with a flip of his massive hand. "An acrobat," he said contemptuously, "A rasher. Still," he thoughtfully stroked his

rocky chin, "the taxpayers might start to wonder a little if I let this challenge go unnoticed now, wouldn't they? In fact," he said with decision, "I think I'll send Sailor McGuire against the prancin' ape the next time he fights."

Lord said calmly, "Under an assumed name, Sailor Maguire fought Young Tom three weeks ago and had his cauliflower ears pinned back."

"Whisht ye say! The avaricious bum. Out after the thousand dollars, no doubt, and me paying him a steady, living wage. And Cribb beat him, ye say? No wonder he suddenly up and wint to his grandmither's funeral. He didn't have a face to face me with. This is serious. The Sailor was a good fair-to-middlin' fighter. Maybe I'll make it Jimmy Flannery, a very promising heavy."

Timothy Lord yawned. "Oh promise me!" he scoffed, "Flannery looked like a wilted orange blossom when Young Tom got finished with him two weeks ago. Wasn't it Flannery who up and went to his uncle's wake in Weehawken?"

"It was indade," said Roaring Mike grimly. "And I suppose ye'll be tellin' me next that me prime heavy, Larry O'Sullivan, was took by this galloping wonder. Ye won't be telling me that, will ye, Timmy?" he pleaded

"Under the alias of Battling Sullivan," Lord yawned, "Last week in seven rounds. Where is Larry O'Sullivan, by the way?"

"Visitin' his grandmither's aunt that's got a pain in me fut," said Roaring Mike heavily.

He pushed himself up from his chair and strode ponderously toward the door. He paused with his hand on the knob and said, "I'm goin' home to kiss me Shamrock, Tim, and that ain't for publication!"

DINNY KEOGH was lying on his back on the living room sofa with a cold compress on his ear when Roaring Mike shambled in, mumbling to himself. Nora sprang up from the sofa-side and attempted to shield Dinny from Roaring Mike's gaze with her skirts, but her father's glance was wandering and lack-lustre.

From force of habit, he muttered, "And what did the cat drag in this time, Noralass," but his interest was faint. His eyes roved the room. "Where's me bottle of Auld Bushmill's, coleen? Yer auld man needs a drink."

Nora sprang for the kitchen cupboard while Roaring Mike sank into the hearth-side lounge chair with a sigh, ignoring entirely the presence of Dinny Keogh. He cupped his heavy chin in his hands and stared into space. He scratched the back of his neck, pulled at his ear, and his eyes again encountered the supine figure of Dinny.

"And who the livin' hell are you?" he demanded.

Dinny said belligerently, "I'm Dinny Keogh. I'm going to marry your daughter and you might as well get used to the idea!"

Mike stared at him, awed. "Whisht, young-feller-me-lad, and what happened to yer face?" he whispered.

"A difference of opinion," Dinny grinned, "A difference of opinion with Tom Cribb. He had the last word."

Roaring Mike continued to stare as if hypnotized. "Surely," he faltered, "his gloves were made of barbed wire with an anvil concealed in either fist."

"It was a fair fight and I lost."

"He kicked ye whin ye were down, didn't he?" Mike pleaded, "He kneed yer poor bleedin' face and fouled ye in the clinches, surely?"

"It was a fair fight," Dinny maintained, "I made a mistake, but . . ."

"That ye did," Mike said gloomily, "The mistake of fightin' him in the first place. Young Tom Cribb," he mumbled, clenching his fists, "Me very life is haunted with Young Tom Cribb. 'Twould be better to call him Young Tom Creep, I'm thinkin'. And the worst of it is, I niver clapped eyes on the blasted comedian. How does he fight, hey, young feller? Come on, speak up, speak up! What's that ye got in yer mouth, anyways?"

"There's nothing in my mouth," Dinny mumbled, "That's my lips sticking out. How does he fight? Well, it's half wrestling and half boxing, but I can't say I remember a lot about it, for after that

body slam he crashed me with in the first round, things became a little hazy. I sort of remember that he boxes like Tunney, hits like Louis and wrestles like Jim Londos, kicks like a mule and dances like Fred Astaire, and as for the rest of it, you can liken him to the Invisible Man, especially when you're trying to hang a right hook on his jaw."

Nora came in with a tray bearing a bottle of Irish whiskey and a beer glass. Mike filled the glass and drained it at a gulp.

He filled it again, sawlloved twice and the glass was empty. He waved Nora and the tray away.

"I know me capacity," he said. "Hmmm. Thank ye, young feller, ye guv me a lead on this Young Tom Cribb, sink his soul. Also an idea, and if its works out now," he cocked an eye made sunnier by the Irish whiskey, "I'll look favorably on yer suit for me daughter's hand, perviding ye can support her in the style I'd like her to become accustomed to. Now if ye'll excuse me and get the hell out of here . . ."

Dinny said quickly, "Mr. McBride. . ."

"The word is scam, if ye don't understand English!"

"But I . . ."

"Ah now, have pity on me gray hairs and spare me the pother of throwing you out on yer ear. I want to communicate with meself, and I can do it best alone."

At a nod from Nora, Dinny rose from the sofa, put the cold compress in Roaring Mike's lap and departed, but leaving behind him the admonition, "You'll wish you'd listened, that's all I have to say."

Roaring Mike said irritably, "Wurra, wurra," and communicated with himself.

The next day he took up Rinky Sneed's challenge, but obliquely, anonymously, for he wasn't really ready yet. All he wanted to do now was prove that Young Tom Cribb could be beaten, and for that purpose he imported a wrestler from New York, called him the Masked Murderer, and the following Friday sent him to challenge Cribb in his own ring and in the sight of all.

Roaring Mike was at ringside when the Murderer climbed into the ring. He relaxed in his seat with a complacent grin

and smoothed his vest over his paunch.

III

IN THE grappling dens of nocturnal New York, the Murderer was known as Klutski the Clutch, for his specialty was to fasten himself around his opponent's waist and tighten up notch by notch. No one had ever found out if his arms would eventually have met in the middle, for the bout always ended when his opponent's innards met his tonsils.

But things began to go wrong immediately, and rapidly became a mess. The Masked Murderer just wasn't bright—he had forgotten to put on his mask, for one thing. And for another, he had forgotten his lines and had to take a piece of paper from his pocket and recite from it in a hesitant and stilted voice. And in the third place, Roaring Mike was just no good as a showman at all. He could give the public an honest fight, but he didn't know enough about skullduggery to make it palatable with nosegays and vaudeville.

Rinky Sneed, on the other hand, was a past-master. All dressed up like a beau of the Gay Nineties in a flowered vest, a high crowned derby, a fat cigar and a pair of handlebar moustaches donned for the occasion, he held a short, whispered conversation with the Murderer, then led the lumbering behemoth to the mike.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried in a high, sarcastic voice, I want you to be very hospitable to this little boy here, because he's a foreigner. He's come *all* the way from New York, *all* by himself. Next year he plans to vote. Give him a big hand, folks!"

Mike groaned. The Murderer was not supposed to have mentioned New York. The crowd did not like imports, and if it became apparent that he had been hired to come, *that* would be a debacle. An outside manager could bring in a foreigner to fight a local boy, but for a local resident to do the same was treason.

The boos rolled down from the galleries with thunderous volume, and suddenly Mike found himself on his feet booing with the best of them.

Rinky Sneed grinned thinly. He knew

who had imported the Murderer, and he gave Mike a jeering, foreboding glance.

"Now tell me," he said, putting his hand on the Murderer's arm, "who brought you here to fight Young Tom Cribb? A local citizen?"

Mike held his breath. They'd mob him if it came out, but stolidly the Murderer held up his paper to the light.

"I-was-just-passing-through-on-the railroad-train," he read jerkily, like a sixth-grader reciting the Gettysburg Address, "I-like-Center-City. I-want-to-marry-and-and-settle-down-here. I need-a-thousand-dollars to rent-an-apartment-and-buy-my-girl-a-ring."

The crowd roared derisively. Any girl who'd have the Murderer wouldn't be wearing a ring. A halter would be more appropriate.

But the Murderer had sense enough to stop there—or perhaps it was because he had come to the end of his paper and couldn't think of anything to say. Despite Rinky Sneed's sly prodding to elicit the name of Roaring Mike from his lips, all he did was stand an occasionally burp. Onions. Onions always made him burp. In defeat, Rinky waved him to his corner, darting Mike a venomous glance.

Young Tom Cribb was ugly and hairy—but the Murderer was uglier and hairier, 250 pounds of it. He sat squatly on his stool, scratched his belly and burped again, impervious to the hostility of the crowd.

Cribb sprang quickly from his stool at the bell, but the murderer came out slowly, shaking his hands a little, as if the light gloves bothered him. He came out in the wide-legged, spread-armed crouch of a professional wrestler.

Cribb evaded his initial pawing grasp and his hands licked out like striking snakes. The spat-spat was audible all over the arena as the gloves landed meatily on either side of the Murderer's jaw.

The Murderer's eyes flew wide in surprise, but he just pulled in his head a little more deeply into his shoulders and plodded forward, weaving his pincer-like arms. Cribb danced around the ends of his gloves and hooked a hard right to his ear, sent in a straight left. The

Murderer turned stolidly and followed him across the ring, hunching his shoulders higher until his shaven bullet head was almost buried in mountains of muscle. Cribb was being careful, very careful, staying out of range of those clutching arms, depending on his longer reach to soften up the Murderer for the decisive later rounds.

The Murderer gathered himself and made a rush. It was like the plunging charge of a rhinoceros, but Cribb ducked under his reaching arms and swung a full-bodied left to the pit of the wrestler's stomach. It was like beating a bass drum. He smashed a right to the jaw, a left to the mouth, a right to the side of his head, and threw in three lightning left jabs as he danced back and around to the middle of the ring.

But it was as if he had been assaulting a tank with a bean flipper, for the blows lost themselves in those layers of muscle, and the Murderer plodded inexorably forward, ever forward.

Cribb was sweating now. It glistened on every hair and ran down his ribs; it dripped from the ledges over his eyes and pebbled his upper lip. He was worried. His Sunday punch had buried itself in blubber and nothing had happened. His sharp, cutting punches had no target in the hard turret of that round, shaven head.

Cribb was not imaginative, but he did not like the jolts that jarred his shoulder blades every time he connected solidly. He wanted to sit down and talk it over with Rinky Sneed and get some advice, but there was no time limit on these rounds. One man or the other had to go down before he could get back to his corner.

AT RINGSIDE, Roaring Mike yelled imploringly, "Stay away from him, Tommy-me-bhoy! Stay away from him!"

Cribb showed his teeth in a wordless snarl. What the hell did Pudgy think he was trying to do, sit in the Murderer's lap and croon lullabies? He shot in a long left and as he circled, his foot slipped. For a frantic moment he floundered and he felt the Murderer's arm slide around

his waist. He twisted, found a hold and with surging desperation, threw the Murderer with a cross-buttock. The judge's whistle screamed shrilly and the round was over, for the Murderer had touched knee and hand to the floor.

Cribb sneered at the cheers that showed him. He had taken the round, but he knew how hollow had been that small victory. He was arm weary from punching and he had gotten no place. The Murderer just sat phlegmatically on his stool and burped. Onions. And with garlic it was the same. Always burps. The very thought of it made him burp. He shook his head irritably.

The thirty seconds ran out and the fighters went to scratch for the second round. Cribb's warning jab spat viciously against the Murderer's head, but too high, too high. It was almost impossible to find his buried chin from that range. Taking a chance, he stepped in, hooking with rights and lefts. He danced back before the Murderer's seeking hands could circle him. He grinned a little. This was better. There could be more of this.

But Rinky Sneed, his pointed face pinched with worry, gnawed at his cigar and glanced malevolently across the ring—but Roaring Mike's seat was empty. He had fled. Rinky grinned thinly. Tomorrow, He'd fix Mike tomorrow.

More confident now, Cribb circled the ponderous Murderer, then darted in, shooting a right—but the Murderer had been lying in wait, and as Cribb came in, he brought up his linked hands and caught him under the chin with a terrific, sweeping blow. Cribb had expected him to grapple, not strike. Cribb's legs flew up and he crashed head and shoulders into the canvas. The audience shuddered under a prolonged groan.

The Murderer stared around disgustedly, burped, and tramped back to his stool. This was a hell of a way to rassle. No jumpings-on, no kicks in the pusses, no grunts, no groans. He belched and the stool creaked beneath him. The next round was the end. He was tired of this sissy stuff, and he wanted to go home and take a bicarbonate of soda.

As the dazed Cribb was dragged to his

corner by his seconds, Roaring Mike came pounding down the aisle, his collar open, his face purple, his paunch heaving from the exertion. He galloped to Cribb's corner, uncorking a small bottle. He thrust Rinky Sneed roughly aside, snarling:

"Ye want yer tramp to win doncha, ye under-sized dose of arsenic? Git outta me way!" Dabbling liquid from the bottle on Cribb's gloves, he whispered, "Let him grapple with ye next round, me bhoy, and whin he does, shove yer gloves under his fat snoot. That's all ye gotta do. Mind me words now!"

Sneed watched with beady eyes, not attempting to interfere. If Cribb lost now he had his rival in a box, a box filled with the barbs and poison of scandal, for Mike had no right in Cribb's corner.

He said loudly, "Leave the boy alone, Mike!" and noted with satisfaction that the reporters in the press row had heard and were staring curiously. That did it!

Cribb went groggily to scratch at the whistle, groggily but grimly. Grapple, eh? He eyed the Murderer's flat, impassive features. There'd be some changes made there before they got to grips. He chopped a stinging right and left to the Murderer's nose and arched his back as the wrestler's arms went around him. The Murderer braced his legs and settled his face against Cribb's chest with a satisfied grunt. He cross-locked his hands and constricted. For a terrifying moment, Cribb fought against that awful pressure. His ribs sprang and his eyes stood out on stalks. He beat against the side of the Murderer's head with impotent gloves.

Mike roared, "Under his snoot, ye stupid ape, under his snoot!"

The voice came faintly through the sound of jagged cymbals that crashed in Cribb's brain, and weakly he pushed his gloves under the Murderer's nose. The response was instantaneous. The Murderer jerked up his chin and sharply drew back his head. He strained away from the gloves, but Cribb kept them glued to his upper lip. The Murderer's expression changed from that of distaste to one of horror and agony. He turned green and

finally, releasing his lethal grasp, staggered back, wiping furiously at his nose with his fore arm. Thunderous, rumbling sounds came from his lips. Cribb pursued him as fast as his shaking legs would go. The Murderer covered his face with crossed arms and retreated. Round and round the ring he stumbled, rumbling like a train in a tunnel. Cribb boxed him into a corner and hammered pile-driving rights and lefts into that agonized face, to the tilted shelf of the unprotected chin. The Murderer looked almost grateful as his knees crumbled and he sank into unconsciousness, signalled by a monumental burp.

Rinky Sneed snatched the little bottle from Roaring Mike's hand and snarled, "What did you rub on Cribb's gloves?" His pointed nose dipped to the lip of the bottle. His features convulsed and he thrust out the bottle at arms length. "Peeyoo!" he gasped, "Garlic!"

"Essence of garlic," corrected Mike complacently, "Poison for a bilious stomach like the Murderer's, poor lad!"

THE next day, Rinky Sneed brought out another innovation in ballyhoo, a paid advertisement in the form of a two-column sports gossip feature in the Center City News.

AT RINGSIDE WITH RINKY SNEED

"What prominent manager-promoter," he wrote, "sprang a ringer on Young Tom Cribb, Classic champion of Center City, and got his comeuppance? Five dollars for each correct answer."

That was pure inspiration, that five dollar prize offer. It was not so little that folks wouldn't try for it, and not so much that Sneed would go broke paying it. And pay it he did, cheerfully, for the answers came rolling in. It cost him \$5,255—but the name of Roaring Mike was on every tongue, and the name was mud.

Sneed let this situation ferment for three days, then put over the crusher in his column.

"Are you all washed up, Roaring Mike McBride?" he inquired, "Isn't there one real fighter in your stable of bums? Your St. Patrick's Arena must be in a bad way if you don't have even one boy you can send against Young Tom. You must be cheating the public, Mike, if you're putting on a show without fighters."

"This is a challenge!"

"If I don't hear from you within one week from date, Mike McBride, I will proclaim Young Tom Cribb undisputed Classic Champion of Center City."

"How will it feel, Mike, going back to bricklaying?"

THAT evening Roaring Mike held a council of war in his office. The genial bloom had left his cheeks, and even his prosperous paunch had a discouraged droop. With him were Sailor Maguire, Jimmy Flannery and Larry O'Sullivan, his top-bracket heavies. Mike leaned heavily on his desk and looked at each of them in turn.

The Sailor rasped, "Don't look at me, Mike. I can't take the guy."

Larry O'Sullivan nodded. "And I ain't trained to fight his way," he admitted, "He gets me all mixed up. Why doncha challenge him to fight our way?"

Mike spread his hands in a weary gesture. "Bhoys," he said sadly, "I jist waited too long. I been out-witted. They'd laugh at me if I come out wit a challenge now. How about you, Jimmy Flannery?"

"I'll take another shot at him if you say so, Mike."

"But ye don't have much hope, is that it?"

Flannery grimaced. "I can't get the hang of trying to break a guy's arms the same time I'm punching him in the snoot. It don't come natural."

Big Mike slumped. He raised his hand and let it fall. "Go home, me bhoys," he said, "Go home and water yer lawns, and if ye have money in the bank, pay off yer mortgages. It looks like Roaring Mike McBride's going out of business."

After they had gone, he locked the office and trudged out into the soft darkness of the summer night. The Arena was closed for the first week-night in its history. But

across town on the North Side, Rinky Sneed's Emporium Of Swat was jammed to the eaves and the customers were fighting on the sidewalk for the last few tickets remaining. It was Tom Cribb's last come-one-come-all night, for next week he would be the crowned king of Center City.

Mike trudged his lonely way homeward, his chin sunk on his breast, his hands sunk in his pockets. This was the bitter way of defeat, this lonely road. He had never thought it would come like this. Fighting—that was his way. It hurt having to slink off like this.

As he neared the flowering rhododendron that bordered his modest Cape Cod cottage, a burly figure stepped from behind the bushes and growled:

"That you, Mike McBride?"

Mike stopped. He wasn't afraid, but his heart was hammering. "'Tis meself," he snapped pugnaciously.

But before he could draw his hands from his pockets, his assailant was upon him. A heavy fist crashed against his jaw and he sagged to the sidewalk. The thug stood over him as he feebly tried to rise.

"That'll teach you to bring in furriers, Mike McBride!"

Though the words were snarled, they were curiously empty of rancor, and with an intuitive flash of understanding, Mike knew that this attack had been planned by Rinky Sneed as a blow to his pride.

The screen door slammed and a lean figure hurtled down the walk. In a flying dive, he plunged into the thug and they rolled on the grass. But only one rose and the other lay jack-knifed and writhing. Comforting hands helped Mike to his feet and Nora's young voice panted:

"Did he hurt you, Dad?"

Mike ruefully rubbed his jaw. "Whislt!" he grumbled, "A McBride niver gits hurt with a sock in the snoot. But who is this cock o' the world that came lepping to me rescue now?"

"That's Dinny Keogh, the boy who . . ."

"Aye," said Mike gloomily, "the bhoys who made a mistake fighting Young Tom Cribb, me curses on his hairy hide. Help me in the house, me bhoys. These she-nanigans kind of shook me up, like."

Between them, Nora and Dinny helped him into the living room and when Nora went for the whiskey bottle, Mike looked critically at Dinny's lean, tanned face and said politely:

"I'm glad to see yer face is back to its normal ugliness, me bhoys. But 'twas a good lesson to keep yer nose out of other people's gloves."

Dinny grinned. "It was a good lesson," he agreed, "But I'll take him the next time."

Mike chuckled. "Ye can't beat the Irish," he said, "Especially the thick Irish. So there's goin' to be a next time, hey?"

"You bet there is."

"Well, well, now? And what makes ye such a fightin' cock and all?"

"Because I'm going to marry your daughter and I need the money to buy a gas station. I have fifteen hundred dollars, but I need another thousand."

Mike listened thoughtfully. "It's a wonder bhoys, ye are," he observed, "Yer the only one that fut this Cribb that wants another dose. Ye think ye can beat him, surely?"

"Well," Dinny's chin went up, "he won't take me by surprise this time. I'm in good condition. I played football and I can take care of myself. I've got a chance."

"And a fightin' heart too, I'm thinkin'," Mike muttered. "It's a good build ye got—broad in the shoulder and lean in the shanks, and the courage to take on a man bigger than yerself as ye just did out there on the sidewalk," he hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his vest and said in a suddenly business-like voice, "See here, young-feller-me-lad, 'I'll make ye a proposition . . ."

IV

THE next day all Center City was electrified by the full page ad in the News, surmounted by the smiling picture of jovial Roaring Mike McBride himself.

"I'M CALLING YOUR BLUFF,
RINKY SNEED!

"I'm taking up the challenge against your grasshopper champion, Tom Cribb,

and against him I'll match the Wonder Boy of the Fistic World, none other than Center City's own

"DINNY KEOGH

"And though gambling's against the law who's to know if I bet my St. Patrick's Arena against your run-down Emporium of Swat?

"PUT UP OR SHUT UP, RINKY SNEED!"

Rinky Sneed sat in his office, the paper spread before him. His ferret-bright eyes darted from the bold print to Tom Cribb, who lay on the couch across the room, interested in pulling hairs from his ears. Rinky's glance was calculating and cold, and there were dollar signs behind it.

"You didn't look so good last night, Cribb," he said sharply, "What's the matter, getting old?"

"Me, boss? I took on eight guys, didn't I?"

"In three and a half hours. Slipping?"

Cribb looked abashed. Rinky's thin, metallic voice could do that to him. "Aw, boss," he mumbled, "I was juss kind of showing off. It was me lass night, and I was clowning it up."

"If that's all, okay. But from now on I don't want any monkey business. Did you see this?" he tapped the spread of Mike's ad.

"Yeah. Lousy picture of Mike, ain't it? A baboon, Haw, haw!"

"Shut up! Didn't you read it?"

"I was kind of busy at the time and—aw, hell, who wants to read what that guy says anyway?"

Rinky knew Cribb couldn't read, but he liked to rub it in. Somehow, though, this game didn't seem to have much flavor.

"Keogh," he said, "Dinny Keogh. You beat a guy by that name."

"That's a fact, boss. Four-five weeks ago. A young guy."

Rinky's eyes narrowed the way they always did when his sharp little mind was searching for the joker in what looked like an honest deal. Rinky had plenty of experience with those jokers. Suspiciously, he reread the ad.

"I don't get it," he admitted sourly. "He's putting up a monkey you already beat, and betting his Arena against mine."

Cribb whistled and sat up. "Say, boss," he said brightly, "what'll my cut be?"

ROARING Mike McBride was feeling a lot less jovial than he looked as he marched down the aisle before Dinny Keogh and the honor guard of seconds and handlers behind. Beneath his white sweater, his heart had butterflies, and his feet were quaking in their number fifteen prisons.

Hairy and slightly simian, Cribb was already in the ring, swapping jokes with his admiring partizans, and when Dinny climbed between the ropes, he roared boisterously:

"Well, well, if it ain't me old punching bag, Dinny Keogh! I got a pair of horseshoes you can put in your gloves if you want."

"Dinny flushed, but he showed a flashing grin and waved his hand. "Getting old and flabby, Tom? You offered me anvils the last time."

He got a laugh for that and even Cribb grinned.

Roaring Mike's eyes were watchful and appraising. Cribb was a half inch shorter than Dinny, but he was bulky, and in comparison the boy was a peeled stripling, six feet one and lean as a bull whip. He didn't have the weight for a fight like this.

Sneed called derisively across the ring, "Make it another five thousand, Mike. Or are you a piker?"

Mike snarled, "Make it ten!" and immediately regretted his quick, Irish tongue. But it was done, and he turned to Dinny, showing a smiling, confident face.

The referee called the fighters to the middle of the ring and gave them the slightly bewildering instructions, for these were not the National Sporting Club rules. He patted them on the shoulders and sent them back to their corners for the gong. This was all done in the fine old classic style. The referee was a deputy sheriff and wore his star on his suspenders, and on his hip hung an ivory-handled six

shooter. Hollywood could have used Rinky Sneed. For this bout, he had installed a gong with a funereal knell.

It tolled and both fighters left their stools fluidly and quickly. Dinny held his hands as a boxer would—the left crooked and out-thrust, the right close to his jaw and ready. But, scowling, Cribb came out with a pantherish leap, crouched low, both arms extended. He looked wide open—a delusion, for Cribb could move with lightning speed.

He fainted with his body to draw a lead, but Dinny merely circled, standing straight-up, watchful, his hands bobbing a little, but poised and close, offering no handle for a Flying Mare or a body slam. He had been there before. Cribb grinned narrowly and prowled around his wary opponent, feinting with both hands now. But Dinny's eyes were on Cribb's feet. He pivoted slowly, refusing to be drawn into a lead.

Cribb straightened suddenly and threw a long straight left. Dinny's right spat out, beating the punch, and drew a trickle of red from Cribb's nose. Cribb bobbed, shot another left, crouched and pointed with a right that purposely missed and offered his body for a left. But Dinny grinned and winked, for Cribb's right would have locked on Dinny's wrist if he tried for it, and a fall would have followed.

Cribb scowled. He had to force this fight or lose the popular acclaim, but this monkey wouldn't be drawn. Cribb counted on that first, crushing fall. He circled lithely, watching for that opening, the opening that would send his opponent to the canvas with a bone wrenching crash. Dinny Keogh could hit. That he knew. His cabbage ear was still a witness to the fact. He didn't want another.

He circled tigerishly, waiting, watching. He was expert at this. Keogh would make a mistake. They always did. They weren't trained to this kind of fighting. It took years—years and a blood-thirsty louse like Rinky Sneed to promote it. Cribb had no illusions about Rinky Sneed.

He padded patiently around Dinny, shooting an occasional punch, but waiting,

always waiting. He offered his chin for Dinny's right, but Dinny just wagged his glove derisively. He, too, was waiting.

The crowd was getting impatient. And, as far as that goes, so was Cribb. Usually, by this time, he had the fight in his pocket. This wasn't running on schedule. A body slam, he remembered, a body slam had done for Keogh the last time. He'd be watching for that. Give him the Mare with an arm-wrenching twist. That was the one. The Mare. He circled until he had Dinny pivoting in the middle of the ring, then sprang . . .

The breath went out of him with a whooooooh! and he went back across the ring on his shoulder blades. It was the first time he had encountered the smashing block of a hard-running fullback. Dinny had caught him mid-stride with shoulder and side, the full weight of his thrusting leg behind it. Cribb had never played football. That was obvious.

The judge's whistle screamed as Cribb skidded into the ringpost. His back looked like what happens to your hip after a reckless slide into third base.

Rinky Sneed hissed into his ear, "I thought you took this tramp once before. Snap it up, ya bum, or I'll pin your ears back.

Cribb's sides heaved painfully. "Next round," he panted, "He's got somethin' new."

White-faced Nora sat at ringside. Dinny had not wanted her to come, but there was too much riding on their fight. She fluttered her handkerchief and managed a pallid grin when he winked down at her as he walked to his corner.

Roaring Mike worked over him, saying joyfully, "Ye got him, Dinny-bhoy. Ye stopped him cold. Ye got him!"

Dinny shook his head. He didn't have him, not yet, and that block wouldn't work a second time. Cribb was too smart for that.

THE bell tolled at the end of the thirty-second respite, and the fighters went to scratch. The referee stepped back and Cribb jabbed with a snaky left, followed by a hard right to the side of the head, tried for the midsection, but Dinny

countered with a right to the jaw and circled. Cribb bobbed and weaved and came in hard, hooking like a wounded bull. Dinny stepped back and nailed him between nose and cheekbone with a driving left.

Cribb bled and shook his head and Dinny rocked him with a right and left. Cribb grabbed for his wrist and turned to throw him with a cross-buttock, but Dinny slammed into him with his full body and chopped his face with sharp hooks as he went back to the ropes.

Roaring Mike tore his sponge to bits and Rinky Sneed shredded his cigar between his teeth.

The referee parted the fighters when Cribb clinched and held on. Cribb circled and fell back. He dropped his hands, hitched up his trunks, turned his back on Dinny, took two steps away from him, then whirled and dived at him in a hard-thrusting flying tackle. This had taken many a man by surprise, but Dinny leaped toward him, swaying his hips just a fraction, evading the grasp, and shot out a straight-arm as they crossed. Dinny laughed as Cribb pancaked, face-down, on the canvas. The whistle shrilled and Cribb, dazed, lurched to his feet.

Roaring Mike kneaded Dinny's heaving stomach and whispered, "And jist exactly was that one, Dinny-bhoy? I niver saw the like of it in the whole o' me life."

Dinny said, "Football," and grinned. He relaxed his muscles under Mike's skillful hands.

It was Cribb who came out slowly and warily at the gong. Cast aside were his wrestling tactics and he looked more like a true fighting man as he shuffled from his corner, weaving and bobbing, his hands poised for a blow rather than a grab. He grinned. This was what he really liked. That other stuff was okay against the clowns Rinky Sneed had matched him with, but against a boy like Dinny a real stand-up fight was the thing!

He bobbed under Dinny's reaching jab and lanced in a straight left that took Dinny high on the forehead, snapping his head back, drove in a right to the body, but took in return a slashing right and left that rocked him to his heels. This

monkey could punch! He moved more warily. He bobbed, feinting, and grinned as he sank a left to the heart, but in the next instant his grin was nailed to his teeth by a crashing left. He back-pedalled and the grin stayed where it was. He offered his chin and drove in under Dinny's right, pumping short, vicious hooks to the stomach, the heart, the belly.

He had a chance then to throw Dinny with a cross-buttock, but he just crouched tighter and hammered away at the midsection. This was a fight now! Dinny let himself be driven back to the ropes, then chopped twice for the side of Cribb's head and turned as Cribb went into the ropes from the force of his own momentum. Dinny straightened him up with a short right that had bone, muscle and sinew behind it. It took Cribb on the side of the neck and sent him lurching into the corner. Dinny followed relentlessly, stabbing over the feeble defense of Cribb's raised arms.

He drove a left to the heart, and as Cribb's arms came down, he shot a straight, ramming right to the jaw. Cribb toppled into him and he stepped back, raising his arms, and Cribb went to the floor. The judge's whistle shrieked into the pandemonium—there was no count in this scrap—and Dinny trotted to his corner.

The seconds dragged Cribb to his corner and Rinky Sneed, his cigar cast aside, worked frantically over him.

Cribb was able to stand at the bell. Gamely but blindly, he wavered to scratch, and when the referee stepped back, he lurched at Dinny, still punching, still trying. Dinny caught him under the armpits, held him up and turned his head in appeal to the referee. Cribb was still trying to fight himself clear when his seconds bore him to his stool.

Roaring Mike was dancing a come-all-ye in the middle of the ring, bellowing. He grabbed Dinny, hustled him out of the clutch of the hysterical crowd and ran him up the aisle to the dressing room, where Nora was waiting. Grinning, Mike stepped back into the corridor and closed the door. He stood for a minute with his tongue in his cheek, then rubbed his

horny hands together and went hunting for Rinky Sneed's office.

Rinky was huddled behind his fancy desk when Mike burst in with a roar.

"Rinky, me bhoy," he cried, "I'll take it kindly if ye'll git the hell outa me chair and away from behind me desk."

Rinky gave him a venomous glance, but slunk out of the chair. Roaring Mike dropped into it, patted the padded arms and looked around with an air of satisfaction. His nose wrinkled but there was a twinkle in his eye. He waved a thick hand at the garish furnishings.

"Take a look at it, will ye!" he marvelled, "It's as fancy as a lady's front parlor. What we need in here, Rinky, me lad, is more spittoons and fewer nakit women on the walls. There'll be a few changes made, now that I'm sole owner and proprietor."

Rinky snarled wordlessly. He dug into his pocket for the keys to the Emporium Of Swat and furiously threw them across the desk.

"The interest on the mortgage," he said in a mean voice, "is due on the 30th of every month."

Roaring Mike's eyes opened a little. "Ah, a mortgage is it? and just what is the amount of this famous mortgage?"

"Thirty thousand dollars."

"Ye don't say," said Mike soberly, "Ye . . . don't . . . say."

"And the contractor who put in the new balcony last fall holds a corporation note for fifteen thousand dollars."

"The thievin' robber!" Mike gasped, "I could of done the job meself for ten."

"And there's still seven thousand due on the new air conditioning unit," Rinky said derisively.

"We-ll, we-ll, is there now? It seems to me that air comes a lot cheaper over at me own St. Pat's Arena."

Rinky hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his vest. "I'm a little in arrears with the taxes," he purred, "But it's nothing that five thousand dollars won't clear up."

Roaring Mike scratched his chin. He stole a quick glance at the gaudy office

and winced. He took a deep breath and put on his most persuasive smile.

"Rinky, me bhoy," he said genially, "I been thinkin' it over. If I went and took this arena away from ye now, why I'd be in competition with meself, and that's silly on the face of it. Tell ye what I'll . . ."

"Just a minute," Rinky jeered, "There's something else I forgot to tell you. The mayor owns ten percent of the stock in the Emporium, the police commissioner owns another ten and the chief of police took fifteen. They're your partners now."

"Not mine, me bhoy. Yours."

"Not on your life, bud. This is your arena."

"Oho, is it now! And did we sign papers?"

"What're you trying to do—welsh on the bet, Mike? This is your arena and don't you forget it. I'm taking the first train out of town before the chief of police, the mayor and the police commissioner crack down on me for non-payment of taxes and other debts. They were threatening to throw me in jail, but if you put up the five thousand for the taxes I guess they'll leave you alone for awhile. So long, Mike."

Grinning, he tipped his hand from his forehead and strutted out of the office.

Mike groaned, "Wurra, wurra," and forked his fingers through his hair. "If I was a young feller, now, with ambition in me very bones, I could make a payin' business outta feenancial collapse. Wurra, wurra!" All he wanted to do was to sit in his lounge chair and drink a quart of Irish whiskey and watch over the peaceable affairs of St. Pat's Arena. This Emporium needed hard work, but it could be done. Work! Mike shuddered. He plodded out of the office.

As he opened the door to Dinny Keogh's dressing room, the boy and Nora sprang guiltily apart.

"Ah, 'twas a pretty picture indeed," Mike said fondly, "Ye make a handsome couple and I'm givin' ye me blessings. And what's more," he went on as inspiration seized him, "I've got a little surprise for ye. Guess what I'm givin' ye for a weddin' present?"

Poor Jake!

By Harold Helfer

YOU CAN look up and down the annals of the ring and you won't find a pugilist that you'll feel any more sorry for than one, Jake Kilrain, following his 106-rounder with Jem Smith, the English champ.

If ever there was a guy who seemed to get the back of the hand despite the most commendable determination and valor, it was Jake Kilrain in this fight. To begin with, he was outnumbered. Originally, there had been something like eight Americans in his party but four of them, in winding their surreptitious way to a swampy island in a marshy part of the Seine River in France where the illegal match was to be held, got lost. Thus, of the 100 or so spectators who did get there, virtually all were Englishmen, deeply partisan, in their sentiments and in their financial wagers, to the Britisher, Jem Smith.

The year was 1887, when the boxing glove was first beginning to be used. In fact, back in America, what fighting Jake Kilrain had done always had been with gloves. This was to be his first bare knuckle encounter and also, as a matter of fact, his first appearance in a professional prize ring.

The Englishmen, consisting pretty much of the nobility, were quite certain that their man, highly touted the world over, would waste little time and experience no difficulty in finishing off the raw lummoX from across the waters.

But, although Smith landed a blow at the outset that closed one of Kilrain's eyes, it became evident quickly that the game American was going to be far from a pushover and, indeed, that Smith was going to need all his ring lore and stamina to survive.

As one of the chroniclers of the event reported, "When Kilrain came up for the next round there was something in the expression of his good eye that caused Smith's seconds to warn him." In every round from the fourth through the 11th Kilrain knocked Smith down at least once and by the 50th round he had knocked him down more than 30 times. The last portion of the fight seemed to follow just about the same pattern.

But, while Kilrain was doing plenty all right against his ring opponent, that is, against one specific one, namely Jem Smith, he was having discomforting moments with Smith's seconds, in particular a chappie named Baldoch.

It seems that in those days if the two pugilistic opponents got into a clinch they would wrestle each other trying to break out of it and if both men went down, which frequently happened, then the seconds ran into the ring and brought their man back to his corner. Well, it seems that Smith's second, Baldoch, would use his opportunity in the ring to do nefariously mischievous things to Kilrain.

"At the end of the 32nd round," went an account of the fight, "Kilrain staggered to his feet, half blinded. 'Mr. Atkinson,' he addressed the referee, 'that man Baldoch rammed his finger into my eye as I lay there and tried to gouge it

out. You can see for yourself.'

"His left eye was streaming with blood. The right eye had been closed for an hour. The wound in the eye was on the lower lid where the nails of Smith (apparently not a paragon of gentlemanly attributes, either) had dug into it. Fortunately, he had not succeeded in piercing the eyeball. Atkinson reproved Baldoch."

But, reproof or not, it appeared Baldoch could not be contained from his rather underhanded practices. At one juncture Charley Mitchell, Kilrain's handler, leaped into the ring and cried out: "You dare not maltreat my man. I blush to acknowledge that you are Englishmen. Here's a lad who has come three thousand miles overseas to fight your champion. He never even saw a prize fight before. He has no friends here while there's one hundred against him. He's going to have his right or I've got to get licked as well as he."

Even this stirring declaration did not deter the determined Baldoch and at the end of the 38th round, while in the ring supposedly to pick up his gladiator, was seen trying to break a finger of Kilrain. This was too much for Mitchell and he jumped into the ring and took a swing at Baldoch, knocking him out of the ropes. Baldoch got back in and the two seconds went at it hammer and tong, threatening to eclipse in fierceness the main event, but ringsiders finally brought it to a halt.

As the fight passed the 100-round mark there was no doubt that, from one quarter and another, the American had absorbed quite a bit of punishment. "Kilrain's right eye was puffed like a miniature balloon," a journalist wrote. "His left eye could open itself only partially. His jaw looked like a piece of raw beefsteak and there were bumps on his forehead the size of eggs. A continual stream of blood flowed from his right ear where it was torn. There were blood smears all over his body although it was kept continually sponged."

But, although Smith only had one opponent in the ring to contend with, the journalist went on to say that the Englishman's appearance "was even worse," indicating very strongly that Kilrain had got much the better of the embroglio. In the 106th round Kilrain knocked Smith down again and the Britisher seemed to have trouble getting up but the fight was stopped and called a draw "because of darkness."

A heartbreaking denouement for Jake Kilrain, it goes without saying, and a rather strange fight all the way around, but perhaps the most curious part of it was the presence at the ring of a rather small Englishman with patches of hair at his cheekbones. He was the Marquis of Queensbury, the man who was to set down our modern civilized rules for pugilistic ring behavior. And what was the Marquis' reaction to all this skull-duggery and mayhem on behalf of his compatriot prizefighter? "He wandered socially about," it was recorded.

The Lady Likes Blood

By Bill Erin

*"I'll murder the bum," Mason yelled at Adele.
McNear fumed.*



The title was the least these two men were fighting for. There was a brown-haired honey who had 'em both sizzling before the bell ever rang.

OLD TOM JOHNSON looked up at the man standing in the doorway. The man was a fighter, Tom could tell that by looking at his face. It had been a good-looking face once, but now it was marked too much. The man was still youthful but something had aged him.

Old Tom grunted. It was his way of greeting.

"Tom Johnson?"

Old Tom grunted again, looking up sourly at the man.

"I'm Jimmy McNear."

Old Tom grunted the third time. The name didn't mean anything to him. Too many men came to his gym office every day.

"I'm looking for a match and apparently —can't get one in New York without a

manager." The man seemed undaunted by Old Tom's cold attitude. He stood in the doorway easily, steadily regarding the well known manager.

"Whodjaeverfight?" It almost sounded like a fourth grunt.

"Solly Mason seventy-three times."

Old Tom's head snapped up and his eyes came open. He didn't say anything and his face held a question.

Jimmy McNear smiled faintly. "We did a series of exhibitions overseas right after the European war closed—a long series."

Old Tom's head slowly sank again and his eyes lidded. He was unimpressed.

"I learned a lot in those fights," said the man a little grimly.

"Whereyabeensince?"

"Out on the West Coast. I met some pretty good boys out there, and beat them. Haven't lost a fight since my discharge."

"Howdjahappentopickme?"

"Had an old trainer and sort of manager on the Coast. He told me to look you up if I ever came East. Name is Ziggy Peters."

"Ziggy?" Old Tom's feet came off the desk and his face turned up alert and smiling. "How is the old fathead?" He forgot his role and the words were understandable.

"Fine," said Jimmy. "Getting old though. Figured he was too old to keep climbing in and out of rings and getting all excited."

"Old? Why, I'll say he must be old. He was old when I first started in this racket." Old Tom shook his head slowly, thinking back. "I'll say he must be old. He told you to look me up?"

"That's right."

Old Tom remembered his role again and subsided a little. He hooked his thumbs in his vest and looked the fighter up and down. "So you want some fights? Well, I can get them for you if you're any good. Ziggy probably wouldn't fool with you unless you were."

"I'm good—now," said Jimmy, grimness returning to his voice.

Old Tom squinted at him. "Middle-weight?"

"Right."

"Solly Mason's still champ, you know."

"I know."

"Okay, come with me."

Old Tom took Jimmy back to the locker room and scooped out the bottom of a locker, throwing aside an old towel, sweat-shirt and one shoe. "Take this one," he said. "You got duds?"

Jimmy nodded at the bag he was carrying.

"Okay, get dressed and come out to the ring. I'll line something up."

Jimmy slipped into the ring a few minutes later. He was dressed in a pair of old trunks and Tom noticed the ripple to his muscled back and the good slope to his shoulders. While Tom was putting a pair of heavy gloves on him, Jim looked across at his opponent. He was only about twenty and danced in his corner, sticking his mouthpiece in and out and blowing through his nose the way he thought a fighter should. Jimmy grinned to himself.

"Okay," Tom shouted, "go to it." He stepped aside and let the two fighters come together.

Jimmy fought upright, moved in on his toes, but didn't dance and waste energy. He watched his opponent closely.

The kid came dancing in with a great deal of flourish. He lashed out with a long left and Jimmy picked it off easily. Jimmy stepped in close to draw a punch and the kid swung a savage right-hand haymaker. Jimmy rolled and leaned back just a little. The right flashed past in front of his nose and Jimmy was immediately alert for the left-hand follow. But it didn't come. The kid, having missed, was far off balance and wide open. Jimmy grinned and crossed with a left, pulling the punch as he tapped the kid on the chin.

The kid straightened up and drove at Jimmy furiously, hitting with left and right and pounding with everything he had. Jimmy had a rough time for a moment, but managed to tie the kid up with both of them unscathed.

THE kid bounced back energetically, swarming in, and Jimmy saw that the kid had orders to kill his opponent if he could. He didn't want to cut the kid up and hated to hurt him, but a good,

clean knockout was the only solution unless he wanted to fool around until the kid tagged him with one of those wild swings.

Jimmy blocked a right and drove his own right hard to the pit of the stomach. Then he crossed his left expertly to the jaw and hooked his right to the other side of the jaw. The kid sprawled out across the canvas.

Jimmy spit his mouthpiece into his glove and looked at Old Tom. "That was a mighty poor piece of try-out you gave me," he said.

Old Tom shrugged. "Why should I throw one of my good boys at you and ruin his confidence? As a matter of fact, I don't have anything very good right now. Besides, how did I know you were gonna pull your punches and tap around? You said you'd been trained by Solly Mason."

Jimmy's face froze. "I said I had some exhibitions with him in the Army—I didn't say he trained me."

"Uh-huh," said Old Tom. "Did Solly ever pull a punch?"

"Sure," said Jimmy, "when he wanted to cut me up."

Old Tom wisely refrained from any more questions. "Okay," he said, "I'll get you some fights. You can use that locker and train here. A lot of the good boys train here at times—even Solly Mason!"

Old Tom got Jimmy fights all right, and Jimmy took them on in business-like fashion. Jimmy always gave the customers a good show. He had a knockout wallop in either hand and he bowled over the men he met. Within a year Jimmy's name became known in the East.

Old Tom stopped him at the gym one day. "Say," he said, "Solly Mason's going to train here for the Jenkins fight. He's looking for good sparring partners. You interested?"

"No," said Jimmy.

"He pays pretty good money to his sparring partners," said Tom.

"He should," said Jimmy shortly, and he walked away.

Solly Mason came in to train every afternoon, belting kids around the ring, punching them silly even with the heavy gloves. To Solly fighting was a joy. He

was a born killer and liked to punch a man around. To Jimmy it was a business and he set about to win a fight in the easiest possible manner for both him and his opponent. He didn't have the color of Solly Mason, but Old Tom recognized in him already a possible challenger for Mason's crown.

Jimmy deliberately avoided the loud-mouthed champion. He fooled with the bags in the morning and did a little sparring, trying to teach Old Tom's kids something, then quit about the time Solly was due. He hid in the showers under a cascade of water while Solly dressed, and came out when the champion had gone into the gym. Then Jimmy dressed and left.

About a week after Solly went into training, Jimmy was leaving and stopped in a corner a moment to watch Solly, across the gym, pummel a sparring partner. Even with the heavy gloves, Solly was giving the kid a bad time and had him a little groggy. Jimmy turned away, a little sick with the remembrance of seventy-three times he had gone through the same thing with Solly, but with fighting gloves. Exhibitions! Exhibitions of how Solly Mason could knock a man out, or cut him up, or beat him groggy. But Jimmy had been in the army and his orders were to climb in the ring and fight Solly Mason whenever an exhibition was scheduled.

Jimmy opened the door and almost ran down a girl standing there. She must have been peeking in the window and Jimmy, preoccupied, had bumped her head, knocking her silly hat askew.

"I'm sorry," he said, grabbing her by the elbows to keep her from falling, "I didn't see you."

"That's all right." She gave him a smile and Jimmy's heart did three quick nip-ups. She was peaches and cream. Jimmy couldn't tear himself away.

"Can I help you with anything?" He asked eagerly.

"Possibly you can," she said, straightening the hat on her rich brown hair. Her face was classic except for a nose that was just a little too snubbed, and to Jimmy she was the prettiest thing he'd ever seen. "I'm looking for Solly Mason."

Jimmy's heart did a quick dive into the pit of his stomach. "Oh, no," he said.

She looked surprised. "Oh, yes, I am. What's so surprising about that?"

"Well" said Jimmy, still not believing, "it just—I mean, you don't look—," he stumbled thinking of the type of girl Solly usually dated—and he still didn't believe it. The girl was nice. She was—nice!

Then a sudden thought came to him. "What did you want to see him about?" His voice was hopeful, looking for an easy explanation.

Her surprise deepened. "Don't you think that's my business?"

"Well, sure, I just meant—I mean, I thought maybe I could help you."

"You can. If you'll tell Mr. Mason I'm here I shall be grateful. My business with him is personal."

"Oh," Jimmy's face hardened. "Thank you. I'll tell him." He turned away and strode across the gym to where Solly was resting until another partner was ready for him. Jimmy's mind was so busy and he was so angry that he was halfway across the gym before he remembered that he was going to talk to Solly Mason! His stride faltered and he almost stopped.

Solly Mason! A hard, cold lump formed in his throat at the thought of Solly's ugly face leering at him across a pair of gloves. He was tired, so tired, and his face was bleeding from cuts that didn't have time to heal between bouts. The doughboys were hollering and he tried to get his guard in the right place, but Solly kept smashing it aside and flicking those gloves into his bloody face. Jimmy couldn't lay down and quit in front of all these GI's, but his legs were rubbery and his arms heavy, and Solly just danced around, flicking and cutting and making himself look good instead of delivering the coup de grace and ending it all.

JIMMY shook his head to clear it and found that he was at ringside. He heard Solly's hoarse, rough voice and looked up.

"Jimmy," Solly yelled. He threw his head back and guffawed. "Well I'll be a wooden saw-horse, if it isn't old Jimmy."

"Hi, Sol," said Jimmy.

"Say," said Solly "you're just the man I'm looking for. I need a good sparring partner. Come on, I'll fix you up in some togs and you can show these bums how to take it."

"No thanks," said Jimmy coldly. "I'm not in the army now I don't have to get in there and let you show off."

Solly allowed surprise in exaggerated proportion to cross his face. "Let me?" He guffawed again. "Don't take it to heart, Jimmy. Besides, it seems to me you used to fight back now and then and I had to give you a lesson." Solly let his raucous laugh peal out again.

Sure, he had fought back before he got too tired, before the tricks and pounding of Solly wore him down. He had been no match for the experience and ability of the older man.

"You gotta admit, Jimmy, you learned when you were fighting the champion."

"Sure," said Jimmy. "I learned a lot of things." He had at that. The last eight or nine exhibitions he had been giving the champion a rough time. He tagged the champ every now and then and once he had nearly put the great Solly Mason on the ropes. But Solly had what it took and he always came back to lace Jimmy unmercifully in the later rounds. It never paid to fight back, although Jimmy always did.

"Watcha doing Jimmy? Still fighting?" Solly was curious about this fighter who had never quit during seventy-three beatings.

"Yeah," said Jimmy, "I'm still fighting." Then he remembered why he had come over. "Just came to tell you that there's a girl at the door waiting for you." He indicated the girl and watched Solly closely. Solly looked over and his chest puffed up. He had always been proud of his women. This one he could afford to be proud of. A leer came to Solly's face.

"She the current rage?" Jimmy was goaded into the question by something he couldn't understand.

Solly looked down at him and guffawed. "Sure, Jimmy, you know how I was with the women." He waved his glove and shouted across the gym. "Hi'ya, Honey,

come on over."

That was enough for Jimmy. He turned away and started back across the gym. He met the girl halfway and she didn't look as though she were advancing eagerly to meet a lover.

"Thank you," she said coldly to Jimmy.

Jimmy stopped doggedly and regarded her. She stopped too, uncertain. Jimmy looked at her well-dressed figure, looked into her clear, hazel eyes and shook his head. "No sir," he said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"No sir, you don't look like the kind of girl that would fall for a lout like Solly Mason." Jimmy's eyes were cold and hostile.

Her eyes widened in surprise for a moment and then anger swept across her face. She turned on her heel and walked toward Solly Mason.

About two days before the Jenkins fight, Jimmy found out who the girl was. The papers were full of pictures of her, pictures of Solly Mason, the middleweight champion, and of the two together. She was Adele Lemuir, an actress who seemed to be a champion in her own field although Jimmy didn't care much for the name, and she announced her engagement to Solly. She was opening a new show on Broadway the night after the Jenkins fight.

Solly announced to the world that he would be there, win, lose or draw against Jenkins. She would be at ringside to cheer Mason on.

Jimmy attended the fight. She was not only there but climbed into the ring and was introduced to the cheering crowd as, "the champion's fiancée who is opening a new show on the great white way tomorrow night."

Jimmy prayed fervently that Jenkins would knock Solly's head off. But he didn't. Jenkins was a rough, tough slugger, made to order for Solly. Solly was a stand-up fighter who cut Jenkins to pieces as the hitter tried to get in close. Jimmy had to admire the way Solly's feet were always in position to hit a solid blow with either hand, the lightning way Solly's hands moved to block and hit, the ring generalship of the man. He knocked

Jenkins out in the sixth. He was a champion all right.

The next week Old Tom called Jimmy into the office. "Jimmy," he said, "we got a chance for a big fight."

"So?"

"We can take Jenkins on in the main event at the Garden two months from now."

Jimmy was surprised. "How come?"

Old Tom shrugged. "You've built a good reputation since you've been here. Your record from the Coast is good. They want to build Jenkins back up for another shot at Mason's title."

It was Jimmy's turn to shrug. "Okay, I'll take him on."

Old Tom's eyes narrowed. "You realize, don't you that they figure Jenkins can beat you or they wouldn't make the match?"

Jimmy stood up. "That goes two ways. I think I can beat him, too."

"So do I," said Old Tom.

This surprised Jimmy. "Why?"

"Well," said Tom, "did you notice how he was kind of made to order for Solly?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever figure out that you fight a great deal like Solly Mason? You don't fight a man seventy-three times while you're learning without picking up something."

Jimmy looked down at his closed fist. "I don't force a fight the way Solly does."

"No, you counter-punch more. That's why I figure you'll beat him when you meet."

"When we meet?"

Old Tom shook his head wisely. "It's going to happen, Jimmy."

Jimmy snorted. "Not unless it's an exhibition," he said. He walked out on Old Tom, that cold lump of lead back in his stomach.

II

JIMMY stood in his corner, waiting for the bell. He looked across the ring at the husky, gnarled figure of Jenkins and a million thoughts raced through his mind. This man was fighting for another shot at Solly Mason. If Jimmy let him win,

Jimmy would never have to fight Mason again.

Then the bell rang and Jimmy was out, with the crowd yelling. He moved warily, keeping his feet in position, watching the older man come in, alert for the opening blow.

Jenkins just plodded in and started swinging. Jimmy picked off and countered, then retreated. Picked off, countered and retreated. He moved out of a corner and stopped to beat Jenkins in the head, taking a few blows to the body that didn't carry too much sting. With surprise Jimmy realized that Jenkins was no longer a fighter, he was too old, washed up—he shouldn't even be in the ring. Jimmy could hit him at will.

So that's the kind of stuff Solly was holding his title against, Jimmy thought. Jimmy had met several promising young middleweights that could do better than Jenkins. And had beat them.

At the end of the first round Jimmy came back to his corner breathing easily and unmarked.

"You're doing fine," said Tom as they sponged him off. "Just keep moving and picking off. You're way ahead of him. Don't let him get in close and you've got nothing to worry about."

Sure, Jimmy thought, stay away and cut him up, just like Solly Mason. Wear him down and then knock him out, make it look good.

"Tom" said Jimmy, "how many rounds did it take Mason to knock out this palooka?"

"Six!"

"Well, I'm going to do it in two!"

Jimmy was out at the bell and walked across the ring to meet Jenkins. Instead of moving away, Jimmy closed in and beat the older man to the punch. He blasted a right hand to the face and hooked a left deep in Jenkin's stomach. Jenkins countered to the body and Jimmy hooked a savage right that caught Jenkins right on the button. Jenkins' eyes glazed over and he reached for a clinch. Jimmy stepped outside the arms and threw a long left over the top of them to the head. The crowd was sensing the kill and were on their feet screaming.

Jimmy moved inside again, put the left to the body and hooked the right to the jaw. Jenkins' knees buckled and he held on. The referee separated them. Jimmy went right back in and hooked the left to the head. Then he brought a right hand up that had behind it every bit of timing and every ounce of weight that Jimmy owned. Jimmy twisted his body into it and it snapped Jenkin's head back savagely.

Jenkins went back into the ropes and then slowly dropped to his knees. He reached automatically behind him for the ropes, missed, and fell forward on his face. He lay still while the referee counted him out.

JIMMY stretched out on the davenport in his small bachelor's diggings and read the papers. Usually his wins were just in with the fight results. Sometimes he got a write-up. But this time he had headlines on the sports pages. His knock-out of Jenkins was described variously as "Unexpected", "Thrilling", "Savage", and an "Upset". Jenkins said after the fight that it was the hardest he had ever been hit. The papers named him as the next man to meet Solly Mason.

Jimmy frowned. If there was one man his knockout wouldn't fool, it was Mason. Mason had just fought Jenkins, he knew how impotent that older man's blows had become, how slow he was, how easy it was to knock out Jenkins. It wouldn't fool Solly.

Apparently it didn't fool Solly and the Champion still considered Jimmy a set-up. Seventy-three times he had his way with Jimmy that's a habit hard to break. Solly's manager announced the next day that he was willing to meet Jimmy. Old Tom called Jimmy to his office.

"Well," said Old Tom, indicating a sheaf of newspapers on his desk, "Mason wasn't kidding the press. I had a call from his manager."

Jimmy was silent.

"What do you think?" Tom asked.

Jimmy shifted his weight. "Jenkins was washed up," he said, "Solly knew that. I'm not as good as I looked against Jenkins—Solly knows that."

"Maybe not, but neither is Solly then."

"Solly sees a good gate and an easy win," said Jimmy bitterly.

"It won't be so easy, if he does win," said Old Tom.

"Do you think I'm ready?" It was Jimmy who was uncertain this time.

"How old are you now?"

"Twenty-six."

"If you're not ready now, you never will be. You should be at your peak—and maybe four more years. Then you start slipping down."

"Mason's twenty-nine," said Jimmy. "He's still a good fighter."

"Sure," agreed Old Tom.

"Maybe I better not fight him," said Jimmy.

Tom looked Jimmy up and down slowly. Jimmy was ashamed of his cowardice but driven by it nevertheless. He could feel the blood stinging seventy-three different cuts on his face now.

"No guts?" Old Tom's two distinct words dropped into the stillness of the office like gun shots on a quiet fall morning.

Jimmy's face jerked up and anger, anger to hide the shame, convulsed it. Jimmy helped to his feet. "No guts, that's right. I got no guts to fight Mason. But go ahead, sign me up, I'll fight him." Jimmy leaned across the desk and pounded it. "Go ahead, I'll fight him. Sign me up." Jimmy turned and left the office, the quiet, accusing eyes of Old Tom following him down the stairs and into the street. Jimmy jammed his hands into his trouser pockets and walked.

He walked without direction or aim, his mind a tumult, the hurrying crowds around him unheeded, until suddenly he was face to face with a life-sized picture of Adele LeMuir. He looked around and saw that he was standing in front of the theatre where her show was playing.

The girl had often been in Jimmy's thoughts since that day he met her at the gym. Now almost without thinking, he pulled a bill out of his pocket and went to the ticket window. There was a matinee and he purchased a seat in the front row.

Jimmy sat among the scattered patrons at the afternoon performance and watched

her slim beauty and grace as she performed her part. It was a comedy, and the people about Jimmy laughed heartily at different times. But Jimmy glowered through the entire show, hearing none of the words, his eyes fastened on each movement of her face, remembering the clean cut lines and hazel eyes of the girl. Jimmy drank his fill and when it was over he rose to leave.

TO HIS surprise an usher stopped him as he reached the aisle. The usher handed Jimmy a small, folded and delicately perfumed piece of paper. Jimmy opened the paper and there was a note penned hurriedly.

"Please see me after the show. The usher will lead you backstage." It was signed: "Adele."

Jimmy was more than surprised, he was amazed. He would have bet money that if he had met Adele LeMuir in the street she wouldn't recognize him. And he hadn't noticed that she had paid any attention to the audience. Yet she had apparently seen him there and had written him that note. Jimmy meekly followed the usher.

He was led through the confusion backstage to a door with the traditional star on it. The usher knocked and Jimmy heard Adele call out. The usher opened the door and Jimmy went in.

It was a very lovely room, obviously a dressing room. Adele sat in front of a huge, mirrored dressing table. She was wearing a fluffy dressing robe that covered her from throat to ankles.

"Hello," she said to Jimmy, "sit down."

He sat and she smiled at him with great enjoyment.

"What's so funny?" He asked sourly.

"You," she said. "I don't think I ever saw anyone get as little enjoyment from a performance. I don't think you smiled once."

"You were watching me?" He was incredulous.

"Intently," she said. "If everybody's reaction was like yours, the show would have closed its first day."

"I was getting my enjoyment another way," said Jimmy, thawing a little and giving in to the joke on him.

"Indeed. What way was that?"

"Watching you," he said, and then wished he hadn't.

She dropped her eyes but then returned her gaze to his with the same mocking smile. "Even though I'm engaged to Solly Mason?"

Jimmy shook his head slowly, the frown returning to his face. "That's something I'll never understand."

"That's why I asked you to come here," she said, the smile leaving her face, "to explain."

"To explain? To me?" The surprises since Jimmy had entered this theatre were piling up on him. "Why?"

She hesitated before answering and her eyes were steadily on his. "I don't know—do you?"

He held her eyes a long moment. "Yes, maybe I do. Maybe the same reason I came here this afternoon."

There was a silence as they both digested this. Then she laughed quickly and turned away to her mirror, picking up a brush and smoothing her hair.

"It was a publicity stunt, the engagement. Our press agents cooked it up. Our show was opening the next night and they figured it would help the box office for both the fight and the show."

"Did it?"

"It did for the show. It isn't a particularly good show, yet we've had a decent run. I think we'll close sometime next month."

"Do you think it was worth it?"

She stopped combing her hair. "Aren't there some things necessary to *your* profession that *you* don't care for?"

"Yes."

"Well then?"

"Okay." Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. "I guess you're right. I just couldn't figure it out. Then you're not going to marry him?"

She shuddered. "Perish the thought. He's—he's very coarse. I had to go out with him a few times with plenty of photographers around."

"I'm glad you agree with me."

She turned to face him again. "I do. However, I probably wouldn't have minded it so much if you, a complete

stranger, hadn't been so outspoken. It kept worrying me—and when I saw you in the audience today I had to tell you." Once again their gazes locked in a long moment of silence.

"Where are you eating tonight?" Jimmy asked suddenly.

"Wherever you are," she answered gaily.

"It's a deal," Jimmy said, and Solly Mason was forgotten.

The next morning Jimmy called Tom on the phone. "Have you signed that Solly Mason fight yet?"

"No."

"Do it this morning."

"What?"

"Do it this morning."

Old Tom's voice became joyous. "That's the boy, Jimmy. I knew you'd do it, boy. I knew you'd fight him. I'll call right away, Jimmy boy."

The fight was scheduled for January 1st in the Garden. Mason had insisted upon waiting until January for income tax reasons. By that time Adele was rehearsing a new play and Jimmy saw her as frequently as training allowed him.

One night a gossip columnist saw them together. The next day he ran a query as to why Solly Mason's fiancée was going out with his next opponent.

Solly called Adele and complained. She told him they should publicly call off their engagement and that was the next story to hit the papers. The sports writers began to bill it as a grudge fight because of the pretty actress. The stories made liberal mention of her next show and called her the "Fighter's Lady."

Jimmy didn't care for any of this. It seemed to him that her whole life was a sham, just like a role in one of her plays. Even her name was false—Adele LeMuir was something her press agent had dreamed up. But Adele was genuine, and when he was with her Jimmy forgot the other things.

January 1st approached and Jimmy's training became intense. He was worried. He was worried not because of the fight or because he might lose, he was worried because he knew that he had a physical fear of Mason. He knew it was unreasonable, that he was a much better fighter

than when he was in the army, but he couldn't control the reaction he had had night after night when he climbed into the ring against the champion. It was too much for him.

On New Year's morning Jimmy was up early after a restless night. He had risen at midnight to lean out the window and watch New York welcome the New Year. He had slept little after that, the night's fight revolving in his mind.

He picked up the morning papers and turned nervously to the sports page. There was a huge picture of Adele standing on a night club table, a glass of champagne in her hand, New Year's Eve revelers all around her, announcing that Solly Mason and Jimmy McNear were fighting for her hand that night, that she went to the winner. The caption said: "Fighter's Lady says, 'Winner, Take All Of Me'." Then there was a mention of her new show, opening the next night.

Jimmy went to the phone and snatched it up, gripping the receiver until his knuckles were white. Then he slammed it back down without calling her. He had been on a merry-go-round ever since he met her. She always protested her innocence, but that stuff wouldn't come out without her consent. And look at the picture, she must have been at the night club.

He picked up another paper and there was the same picture from a different angle. Her skirts were raised high to show her beautiful legs.

Later in the morning the phone rang but Jimmy ignored it, jamming on his hat and leaving the apartment. She would say she had nothing to do with it.

He was at the gym when one of the trainers yelled at him that some dame wanted him on the phone.

"Tell her I never talk to anyone on a fight day," said Jimmy tightly. "Tell her my press agent doesn't like it."

"Huh?"

Jimmy waved a hand at the trainer. "Tell her!" The trainer shrugged his shoulders and went back to the phone. A little later he reported.

"This dame says to tell you she's sorry."

"That's tough," said Jimmy, closing his

mind to the thought of hurting Adele.

III

JIMMY climbed woodenly into the ring that night. He could already feel the rapier fists of Solly Mason cutting him down and he didn't much care whether he won or lost. He knew from long experience how fast Mason could feint and hit—how hard Mason could hit and how it felt when things suddenly blanked out and you came to a few seconds later in an awkward position on the floor with no idea of how you got there.

Then suddenly Adele was on the ring steps and had hold of Jimmy's arm. "Jimmy," she said, "Jimmy, you've got to listen to me."

Jimmy looked at her and saw she was close to tears.

He didn't say anything.

"Jimmy, that picture was faked."

A photographer had seen them and a flashbulb burst.

"That one wasn't," said Jimmy. "There's another thousand dollars worth of publicity and another week for your show."

"Jimmy don't! They have hundreds of pictures of me in different poses. They dubbed in that background—don't you understand? I was home all last night."

More pictures were being taken and Jimmy's face froze into a mask.

"Jimmy, I fired my press agent. It'll never happen again, I promise."

Then Jimmy heard loud laughter and Solly Mason was at his back. Solly had come over to get in the pictures.

"Don't worry, Honey," Solly yelled, "we'll be married as soon as I polish off this bum." Solly waved at Adele and more pictures were taken while the crowd stood on the seats, rubber-necking to take in the scene.

Jimmy looked down at Adele and her face was white, frightened, as she looked up at Mason.

The look broke through Jimmy's guard and he knew that regardless of what had happened or who was to blame, there was one thing more important than the past—that was the future.

"Okay," Jimmy said quickly, "your turn

to meet me in my dressing room."

Then Jimmy turned around and placed his glove in Solly's chest, shoving hard. "Get back to your own corner, show-off," he grated.

Solly stumbled backward and almost fell "I'll murder you," he yelled and came at Jimmy. Jimmy stepped forward to meet him.

Suddenly there were trainers, policemen and the referee in between the two. Solly allowed himself to be led back to his corner, the coarse grin back on his face. But Jimmy struggled to get loose. The crowd screamed its approval of the before-fight fracas.

Jimmy strained in his corner, all the pent-up hate and emotion spilling out of him as he waited to get at Solly Mason.

"Listen," said Tom, "don't be a fool now, stay away and counter-punch—he'll force the fight if you don't rush, that's the way he works."

But Jimmy didn't hear anything except the pounding in his ears and when the bell rang he leaped across the ring to get at Solly's ugly face.

Solly backed and blocked as Jimmy made his first vicious attack. Then Solly saw an opening and slammed home a left. Jimmy drove back in, throwing solid smashes at Solly's head and face with everything he had. He backed Solly into a corner but didn't land a blow and the champ tied him up again.

Jimmy drove Solly back across the ring with maniacal fury, throwing punch after punch, expending energy he was going to need before fifteen long rounds had gone their way, and Solly just retreated before the outburst, picking off and waiting for his chance.

Jimmy thought he had the champ on the ropes and drew back his right hand to swing a haymaker. But Solly saw the opening and hooked a fast left to Jimmy's head.

Jimmy threw the right and missed, going off balance, and Solly racked him with left, right and left before Jimmy went into a clinch.

The challenger made one more attempt to smother the champion under a flurry of blows and again he met with no success

as the cool-headed Solly covered. Once again Jimmy drove him to the ropes. Solly, seeing that Jimmy was tiring, came off the ropes slugging.

SOLLY caught Jimmy with a right that staggered the younger man. Then he exploded a right and left to the body that hurt and took away some more wind before blasting at the jaw with both hands.

Jimmy saw the flash of stars and pin-wheels as he tried to clinch. But then he felt another jolt and everything went black. He came to on the floor of the ring with the lights glaring into his eyes.

"Four," said the referee, and Jimmy tried to focus his mind.

"Five," said the referee, and Jimmy remembered where he was.

"Six," and Jimmy turned over on his stomach.

"Seven." He was on his hands and knees.

"Eight." He was crouched.

"Nine." He got up.

His arms were leaden and his legs tired as the referee wiped the resin off his gloves. He tried to bring up his guard as Solly came in, but his reactions were too slow and Solly whipped home a left and a right.

Solly could have finished the fight, but he was still the supreme egotist and sadist killer. He decided to have a little sport first. He slashed in some cutting blows that opened wounds on Jimmy's face, and then let Jimmy clinch.

"I'll teach you to take a girl away from me," he rasped.

He slipped away and laughed as Jimmy tried to renew his attack. Solly again cut with his left hand and then drove a hard right to the body to keep Jimmy slowed down. They clinched and Solly whispered in Jimmy's ear.

"She sure gave you a run-around, didn't she?"

Jimmy tried again and the bell rang, ending round one.

"What are you trying to do, commit suicide?" Old Tom raged at him between rounds. Tom used an antiseptic on his cuts and then got to work with the colloidion. Jimmy tensed himself against the

stinging pain and it helped to clear his brain.

"Listen, son," said Tom, "you want to win this fight, don't you?"

Jimmy nodded affirmatively.

"Then stay away, understand? Stay away!"

"I'll kill him," Jimmy grated.

"Not the way you're fighting, you won't," said Tom, and he stuffed the mouthpiece in Jimmy's mouth as the bell rang.

Solly waited for Jimmy to come in close, but Jimmy stayed out, moving around, following Tom's instructions after his close call in the first round. Solly began to press a little and moved in with left and right. Jimmy blocked and tied Solly up, still getting his second wind and not ready to fight.

"She ain't no saint, take it from me, kid," Solly whispered in the clinch. Then they were separated and Jimmy had a sudden desire to drive in and smash that leering face. But he held fast to his self-control and circled warily.

Solly came in and again Jimmy tied him up before any damage could be done. "That davenport of mine could tell some tall stories," said Solly that time.

When the referee separated them Jimmy lashed out with a hard left, but Solly picked it off and moved away, laughing. The crowd saw him laugh and responded. Jimmy went back into his shell.

It was a slow round compared to the furious first, but Jimmy refused to open up.

The second round went to Solly also, but Jimmy was in much better shape when it was over than he had been after the first.

"Good boy," said Tom between rounds, inspecting the cuts which hadn't been reopened, "you've got him coming to you. Now start hitting back instead of clinching, but watch out, he's got dynamite in those fists."

Jimmy nodded. The bell rang and he was back out. They sparred for a moment and then Solly moved quickly, stabbing with a left. Jimmy rolled away and circled. Solly followed and Jimmy moved into a corner, letting Solly trap him. Solly

stepped in, expecting Jimmy to slip away down the ropes, but Jimmy set himself and threw a straight overhand left to the bridge of Solly's nose. Solly snorted and Jimmy followed in with a right to the pit of the stomach before Solly could recover. He heard the champ grunt.

He tied Solly up before the champ could retaliate and slipped out of the corner after the clinch. Solly had been too busy getting breath back to say anything.

Solly followed Jimmy, his eyes narrow and mean the way Jimmy remembered them, and for a moment the knot returned to his stomach as it used to do when he was going to take a beating. Then he remembered where he was and shook his shoulders to loosen the tension. He waited for Solly's attack.

It came with lightning swiftness. Solly suddenly stepped forward, cocking the left, then shifted his feet quickly and slammed a hard right at Jimmy's head.

THAT maneuver had worked many times for Solly, but Jimmy had seen it many times during his seventy-three beatings and he was inside the right just as quickly as Solly had moved. He went inside and blasted a savage left hook to Solly's face and sank the right in Solly's stomach again.

A warm feeling spread through him as he heard the air whoosh out of Solly. He had found a weak spot. Solly wasn't in top condition. He was soft around the middle.

Solly hunched a little, protecting his stomach, as he followed Jimmy. Jimmy stopped and met Solly head on in the center of the ring. They traded hard lefts and rights and then Jimmy took another left and right to the head as Solly forgot his middle. Jimmy drove home the right like a pile driver and Solly stopped in mid-stride. Jimmy saw his face go white and drove in, smashing, blasting and belting the champion back across the ring as the bell sounded the end of round three. Jimmy's round, as the tide of battle was swinging.

But Solly Mason was a champion and a fighter, and whatever his faults he intended to go down fighting. He knew that

Jimmy had found a weak spot and he knew he didn't dare box the challenger. He had to score a knockout in the next round or two before. Jimmy could continue to smash the mid-section. He rushed across the ring to unleash his years of boxing experience and skill upon Jimmy.

Jimmy blocked the opening blows of the rush and tried to tie Solly up. But Solly was ring-wise and kept a hand free, slamming home three damaging blows to Jimmy's face before Jimmy could get inside his shoulder. Jimmy was bleeding again.

They broke and Jimmy found Solly right on top of him, catching him in a corner and rocking him with hard blows to the head that sent the stars flashing again. Jimmy got his chin down and blasted back, hitting and slugging as he tried to batter his way out of the corner. But the champ nailed him against the ropes and rocked him again.

Jimmy clinched and realized shakily that Old Tom and he had counted their chickens a little too early. The referee broke them and Solly was back again, throwing ringcraft aside and matching raw muscle and hitting power against whatever Jimmy could muster.

Jimmy had to fight back and he couldn't set and drive that blow to the mid-section that he knew would stop Solly. They stood toe-to-toe while the frenzied thousands had their blood lust stirred and put themselves in the ring with the fighters, giving and taking.

It was Jimmy that gave ground. He knew he was fighting a losing battle, the first round had taken too much of his stamina. He felt his strength ebbing again and he gave ground suddenly, drawing Solly with him. Solly thought he was hurt and charged, but Jimmy set himself and met the charge with a straight left. Solly had his right cocked as he got inside the left, but Jimmy beat him to the punch, smashing a right hand into Solly's middle. He felt the champion give and drew it back, blasting it home again. A third time he belted it in before Solly tied him up, hang-

ing on. He saw Solly's mouthpiece bounce away across the ring as the champ fought for breath.

"Now you can talk better," he said into the champ's ear as the referee pulled them apart.

Solly was hurt and covering as Jimmy moved in warily. He exploded two left hands into Solly's face, but the champ refused to open up. Jimmy drove him into a corner and hit both hands to the head as the round ended.

BOTH fighters were bloody and both were breathing hard from their savage fight, but Solly was visibly hurt and the crowd was yelling for a knockout.

Jimmy was as the hunter when he sees wild game falter, he rushed in for the kill, banging away with both hands, belting to the head, blasting to the face, and, finally sending a crushing right to the helpless man's mid-section that doubled him up until the champion fell to the canvas like a broken straw. He writhed on the floor but at the count of ten had made no motion to rise. Jimmy was the new world's champion!

Jimmy posed for the pictures and spoke to the radio audience. He received congratulations and shook hands and finally got out of the ring, Old Tom clearing a way to the dressing room. Tom held everybody out of the dressing room and finally closed the door against the press of bodies.

"Well," he said turning around, "so now you're——." His voice trailed off and his eyes bugged. His new champion was back in a clinch.

"Hey!" Old Tom was uncertain as to whether to break the clinch or not.

The new champion worked a hand free and waved Old Tom away. Tom shrugged his shoulders and opened the door, pushing out into the press of bodies and closing the door behind him.

The champion got his hand back into the clinch and pulled his opponent with the rich brown hair close. The infighting was delicious!



THE BUM!

By Don Shea

His dirty record was behind him. Tonight he'd fight a good clean battle. He'd go out on a note of triumph. He went out all right . . . but the note was terribly sour.

HARSH GRAVEL ground into the palms of Perry Walsh's hands and grated against his cheek. Searing pains chased each other through his neck and down into his chest. Three bullet holes can cause a lot of pain. It was deathlike still in the alley after the thundering of the guns and the metallic patter of running feet. The three thugs had fled, leaving him to die.

The first trickling of a crowd was beginning to gather, their feet scraping on the gravel, their awed voices low.

"He's unconscious," a voice from the crowd came to him dimly. "Look at his

lips move. He thinks he's fightin' a fight, I guess."

Thinks he's fightin' a fight? Huh! That was a laugh! Just like a fight fan. This was the toughest fight he'd ever had. He'd better get to work before the kid stabbed him to death with that left.

What round was this? The fourth? Six more rounds! About twenty-five more minutes to go!

The cocky youngster glided toward him behind that razor-sharp left hand; darting in and out and circling to his left; jarring, his left, and effortlessly backed by a smooth fighting machine. Mike Travis was

plenty good. Lean, a hard young battler, a fancypants with an unmarked face. A tanned, glistening body bouncing another step toward the championship.

Perry Walsh trailed him closely, patiently, rationing his strength, until the kid committed a technical mistake, delayed a fraction of a step in sliding out of a corner. Perry looped a whistling left hook into his body that should have dulled some of his spark, but didn't. The youngster drove needle-point lefts into his face, stinging, sneered as he spun to the left out of range, away from the ropes, back to the middle of the ring.

Perry Walsh grinned at Travis, tight mental checkrein on his temper. He must hold his temper this time. He'd promised Florence, his wife.

The throbbing in the back of his head had quieted now. Only the sharp knives in his throat and chest were left. It was chilly.

Mike Travis moved toward him again, the slight sneer still on his smooth face, confident behind that sniping left hand. He isn't punching at me, Perry realized, he's walloping at my temper. Perry half-crouched, shuffled forward, let a hail of jabs rattle high across his forehead and bulled his man into the ropes. He ground a half-dozen murderous lefts and rights into Travis' belly before they clinched, and as the referee worried them out of it a backhand flick slapped sweat into his eyes. A deliberate foul. Perry grinned.

With the bell Travis dropped his gloves and headed toward his corner, a swagger in his walk, because the championship was one round nearer. Perry turned to his corner more slowly, economizing on strength, and sat down. Buzz, his second, sloshed water into his mouth, hard hands lifted his chest to make room for deep gulps of air. Perry casually gazed out into the smoky dimness. A full house. His cut would be a good one, and he needed it. "Lotsa shoes for baby," he thought and pictured his wife listening to the radio, alone, anxious . . . pulling for him not to go crazy again. Little Katy would be asleep in her crib.

It was still early in the evening when he and Dick had sat down at one of the tables in his little restaurant to count the day's receipts. Dick ran the place for him. It was

deserted when the three robbers had walked in, guns gripped tight in their hands, coat collars turned up.

He felt good, strong, as he sat in his corner. Buzz was working over him hard, kneading his legs. His eyes wandered out over the crowd again. The dirtiest man in the ring, they called him . . . The Bum. Well, what the hell, why not, he'd thought for so many years. He'd been born into dirt, the filth of the East Side. When he was nine life had taught him how to fight life—with every weapon on hand, fists, feet, brains and even clawing fingernails—after a gang of street toughs broke his nose with a blackjack, stole his clothes, and left him naked in the gutter. At eleven he had discovered he had an ally, an ungovernable temper which shot dynamite into his hard fists and coated pain with a dulling redness. The magnet of money had lured him into the ring and fans such as these had poured more into his pockets. They booed him, they hated him, but they came to see him fight. Because when he got mad he forgot the rules, forgot he was fighting a foe with padded gloves and was battling in the streets again for his life. Sure, he'd been kicked out of rings. Plenty. In California he was barred for life. But he was a good fighter, almost a great fighter. For the past year he had stood as the insurmountable obstacle between all comers and the title. The champion of the champion, always the challenger but never the champ.

But now he was through as a dirty fighter.

He smacked his wine red gloves together in grim determination, glared at the crowd. Just this one last good clean fight against Mike Travis tonight; he'd prove he could fight clean.

He and Dick had half risen in surprise when the three thieves walked in. One of them had grated: "All right, you guys, up against that wall and no monkey business." Dick, old and cautious, had backed against the wall, hands raised over his head. Perry moved slowly, fighting the temper which choked him. "You'll never get away with this," he'd growled. One of the robbers had made a menacing gesture with his gun.

Travis moved into him, cautiously; he would be cautious. His midriff

glowed red from the pounding he'd been sucked into during the last round, but it hadn't slowed his blinding speed, that rapier left, just made him doubly cautious, even sharper.

Walsh didn't like Travis. This guy would fight dirty given the chance, and a dirty fighter had no place in the ring. He should know. He thought of Florence. "Promise me," she'd pleaded a couple days ago, "promise me you'll keep your temper, in the ring and out." And he'd promised.

Travis' left jabs were small charges of dynamite exploding in Perry Walsh's face and he worked in close. But Travis locked his elbows and butted him sharply with his head, starting blood flowing from a small cut under the eye. The referee didn't see the foul. Perry ignored it and clipped Travis alongside the chin, drawing from his deep reservoir of hard-earned experience to shake one hand free, but he didn't hurt Travis. The kid went on his bicycle again, circling to the left and pecking open that cut beneath Perry's eye. Slowly the cut grew and blood flowed more freely. Suddenly a left hook swished into Perry's groin, low. It didn't hurt him or slow him, and the referee warned Travis, but Perry knew that wouldn't stop these tactics.

A film as red as the blood smeared across his cheek slowly rose in Perry. He was getting the business. The old crimson tide of ungovernable anger welled within him. His eyes narrowed to twin slits. Then he suddenly stopped his forward rush as he remembered Florence.

He halted for a moment, shaken, then moved into Travis more confidently. He had beaten the thing and could have hit Travis out of sheer joy after the bell if the youngster hadn't suddenly sat down. Perry realized Travis had cleverly worked him into his own corner just as the bell rang, but he didn't care. He was inwardly glowing proudly as he strode across the ring to his corner.

He lay back. Buzz leaned close to his ear: "Better get goin'. This guy's givin' you the works!" Perry nodded, grinned at him, then smiled and waved at Travis across the ring. Buzz' mouth fell open in astonishment; a surprised murmur ran

through the crowd. Perry chuckled. Florence would appreciate that.

The three thieves had him covered cold. He knew that. Well, let them have the money, which was little enough, he'd thought. Then Dick, in his confusion, had allowed his hands to drop. One of the thugs had half-whirled and crashed his pistol barrel alongside the old man's head, crumpling him to the floor. Then Perry knew what he had to do, and he was proud that he did it coldly, and not in anger. One quick step had carried him to the nearest man; a hard right knocked him across a table. Perry spun around toward the others.

Guns roared. One slug had smashed into his neck. He'd staggered back as another had blasted into his chest.

Perry kept his eyes on the timekeeper and was out of his corner with the bell. Buzz was yelling at his back for him to bore in, to infight. The kid tossed some rights, hard and sharp. Perry worked over his stomach with both hands before switching to a clean uppercut. He was feeling good now, and getting stronger. The sweat rolled freely, lubricated his big muscles. Travis took a lesson from what had happened before when he tried to swap punches and went back to his educated left hand, unstitching the cut under Perry's eye. Perry grinned at these tactics. Travis circled, always back and away to his left and Walsh deliberately stopped in the middle of the ring and waved him in. But Travis merely spat out a foul word which Perry couldn't identify. Then the kid moved in swiftly to bounce two knife-like lefts off the cut again.

The youngster was working even faster now. Swift, like a collie, in and out. What round was it? Eighth round? Perry wasn't sure. It was a good, hard fight.

He went after Travis, blocking him into a corner while his eye sopped up a dozen of those snake-like left hands. Blood flowed freely now and Travis was trying to out-manuever him, to stagger him with a right cross and dance free. Perry knew the punch was coming, flexed his knees slightly to let it slide past his jaw over his left shoulder and then curved a looping left hook against Travis' ribs. Travis grunted and scowled, smashed a hard right

below the belt. It hurt, but Perry only grinned at him. He had that temper situation well in hand now. The kid finally worked out of the trap back into the middle of the ring.

Perry had remained standing, his legs spread far apart, weaving slightly, a dazed look in his eyes. From the floor the third bandit had propped himself on an elbow to pump another bullet just below Perry's heart. Then the bandits had fled, racing into the street. Perry had staggered to the open door after them. They were running up the alley alongside the building. Perry had followed a few weak steps, then had collapsed in the gravel.

Travis was there in front of him, always stabbing, moving away from Perry's right hand, his chin hidden behind a raised left shoulder. He was tough and fast, all right. The blood ran into Perry's eye again and he cocked his head to see. Travis roughed him in the clinches and he was proud of his ability to curb the instinct to reply with similar tactics, to refrain from grating the laces across Travis' face, or to clip him with an elbow. Perry ducked his head and bored in.

That round was even, maybe a shade on his side. He was breathing hard, but the pace was telling on Travis, too. A hard red lump was raised on one cheek, one eye was dark and his ribs would ache. But every wallop still had plenty of sting.

Between the rounds, Perry sat and chuckled at the fight he was making. What a field day the sportswriters would have. He could see the headlines: "Dirty Fighter Gives Technique a Bath!" He chuckled again.

Buzz worked on the bad eye so he could see and Perry asked himself if he could somewhere find something deep down within himself this last round to score a knockout. Wind up his career with a big noise.

With the bell he rose slowly. Cold, calculated, untouched by the drug of anger which had won him previous battles, he accepted Travis' straight left jabs with disdain, crowded beneath the flurry of whiplike blows to rip home a short right,

another one. And a left. The crowd rose with a roar.

Perry moved into the kid, forced him across the ring, ripped across his middle with piston-like precision, switching to his face. Travis fought back hard, his breath whistling; jabbing, crossing.

Perry took a faceful of punishment to get Travis where he couldn't circle, and he rocked him with a right hook to the jaw and dropped his left fist half-way to the wrist into his body. Travis staggered, quickly recovered and fought back with dogged ferocity.

Both were battling now, their hardest. Travis forgot his jabs as they squared away in the center of the ring. And, head burrowed between his thick shoulders, Perry answered him with flying fists.

Dimly, through the great pain, he could hear the screaming of an ambulance siren in the distance.

Travis folded quickly. Perry ripped a short left into his solar plexus and left him gasping. The kid's hands dropped. Perry splashed rights and lefts into his face, drove him across the ring. A crisp left hook straightened Travis up and a whistling right uppercut dropped him for a nine count. He struggled to his knees, raised one foot under him, then sprawled forward on his face.

Perry was exultant as he slipped through the ropes, bathrobe thrown over his shoulders, the tumult of the mob roaring in his ears. He couldn't wait to phone Florence, to hear her happy congratulations over not losing his temper; he was going to retire after a good clean fight.

The gravel was still harsh against his palms, but strangely his throat and chest no longer hurt. Then his hands clawed at the alleyway, one last time. A dull voice in the crowd spoke, but he didn't hear the words:

"Cripes, what a tough break. And over such a little bit of dough, too. He woulda made a hundred times that much fightin' Mike Travis tomorrow night.

"He musta lost his temper to get shot up like that. He never could keep his temper."

Once They Kiss The Mat

By Nathan Broch

A Short Story



The dying prizefighter scooped up the bills with his good hand and held them against the dimmed light so they looked like a round green glove with fancy pictures on it.

THEY had put a screen around his bed and now he was looking up at them through his one good eye, the left eye, the one that wasn't busted.

The interne had a pad in his hand and a pencil and tried a smile. The nurse wasn't doing anything. Not even smiling. She just stood there, looking down at the dying prizefighter.

"Just a formality," purred the interne. "How you spell that name again?"

"C-l-e-m," his breath rattled low with the spelling. "Z-e-l-l-o."

"Right," the interne crossed something out on his pad and wrote down the correct name. "Married?"

Clem shook his head a little. "Only my mother," he whispered. "And my kid sister. Over in Lakewood." It hurt to speak and the good eye closed for a moment, then opened again slowly, dragging the lid with the words. "It's all white in Lakewood now," he muttered. "My kid sister's on the lake. Skating. She likes to skate. Always has." He paused. Long straight lines furrowed his forehead. "Carolli," he said with sudden clarity. "I want to see Carolli."

"Relative?" the interne was writing again.

"My manager," said Clem. "Haven't seen him since they took me from the

ring." His eye steadied with the question, "Know him?"

The interne flipped the pencil against his nose, "Never go to fights."

"Me too," said the nurse and it was the first time she spoke.

"Guess he's sick himself," Clem murmured. "Trouble with his stomach. Ulcers. But I got to see him."

"Why?" asked the nurse.

"My cut," said Clem.

"We stitched that up," the interne offered.

A smile crept into the one good eye. "No. I mean my money from tonight's bout. A hundred and thirty dollars."

"Oh," said the nurse. She looked at the interne.

He was shaking his head, his eyebrows way up.

"Maybe he's already gone to Cleveland," Clem said. "Carolli always goes to Cleveland when he gets those ulcers."

The interne gave a short laugh. The nurse turned around sharply and he stopped it. "Where's he staying?" she asked.

Clem shook his head. "Better go to the station. Sure to find him there. On the platform. Going to Cleveland. Always does when he gets those ulcers."

"I'll go," said the nurse. "I'll bring him here."

"No," Clem thought hard. "He's a sick guy. Those ulcers. He's got to go to Cleveland. Just get my cut. Hundred and thirty bucks."

She looked down at the fighter. "I'll go," she whispered. She opened the screen and slipped out and the interne closed it after her and came back to the bed.

"Carolli's a good guy," the good eye smiled again. "Only about money. Sometimes he forgets about money. Account of those ulcers."

"Then he goes to Cleveland?" irony flickered in the interne's voice. But it got lost against the white screen, against the battered body of the dying man.

"Yes," said Clem, "but I've been with him these four years. Live and let live. That's what Ma always says."

The interne nodded. Clem wasn't looking at him. "I hope she'll find him on that platform," he said. "I hope to God she'll find him. Got to send some money to Lakewood. Just got to."

For a while they didn't speak. Sometimes they were watching each other. Sometimes the interne got a hold of Clem's good hand, the one that wasn't broken, and felt the pulse and shook his head without really shaking it.

After a long time Clem said, "Maybe she didn't find him."

"I'm sure she will," the interne stole a glance at his watch.

Then the nurse slipped back through the screen. "Here," she leaned across the bed. "A hundred and thirty dollars."

Clem's good hand felt over the bills. "So you found him," he muttered. "Thanks for finding him. He's a good, sick guy, Carolli."

"Yes," said the nurse. "A good man. He's gone to Cleveland."

"Those ulcers," he scooped the bills with his good hand, holding them against the dimmed light so they looked like a round green glove with fancy pictures on it.

Suddenly the good hand wasn't good any more. It dropped heavily by the side of the bed and the green glove with pictures fluttered limply to the floor.

The interne stooped for the bills and gave them to the nurse. Then they covered the dead fighter and walked out together through the screen.

"Never thought you'd find that manager," the interne sounded hoarse.

The nurse nodded. "I had him paged and he came to the information booth. We talked."

"And he gave you the money?"

She shook her head. "That manager's horrible. Maybe insane or something. 'Once they kiss the mat,' he told me, 'they're through and there's no cut.' And with that he ran for his train."

"But you showed that boy the money?"

The nurse smiled. "My own money," she whispered. "I never knew it could buy that much."

Tony Zale - His Ring Story

By Robt. R. Richards

He never caught the fancy of the fight mob nor the wild acclaim of Press Row. A thorough workman, a clean-liver, an uncolorful precisionist with a wide knowledge of the ring game seldom does. Tony Zale's road to the middleweight title was long and tough . . . and his record speaks for itself.

COLD PALE eyes raked the ringside for a friendly face. Tony Zale saw few of them. It was a long way from Gary to Seattle. Not many steel workers could make the coast trip but those who did made up for their lack of numbers by loud cheering for Tony Zale. Their faith had never wavered. Zale was their idol. They had been with Tony when he was beaten so often in the past that he had to quit the ring. Even when he quit they knew he would come back. Tony was as tough as Gary's steel.

The steel city slugger sat calmly in his corner. Typical of Tony. Unworried, unhurried. And here he was facing the most terrific left hook artist among the middleweights. Zale never could stop a left hook in his early days and now, six years after his pro debut, his only defense for a snaking left was hitting the other man quicker and harder.

Tony grinned at the few familiar faces beyond the blazing ringlights. As long as there was one Gary steel worker in the house that was enough to spur him on. That, and the terrible anger he felt as he stared at Al Hostak. It had taken Tony ten long, hard years, to fight his way up from the amateurs to a big name bout. A dozen setbacks had marred his climb towards the top. But always Tony fought to get away from the steel mills. Not that Tony felt higher than the work. It was just that he knew he was made for something else. He knew it when he was still an amateur. He knew it when he climbed through the ropes for the first time.

The prize-ring was a rainbow, and the championship was the pot of gold at the end of it. Tony was rugged, he could sock, he had endless courage. He fought like the blond tiger that he was, throwing

his all into every punch. But the ring had its paradoxes. There were times when a man won and it was just as though he had lost. Seven months before he had fought this same Al Hostak in Chicago. Tony had come off the deck to thrash him after being dropped by a whizzing left hook.

Afterwards it was learned that Hostak had broken his hand after dropping Tony. They called Zale's victory a fluke. It hurt when you licked a man and then everybody went around saying you were just plumb lucky and hadn't really beaten him at all. Tonight Tony was getting his second chance. Perhaps the only chance he'd ever have to make good again.

Hostak was the National Boxing Association Middleweight Champion. The honor was worth more than half of the disputed world title.

Hostak and his manager decided to make the Zale camp pay if they wanted a return match and a shot at Hostak's title. Although Hostak had lost seven months ago, he still retained his title, as both men had come in over the official weight. Tony's managers were glum when they told him Hostak's terms. "You see that doesn't even leave us enough for training expenses," Sam Pian said. Tony snapped. "The heck with the expenses. I'll fight him for nothing. I've just got to have that title, Sam. I know I can beat Hostak and you know it." Sam smiled, "Okay, Tony, then we'll travel to Seattle."

Zale faced Hostak beneath the blaze of lights as the referee issued instructions. He saw the cool confidence, the quiet superiority in Hostak's face and it annoyed him.

Maybe you don't think I belong in here with you, Al. And maybe you can show

me that I don't. But I don't think so, I've come two thousand miles to meet you, Hostak, without a cent coming to me. A man doesn't travel that way for nothing.

The fighters shook hands. It was written all over Tony Zale's cold pale eyes and the grim line of his lips.

I'm going to lick you Hostak, you'll never send me back to Gary in defeat, never send me back to the steel mills. I'll show you that first win was no fluke.

THE bell. Tense, prayer-like silence envelopes the crowd. The two hardest hitters among the middleweights crowd each other beneath the lights. No room to breathe, barely room to punch. Whack! whack! they smash at each other and the echo of scorching leather can be heard in the back rows. Hostak rushes his punches for one of his famous one round knockouts. Zale slams with gusto.

One round melts into another like a roaring flame. Not even a simple jab is thrown without murderous intentions. The bell between rounds is a mere punctuation

mark separating the fighters for a brief minute until they tear at each other again.

Round four. Sam Pian is happy. "You're ahead Tony. Stay out in front." Zale nods, the roar of the crowd is in his ears as Hostak rushes him in the fifth. The champion's pride is badly wounded. He's willing to gamble everything on a knockout and he does. Left hooks buck from his shoulder in an endless stream. Rights windmill into Tony Zale's face. But the Gary fighter stays with the rangy, semi-bald Hostak.

Mid-way in the fifth Tony slams back with an offensive of his own. He spikes Hostak's big guns and opens a cut over the champion's eye. Zale will not be denied. His jaw aches from the shock of Hostak's lefts. His body is sore from the terrific infighting. But there's no quit in Tony Zale, no signs of let up. The Steel City slugger is a hurricane in the tenth. Hostak reels and rolls beneath his shattering blows. Hostak has never been on the canvas, never been knocked out. Tony Zale grits his teeth. He must drive him

to the deck, knock him cold. 11-12- the 13th round, Zale's dynamite-laden fists explode on Hostak's granite jaw. The granite is blasted. Hostak takes the count while the crowd cheers the thrilling fight with delight and the handful of Gary steelworkers go absolutely mad.

Tony Zale is a fighting champion. He draws the line against nobody. Big Billy Soose, six feet tall, rangy, long armed, long legged, a crafty, thinned out light heavyweight, wants an over-the-weight match with Zale. Tony might have ducked it but he took the match. Soose kangaroos all over Tony and grabs the decision. Once again they start calling Zale a second rater. Even when he's on the top they try and drag him down. Soose moves into the light-heavyweight division where he belongs and leaves Tony looking foolish.

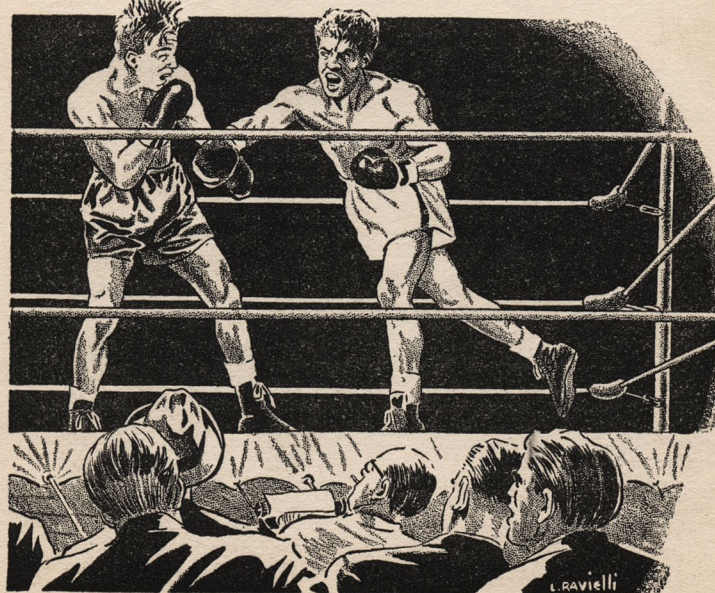
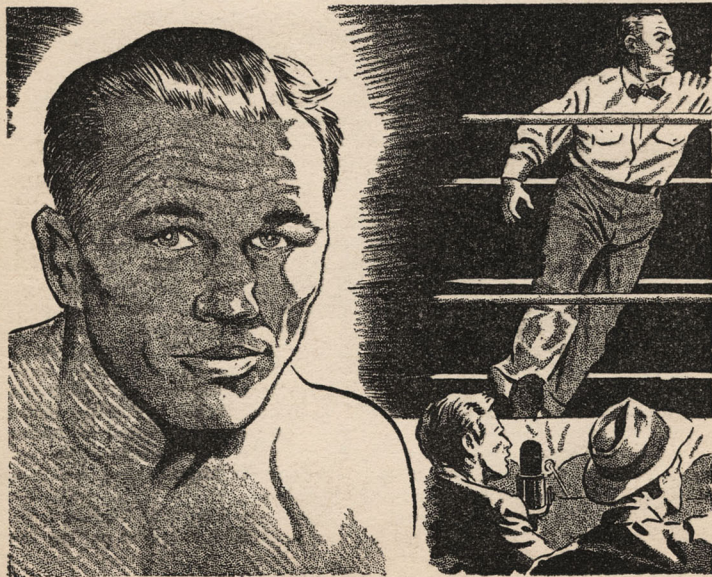
The world middleweight championship is still in a muddle. One half is owned by Tony, the other half is claimed by Ken Overlin. Had Mike Jacobs been willing to take a chance a few months back things might

have been different. Shortly before Tony's spectacular knockout of Hostak, Zale's manager's had begged Jacobs to give Tony a shot at Ceferino Garcia, for the New York version of the title. Mike chose Ken Overlin instead. Zale had no following in the east, and besides, his past record was studded with defeats. Tony's pilots, Pian and Winch, talked their charge's ability up to the skies.

Jacobs was insistent, "I want Overlin, not Zale." Pian argued that Tony would turn in a terrific performance against Garcia as compared to the dull slapper-dapper affair one could expect from Overlin. There was no use arguing with the big promoter.

Like many of Zale's opponents who had once dropped Tony to the canvas, Al Hostak was hard to convince. In their first encounter he had broken his hand. In their second clash Al's eyes were cut up badly. Besides, he had Tony in a bad way during the fifth round of their Seattle clash. Chicago was the scene of their third

Grasiano was furious. His murderous right came screeching at Zale's jaw.



tangle. Tony ripped at Hostak from the opening gong. The terrific socking, semi-bald Seattle boxer was slugged into oblivion before the second round ended. It was a tremendous victory for Tony before the home town folks. Sam Pian knew that "Benny Ray's fighter" was on top to stay.

The meeting of Sam, Tony and Benny Ray is a story in itself. It marked a turning point in Zale's ring career. Tony often felt that afternoon in Trafton's gym made his rise to the peak possible. Benny Ray was a local Gary promoter. He was an exceptionally shrewd judge of boxers, having predicted the rise of Barney Ross and Joe Louis.

Tony came smiling into Trafton's gym one day. Benny Ray's eyes narrowed. Zale had quit the ring in '35, and here it was two years later, with Tony showing up with a boxer's handbag. Zale stepped gingerly toward Ray, his pale blue eyes eager and alive. "I've been looking for you Benny," the fighter said.

Benny glanced at the handbag, "I don't get it. Last I heard you were back in the steel mills."

"But not for keeps." Tony smiled, "I've just got to take another crack at fighting again. I'm ready to hit the comeback trail if you'll manage me, Benny."

The Gary promoter thought it over. This Zale kid was made of tough fibre. He had known Tony since way back when. The Gary slugger had been pushed too fast, over-matched, rushed in against top notchers without having mastered the rudiments of pro fighting. Benny grinned when he saw Sam Pian, Barney Ross's famous manager.

Sam Pian was the answer to Tony Zale. It would give Benny a chance to settle a debt that could not be repaid in money. Many years back Benny Ray was down on his heels. Sam Pian had staked him without blinking an eye. Benny would never forget it as long as he lived. The promoter glanced at Zale. Given a top notch manager who could nurse him along this kid was set for ring stardom. Sam Pian was that manager.

"How about it am?" Benny said, "He's a grand kid with a barrel load of guts.

Remember, I picked out Ross and Joe Louis. Well, Tony Zale is going to be right up there with them some day."

Zale was thrilled. He hoped Sam Pian would take him into tow. "Okay, Benny, I've seen this boy in action. I'll bring him to the top for you. Anytime you want him back, he's yours." For years Pian handled "Benny Ray's fighter." Benny never asked for him back. Each year he predicted great things for Tony. Pian and Zale were satisfied and Benny Ray died happily some time later. He never did see Tony rise to stardom but he had squared his debt with Pian.

Tony followed Pian's instructions to the last letter. The desire to make good burned in Zale like a flame. Zale was the strangest tough guy Pian had ever run across.

He never drank, never swore, he trained for each match as though it was the last and greatest fight of his career. When he threw a punch, even a simple jab, he tossed everything he had behind it. He didn't just train, he was fanatically devoted to training. Other fighters might balk at the grind, but not Tony. Other fighters might take it easy between bouts but Tony went right on with some part of his training regime.

Zale drove himself relentlessly. He wanted as much perfection as he was capable of. When he finished one bout he was already thinking of another. Sam Pian was pleased by his hard driving protege. Others were puzzled by this total devotion to ring warfare. What was Tony Zale seeking? Did he want to become the greatest fighter of all time? What made him lash back ten times as hard when the chips were stacked against him? What made him stand up under beatings that most fighters would have quit?

Tony Zale was a two fisted tough guy between the ropes who hated to fight outside the ring. He was a physical man who loved to read; a kid who insisted upon obtaining a high school education while laboring in the steel mills. Tony Zale in his own quiet way was an engine. But there was no answer to Tony Zale's fierce drive, his tremendous will to succeed. The answer was in the Tony Zale who faced

Hostak, Abrams, Conn and Graziano. Yes, the answer was there, but the key to the question. What drove Tony Zale?—was forged a long time ago when he was a boy in Gary.

II

ANTHONY FLORIAN ZALESKI, was born in the fiery reflection of the Gary steel mills. Ever since he was a child he could remember the reddish glow in the night sky. The soot-covered, smoke-ridden city, at the lake bottom. The laborers going to work with green lunch pails. The mournful cry of the factory whistles announcing the end of one dreary shift and the start of another.

The mills of Gary claimed everyone sooner or later. Tony's Polish born parents settled in Gary in 1912. His father was a moulder in the blazing foundry of the Illinois Steel Corporation. Automobiles were new fangled, reckless and expensive things. Joseph Zaleski was fond of using a bicycle. One day Papa Zaleski was found dead on the streets of Gary, his bicycle a twisted wreck after having been struck by an automobile.

His widow was left with seven children, five boys and two girls. The road ahead was a hard one for the family. Mary, the eldest daughter, went to work. One by one the Zaleski boys followed each other into the roaring infernos of the steel mills. As each lad reached fifteen he took up his lunch pail and headed for the mills. Young Tony's turn came soon enough.

He neither hated nor liked the mills at first. It was work and the family needed money. Tony was never one to runaway from a fact. It was a fact that if he worked in the mills and didn't get himself an education he might not get anywhere either. His mother encouraged him along those lines and he graduated from high school. He was a fine student and read a great deal along with indulging in sports. His older brothers, both amateur boxers, donned the gloves with him when Tony was only ten.

He got used to the feel of padded leather. It wasn't strange that he entered

the Golden Gloves at the age of sixteen. Nor was it odd that he won the Gary welterweight and middleweight titles four times in a row. Tony rolled up fifty knock-outs in ninety-five contests. In the winter of 1934 he travelled to New York in order to represent Chicago in the inter-city finals.

Tony was a middleweight. He was sure to hold his own in that division. A big, sleepy-eyed colored boy with a shy, pleasant smile, was representing Chicago in the light-heavy weight division. He was a terrific socker for an amateur, this Joe Louis.

His New York opponent, stocky Melio Bettina, was far above average for an amateur likewise. In a few years he went on to win the world's light-heavyweight championship. At the last minute Joe Louis was disqualified from the team as his official residence was Detroit and not Chicago. Somebody had to fill the Brown Bomber's place against a rugged mauler like Bettina.

Tony Zale, the middleweight from Suburban Gary, was the Windy City's answer to Bettina. Tony was tough, dead game. He could hit like a mule and take a punch without backing up. Of course Zale only weighed 153 to Bettina's well stacked 175 pounds. But for a kid who managed to graduate from high school and work in the steel mills at the same time, it shouldn't have been too great a handicap, provided you weren't in Zale's shoes facing husky Melio Bettina.

Madison Sq. Garden was packed. Bull bodied, hairy chested Melio Bettina scowled in his corner. A chunky, unorthodox southpaw, with tremendous power in his hefty frame, Melio certainly didn't look like an amateur. The mob waited anxiously for his opponent. They stared in disbelief as Tony Zale stepped through the ropes. The blond kid from the mid-west appeared awfully fragile alongside Bettina. So this was the substitute for Joe Louis. Well, chalk up a knockout for New York!

Tony could read it in their faces, hear it in their voices when he shed his robe. He stood nonchalantly in his corner. Broad shouldered, square jawed, cucumber cool. Nothing could ruffle Tony Zale once he

slipped through the ropes. He waited calmly for the opening bell. Zale rubbed his gloves together and rushed at the gong's hollow sound. Bettina sailed into him. They collided in mid-ring and a sizz-ling fight was on.

Zale was backed against the ropes by the crushing weight advantage of Bettina. He lashed furiously at his stocky foe. Tony in trouble was ten times as dangerous, even in these early, simon pure days.

Bettina sopped up a pulverizing right to the body. The crowd roared and rose from their seats. Melio was grovelling on the canvas. Goliath had been hit by David's slingshot. The bull-torsoed battler came off the deck with murder in his eyes. He lunged at the comparatively fragile Zale. His awkward, southpaw stance threw Tony off. His twenty-two pound weight edge shoved Zale back. Tony never quit or yielded for a moment. He slugged his way to the final bell while the mob shouted their approval. Bettina got the decision, Zale got the glory. Tony had put up one of the gamest, toughest stands, ever displayed in a handicap fight.

Tony had gone as far as he could in the amateurs. His record of fifty knock-out victories was sensational to say the least. He returned to Gary and was roundly congratulated by his family and fellow steel workers. Tony walked along the grimy streets. He stared at the red-dish glow in the night sky. The mills, just as he had seen them since he was a child. The roaring open hearth furnace ready to claim him again. The long hours, the dreary nights, the mechanical robot march of men through an inferno. Suddenly Tony Zale hated the mills.

His father, his brothers, his relatives and his pals were all part of the mills. Chained to rivers of molten metals, forever smelling the warm, rusty odor of hot steel in their nostrils. Steel was on their clothes, bits of metal in their skin. They washed and scrubbed only to take in more steel again. Sure, the mills had made him strong and tough. The mills had molded him like an ingot of steel. It was hard work, honest work. Tony didn't balk at it. But there was another door. A door to fame and fortune to a security he could

never know in the mills. If he could open that door Mom would never have to worry about meeting bills again. The possibility of it lay within his fists. The prize-ring could free him from the mills and give Mom, the family and himself, a security they had never known since Father Zaleski had been killed on the smoke fogged streets of Gary.

Therein lay the answer to what drove Tony Zale. The kid from Gary fought to stay away from the steel mills. He drove himself relentlessly in order to make a better life for himself and others. Sure, Tony wanted fortune but only enough to buy himself security. Fame? yes, he would take that too in his own shy, modest way. As long as he was a hero to his hard working mother and family, that was enough fame for Tony Zale. Mom had pinned a great many hopes on him. She prayed that her boy would make good in his newly chosen profession. Tony was courageous, bright, ambitious. He must make good. He must be happy. He was her son. She had seen too many hardships among the steel workers to deny Tony his gambling attempt at fame and fortune.

CHICAGO wasn't like Gary. The windy city was a huge, indifferent place for Tony Zale. Fighting for pay was like beginning his career all over again. He had to start from the bottom. Four rounders, prelims that often bored the customers as they waited for the main event. But Tony Zale was different right from the start. He tore from his corner and fought with everything he had.

Unknowns, Allen, Simpson, Millsap, Liston. Tony blasted them to the canvas. He never took a rest, he was anxious to make good, over-anxious. There were times when no more than seventy-two hours elapsed between bouts. Tony would fight on a Monday night and be back in the ring on Thursday. His competition increased by leaps and bounds. In five short months he had punched himself into the main event class. There was no smart manager to pull strings for him, no "ins" with a promoter, no organization behind him, nothing to back him up but a furious,

courageous desire to make good. He lacked experience badly.

There was no master minding Jack Blackburn to train and guide him a la Joe Louis. Nor was there a shrewd and patient manager, devoted, unhurried, taking endless time to develop him like Pop Foster had done for Jimmy McLarnin. There was nothing but Tony Zale vs. the other fighters in the ring. His older brother Johnny, an ex-amateur boxer, was too busy making his own way in the steel mills. Johnny knew training inside and out just like he knew his kid brother. But the mills had claimed him long ago and he belonged to them.

The hour glass of Tony Zale's success began to crack in less than half a year. Skillful, seasoned main event boxers like Jack Gibbons took decisions over him. Jack, the nephew of two great boxers of yesterday, Mike and Tommy Gibbons, had his uncles to teach him the subtleties of ring craft. Tony was tired, he needed a rest. He went right on fighting from one mis-match to another. He began to slide rapidly down to the preliminaries again. Someone by the name of Bazzione took a decision over him. A guy named Phagan knocked him out. A ham andegger like Jack Moran held him to a miserable six round draw.

The hour glass of success had broken. Two years after beginning his ring career Tony Zale was back where he started from. Tony came back to Gary in defeat. The steelworkers, his family and Mom were still all for him. Gradually Tony drifted toward the dreaded mills. He took up his place before the open hearth furnace again and was silent. Tony's ambition was halted, not crushed. Ted Momot, a friend, talked Tony into a Florida trip.

For the first time in his life the steel city slugger took a long rest. He basked in the sun, fished and loafed. The roar of the mills and the dim fight crowds were far behind him. Lying on the sand, staring at the tropical blue sky, gave Tony's tired body a chance to heal and his brain a chance to think. He was twenty-three years old. Vibrant life and hope surged back into his powerful physique again.

He decided to make a comeback. No

rushing, no over-matching this time. He didn't care if it took him ten years. Tony Zale was determined to master his trade. He refused to become discouraged despite any set backs of the past or future. Tony knew he had the stuff. Melio Bettina was a top rank pro fighter now and he had dropped Bettina on the deck just two short years ago. Tony Zale returned to Chicago, determined to turn his back on the steel mills of Gary forever.

Things weren't easy at first, not even with Sam Pain at the helm. Tony was rusty, there was plenty to learn. Becoming a four round prelim boy again wasn't very inspiring either. He climbed back very slowly. This time fighting several return matches until he mastered his opponents. He had his downs as well as ups. Once again he was kayoed. This time by Jimmy Clark. A shadow of a doubt blackened Tony's morale. But he recalled a promise that would keep him plugging towards the championship even if everything else failed.

Tony loved his mother dearly. Despite his rugged, tough, self-sufficient fibre he was a momma's boy. Tony helped around the kitchen, washed dishes, mopped floors, even baked cakes. Mom was always there to encourage him when he was glum. Mom was there to pray for him when he fought. to worry when he lost and feel hopeful when her boy won. Tony knew how much she worried about his career. It wasn't easy for a mother to see her son come home with nicks and scars and stitches. But if it was what Tony wanted, if there was a rainbow and a pot of gold at the end of the trail it was alright with her. Tony promised that he would make good in a great big way, he would drop the middleweight championship of the world in her lap. Someday she would see that all her hopes were not in vain.

Mother Zaleski did live long enough to see her Tony crowned champion of the world. It was one of the happiest moments of Tony's life when he returned to their modest home with a title in his belt.

The blackest day in Tony's life was the day he received a call from his brother. John, while training at Hot Springs, Ar-

kansas. John said that Mom was critically ill. Tony took a plane to Gary. He arrived just a few minutes before Mom died. Tony never fought thereafter without thinking of his mother. He never quite got over the feeling that Mom wasn't still at home listening to him fight over the radio, or waiting to hear his own story of defeat or victory.

Zale faced his kayo conqueror. Jimmy Clark, again. This time Tony handled him with a vengeance. Clark collapsed before the blazing fury of Tony's attack. Clark made the supreme mistake of tangling with Tony for a third time. Zale beat him to the canvas with a thunderous onslaught just a few minutes after the opening bell. The steel city slugger had more than squared his account.

No other fighter in modern times with the exception of Joe Louis, had Tony's ability to score astonishing successes in repeat performances. It was true against Hostak, Clark, Graziano and a troublesome slugger, Steve Mamakos, Steve was cutting a wide swath among the middleweights shortly after Zale's series with Hostak.

Mamakos was the kind of a fighter that never wins a title but makes it hell for those who try. Tony took on this brawler in Chicago one night. Mamakos nearly raised the roof with his slugging tactics. Tony skidded over the line with a decision and signed for a return slug-fest. The N. B. A. middleweight title was at stake and Steve was set to score the biggest upset of the year.

Mamakos could punch like blazes. He staggered Tony early in the fight. Round after round he slammed at the steel city slugger. Mamakos long experience against trial horses, cagey veterans, confusing southpaws and unorthodox battlers was paying off against Zale. Mamakos tossed the book at Tony. There wasn't a punch or trick he forgot to employ.

Tony stepped into Steve's wicked swings and ended up on the canvas. The stadium was in an uproar. Amazingly cool, but groggy, Zale swung back into action. Sooner or later he would catch up with Mamakos. Steve drove him from pillar to post now that he had the upper hand.

Tony held down the lid of his dynamite until he could get a clean shot at his enemy. He was in no mood to be trapped out of his N.B.A. title by a reckless gamble. Round after round he searched for an opening in the weaving form of Mamakos. There were none.

It was the fourteenth round. The fans were hysterical with excitement. Steve Mamakos was beating Tony Zale. For once the Gary slugger was failing to turn in a terrific performance in a return go. The only cool head in the house was Tony Zale's. He lit into Mamakos, unleashed everything he was capable of throwing, and kept tossing it until he broke through. Mamakos stared in disbelief from the canvas as the referee tolled ten and out! Steve was never much good after that night. Tony Zale's furious outburst had shattered something else besides his jawbone.

III

THE WORLD'S Middleweight Championship still remained disputed in 1941, as it had been for ten years following the retirement of Mickey Walker. In November of 1941 it narrowed down to Tony Zale and Georgie Abrams. Mike Jacobs could no longer deny Zale a Garden title scrap. The boxing commission and the fans demanded seeing this slugger from the mid-west.

Georgie Abrams was a weird looking fighter. Bald, with a thick mat of hair curling over his torso. Loose armed, loose shanked, somewhat flabby around the middle and yet he was on the trim side. He was an odd combination of cleverness and rough house tactics. His big forehead loomed like a naked skull beneath the bright ring lights.

Neither Abrams' appearance nor tremendous reputation ruffled Zale. He was fully aware of the Washingtonian's exceptional glove talent.

As Tony crawled through the ropes he tried to shut his ears against the crowd's cheering. Coolness, that was Tony's code before, during and after a fight. It was exciting enough, fighting for the world's title, returning to the Garden after seven

years of ups and downs. In this very ring he had slugged it out with Melio Bettina for an amateur title. And now he had come back as a full fledged professional. Ring smart, experienced, wised up, in the art of punching for pay. Tony was a long way from the steel mills and he was happy.

Sam Pian had warned him about Abrams. "Watch that left hook, Tony. Georgie knows how to throw it with vengeance." Zale's pale eyes narrowed. No matter how much he drilled, Tony still hadn't found a fool proof defense for a spinning left hook aside from hitting the other man before he got his. It was perfectly alright with Tony. A fighter's job was taking it as well as dishing it out. The steel city slugger wasn't one to seek a soft berth.

Georgie Abrams awaited the bell with supreme confidence. It was as simple as the alphabet. Billy Soose had outboxed Zale. He had trimmed Soose, not once, but three times. Hostak had nearly torn Zale's head off with a smashing left hook. Georgie Abrams had the best left hook in the business since Hostak. Zale was a willing mixer, all the better. There wasn't a sportswriter in the nation who thought he wasn't capable of outboxing Zale.

Abrams snorted at the bell. Zale came out. Characteristic pose. Tow head tipped forward. Deep set pale eyes staring, searching. Left extended, curled for action. Right drawn up against his chin. Abrams slammed in. So he wanted to make a fight of it from the opening bell. It was double okay with Tony Zale. The steel city slugger felt his gloves drive hard against Abrams cross-webbed arms. Georgie was a lanky spider with a fatal sting in his left.

In his own way Abrams was as awkward as Bettina. Leather sizzled against flesh in a hot exchange. Georgie was tough, smart, a crack infighter. Tony kept pushing forward. Biff! bang! Zale felt his legs buckling. He was on the canvas. The right side of his face fevered from Abrams left hook!

Take it easy Tony. Keep calm, keep cool. The grey shirted arm of the referee swung like a metronome before his pale

eyes. The mob roar surged at him from balcony and mezzanine. "One . . . two . . . three . . . four." Zale made no attempt to move. "Five . . . six . . . seven." He brushed his gloves against satin trunks. "Eight!" Zale picked up the count at nine and bounced to his feet. Back in the corner Sam Pian was able to breath again.

Tony waded into Abrams. It was grueling, uphill fighting. Georgie had an iron clad defense with his cross-webbed arms. Each round the steel city slugger increased his pace. The bald head loomed before him. The long face seemed to mock his efforts. Georgie Abrams was smarter and faster and just as tough as the man from the mills. Zale hammered relentlessly.

He felt Abrams grab and hold in the fourth. Move back in the fifth. Blood trickled from Georgie's eyes in the sixth. Zale was smashing punishing rights at the heart and head. It was in the bag, Abrams was fading mid-way. Bang! that vicious left drove at Tony in the eighth. Zale could feel his teeth chatter. The crowd faces blurred. Abrams swarmed all over him. The bell was welcome relief.

Tony let himself die for sixty seconds. Arms hanging limply, eyes closed. He heard nothing, wanted to hear nothing but the blood bubbling through his veins, feeding his muscles. It was Tony Zale's way of getting three minutes rest out of sixty seconds.

Tony swept Abrams across the ring in the ninth. His drive was too furious for denial. Georgie was rocked by jolting jabs, shaken to his ankles by thunderous rights. Desperately Abrams worked himself in and out of clinches. He held for dear life. Tony slammed him against the ropes. Georgie's instinct, born of long experience and a cast iron defensive network of arms was the only thing that held him up.

Zale blasted his way to an overwhelming decision. At the final bell Abrams big face was a red blood mask. His eyes hammered to a pulp. Nose, cheeks, lips swollen. Georgie could barely make it to his corner. His arms were bruised and stiff, his body beaten into a pink flame. He had paid the price for refusing to yield before Tony Zale.

"The new, undisputed middleweight

champion of the world!" Tony shivered with joy at the words. An official champion at last. On top of the fistic world, seven years almost to a day since his amateur scrap against Bettina in this same ring. Tony bounded across the ring. Words of praise for his beaten foe. The microphone was shoved before him. The first words out of his mouth were for the home folks in Gary. Familiar faces jammed his dressing room. The steel city boys would travel twice around the world to see Tony fight.

Mike Jacobs clamored for Tony Zale now. Out of the smoke and din of the dressing room Tony heard Billy Conn's name mentioned. "Billy Conn? Mike Jacobs wants *me* to fight Billy Conn? Sure, I'll fight him. Who cares if Conn's a lighthavy or a heavyweight? Who cares if he almost licked Joe Louis. I'll fight Joe Louis if Mike wants me to." That was Tony Zale, not boasting, just willing to trade leather with any man in the ring.

Sam Pian signed for the Conn match immediately. The sportswriters thought he was crazy. If believing implicitly in the ability of Tony Zale to stand up against any man in the ring was insanity, then Sam Pian was crazy.

TONY ZALE didn't linger in New York very long. He never felt at home outside of Gary. Gary people were his people. The kind he had grown up with and knew best. Tony shook hands around the steel city until his fingers were sore. He visited his old haunts, places he had never gotten away from. Places he never wanted to get away from. St. Hedwig's Catholic Grammar School in Gary. Father Grothouse, the priest who knew him ever since he was a kid. Jack Gilroy, physical director for Gary schools. The fellows he had played handball and baseball with, the steel workers, the nameless, numerous chums around the city who no more felt at home in Gary without seeing Tony Zale, then he did when he was away from them.

Yes, 1941 was a great year for Tony Zale. It was at this time that he met a very striking brunette. It was the best St. Hedwig's party he had ever attended.

Adeline Richwalski's presence had seen to that. She was a sweet girl, a wonderful girl. She would make a good wife for Tony Zale now that he could settle down. He kept running into her by accident, in Gary, in Chicago. On the street, in a bus, in a train, at a social gathering.

After his fight with Billy Conn, Zale enlisted in the Navy. Two days later he married Adeline. Nobody was surprised. Adeline became part of the large Zaleski family with their happy gatherings. Things were settling for Tony Zale. The steel city slugger couldn't foresee the future. He had no idea what would happen against Conn, except that he would fight like a tiger. He had no idea how long the war would last and like everyone else he had never heard of Rocky Graziano.

February 13, 1942, the war is in full swing. Uniforms can be spotted all over the Garden. The crowd has turned out for one of the biggest handicap matches ever staged. Billy Conn, hard hitting Pittsburgh heavyweight who eight short months ago flattened Joe Louis, is facing the 160 pounder, Tony Zale.

It doesn't make sense, Zale has no business being in there with Conn. Joe Louis is introduced in uniform. He smiles broadly at his rousing reception. He shakes hands with Conn, then Zale. There is admiration in the Brown Bomber's eyes as he speaks with Tony Zale. Both of them came up from the Chicago amateurs together. Zale went to bat for him against Bettina the night Joe was disqualified. Conn nearly took Joe's title. People are talking, Louis isn't what he was cracked up to be. Who is Conn? Can a small guy like Tony Zale lick him?

Joe sits tensely in his ringside seat. The outcome of Conn vs. Zale is darned important for the Brown Bomber. If Zale upsets Billy Conn then the public is right. Joe Louis has lost his grip, and a million dollar future gate will be swept away. The odds are heavy on Conn but Joe remembers Tony Zale from those amateur days. The steel city slugger's gameness is a factor to be reckoned with.

Conn, six feet tall, towers over five feet eight inch Tony Zale. The Pittsburgh fighter has everything but stamina and

courage over Tony Zale. Its apparent from the start, Conn's superiority. Billy is fast and shifty, he had reach, height, weight. Conn moves rapidly on the balls of his feet, blocks beautifully with his elbows and shoulders. Zale, blond, pale eyed, pugnacious, rips at the bigger man.

Zale takes the third with a furious drive to the body. Four more rounds pass with Conn in front. They're coming out for the eighth. Six rounds for Billy, only one for Tony. The steel city slugger shakes Conn with a smashing mid-section attack. Joe Louis stirs uncomfortably, not that he doesn't wish Tony Zale the best of luck. But if the shorter, smaller man, the complete underdog turns the tide, Joe's performance against Billy Conn will be written off the books as a failure for the Brown Bomber.

Conn is aware of the excited drone of the crowd. Zale is making him look foolish indeed. The Pittsburgh heavyweight is grimly determined to end this farce in the ninth. If he can knock out a two hundred pound heavyweight like Gunnar Barlund, drop Joe Louis on his panties, surely he can better this middleweight into submission.

Zale reels beneath the fury of Conn's attack. Don't go down, Tony. Don't go down, Tony. He keeps repeating between locked lips. He tried gamely to fight back as Conn drives him from one side of the ring to the other. Its the bell, the end of the ninth. Zale is still on his feet.

Conn continues banging away, through the tenth, eleventh. Tony answers Conn's fury the only way he knows how, with a merciless barrage of his own, a faltering but plucky counter-attack against the bigger man. Before the finish of the fight in the twelfth, Zale had been on the verge of a knockout five times as he staggered on the canvas. Billy Conn could not put Zale on the deck!

Sheer grit, determination, steel stamina and the will to fight saved Tony Zale. His heart-rending, stubborn stand against the bigger man, tore at the crowd. There were shouts of "Draw! Draw!" as the referee collected the slips. Purely an emotional response by the mob, for Tony had

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won no more than three of a dozen rounds. Conn charged angrily up the aisle, "I'll never fight a little man again!" he snapped as the mob cheered Tony Zale to the rafters.

Both men were in uniform shortly after. Zale in the Navy. Conn in the Army. Tony was a petty officer, first class, and on active duty for three years. He never allowed himself a chance to get out of shape. In Puerto Rico he headed a physical conditioning program for many months.

Tony certainly had no trouble making the grade in the Navy. Calm, cool, modest, methodical and friendly, that was petty officer Zale. He knew how to take orders as well as give them. Although Tony did no boxing for four years, he insisted on continuing as much of his training program as possible sans gloves. Tony knew it was back to the ring for him as soon as the war ended. He had a wife and a family of his own now to care for. Although he was the middleweight champion, Tony didn't make much money out of his hard won laurels. Hostak had grabbed the lion's share of the profits in their series. As a matter of fact when Tony journeyed to Seattle and lifted the title it did nothing more than pay his expenses. Hostak's manager felt if Zale wanted the crown he would have to pay for it.

The Abrams match wasn't the big attraction it should have been. The Conn camp had received far more than Tony Zale, as Billy was the "big" name on the card then, not Tony. The steel city slugger knew he would be over thirty years of age by the time he received his discharge. That didn't leave much time for title defenses. A boxer was definitely past his peak by the time he hit thirty. Strangely enough it was Tony's post-war scraps that brought him undying fame and fortune.

IN 1946, when Tony donned the gloves again he was the forgotten champion. Nobody had heard of him since the night of the Conn fight four years back. In the time Zale had spent in the service another middleweight had become prominent. And that's putting it mildly. Rocky Graziano, the tousled haired, gum chewing, swaggering fighter from the brawling

streets of New York's tough East Side was a sensation.

Graziano was everything that Zale was not. One would have to search far for two more opposite types. This they had in common, both had come up the hard way, both of them terrific fighters. The resemblance ended there. Had a promoter tried to dream up a pair of opposites like Zale and Graziano his product would have borne only a pale resemblance to the real thing.

Rocky was a street corner tough, juvenile delinquent, a reform school graduate, a specialist in sidewalk fist fighting and back alley brawling. If Zale was made of steel, Rocky was hewn from the concrete sidewalks of New York. Thrown out of school for refusing to learn, and assaulting his teachers, Rocky roamed the streets with marauding corner gangs.

While Tony Zale was plugging away in the steel mills, Graziano was brushing shoulders with mobsters. Tony fought to get an education, Rocky fought just as hard not to get one. The street was where young Rocky learned, the street was where he lived. Graziano believed in only one law, that which his ten knuckles could either defend or break. Method, order, not for Rocky. Graziano's war record was completely the opposite of Zale's. The "Rock" spent ten months in an Army prison for disobedience while Tony sweated beneath the Puerto Rican sun drilling men in a physical conditioning program.

Zale was a polished boxer compared to Graziano. Rocky's early managers were discouraged by his right hand crazy crudeness and his inability to fight in any other style but a caveman's. Graziano was finally picked up by Irving Cohen, who managed him and taught him a few essential fine points. The Rock quickly discarded most of them and went right back to his primitive manner of slugging. That smashing right hand of his brought him victory when everything else failed.

Smart boxers, Harold Green, Freddie Cochrane, stabbed the ears off the Rock until the moment Graziano's right landed. There was no arguing with that furious right, no recovering from its lethal sting.

Two welterweight champions, Cochrane and Servo bit the dust in rapid order when they faced Graziano. Terrific hitting Billy Arnold crumbled before the Rock's attack. These men weren't beaten in the ordinary sense, they were electrocuted by Graziano's right.

In the Spring of '46 Tony Zale was the champion, but one would never know it unless he scanned the record books or remembered the prewar Hostak and Abrams clashes. Rocky Graziano was on everyone's tongue. The most talked of fighter in the middleweight division.

Tony Zale was truly the forgotten man of boxing when he signed for the Graziano fight. He was an old champion, thirty-two, grown rusty in the Navy. Fans with short memories began to ask, who did he ever beat? Graziano was hot copy, scribes and fans flocked to his camp. Graziano kayoed his sparmates while Zale trained in his methodical, unspectacular manner.

Promoter Mike Jacobs talked of a sensational \$700,000 gate. The fans spoke of Rocky. The papers carried column after column on the new fistic star. Tony Zale, who was he? The guy who is going to fight Graziano. Say, Zale's the champ ain't he? These conversations were typical wherever sportsmen gathered.

Tony trained doggedly, unmindful of the huge buildup for his opponent. Graziano was just another fighter to him. Tony was aware of Graziano's crashing right but not afraid of it. The fight was scheduled for July but destined not to come off until September. Zale complained of piercing pains in his ribs. Trainer and managers rushed him to a doctor. The medico called it neuritis but he was only half right. The bout was cancelled and Tony returned to Chicago where the neuritis attack developed into pneumonia.

The postponement only served to wet the appetites of the fans. The champion recovered and September found both contestants training in Stillman's gym, at different hours. As Zale would leave, his future opponent would come hopping up the stairs wearing a polo shirt and trailed by a mob of Dead End looking kids. Tony

7—Fight—Fall



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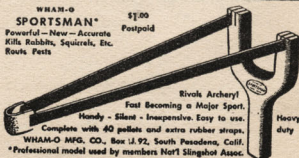
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glanced at the well, built, dark-eyed, gum chewing fighter with the tousled hair. He heard the hoarse, tough voice of the challenger.

There was no sign of recognition between champion and challenger. Zale's cold pale eyes stared straight ahead. Instinctively both knew they would get to know each other soon enough. It was almost as though they could already feel the impending violence of their struggle.

IV

SEPTEMBER 27, 1946. The Yankee Stadium, a clear, bracing autumn night. Two men, one blond, the other black haired, stand beneath the warm glare of lights barely listening to the warning undertone of the referee's instructions. Rocky Graziano's dark eyes gaze at the canvas. Once in awhile he raises his head and glances briefly at the cold, steady stare of Tony Zale.

"Alright, back to your corners and come out fighting." Ex-fighter and now referee Ruby Goldstein says thickly. Never was that phrase more unnecessary than tonight. Zale watches the lights fade like twilight around the stadium. His brothers are sitting out in the mob darkness. Johnny, Wally and Joe. The Zaleski boys from the steel mills of Gary rooting for Tony from the bottom of their hearts. The steel workers who have taken a week end off are lost in the vast expanse of the arena. Aside from his brothers and the workers, very few people believe in Tony Zale, very few have come to see the champion.

The talk is all Graziano. The odds three to one, are all Graziano. The big name sportswriters crowding the ringside have their eyes on Graziano. Tony Zale is aware of the crowd's fascination for his opponent. The champion is a complete underdog. The champion is simply a guy standing temporarily in the way of Graziano's spectacular and certain quest for the title.

It's that way at the bell when Graziano shoves out of his corner while the crowd roar follows him into Tony Zale who waits. Rocky Graziano smashes contemptuously at Zale. No attempt at defense on Rocky's part not one ounce of caution.

The punches hiss from the coiled muscles of the challenger's powerful sloping shoulders. They break like all the furies on Zale's head and torso. The champion moves around, he steps aside, never back, and then all at once he matches blow for blow with Graziano's deadly power. Zale is shaken, his body breaks out into great pink splotches from the challenger's blows.

The crowd screams to their feet. A frenzy of excitement grips the stadium. Rocky Graziano's head is flung back, his torso arches, as the champ rockets an unexpected right uppercut to his jaw. Graziano, bewildered is taking the count! One . . . two . . . three . . . four. Murderous anger clouds the dark eyes of the challenger. Five! Graziano springs to his feet with the savage speed of a jaguar landing on a jungle path.

40,000 voices funnel into a frenzied roar. The mob is swept on the wave of Graziano's furious attack. Rocky would bash Zale's head in with a hammer if he had one. Instead his wine colored gloves churn like leather mallets while the champ stands his ground unflinching, returning as much as he can get through the storm that beats his flesh against his bones.

The wild dark eyes flash before his face. Leather cracks against Zale's head, shoulders, arms, even his wrists. There's no escape from the clubbing cyclone of punches. Zale stands up and trades but it's a losing exchange for the champion.

The bell rings numbly in his ears.

Trainer Joe Neidwick rubs something cold around his neck. Sam Pian and Art Winch are talking. Tony Zale lays his head back against the ropes. He gulps the cool night air. His legs are planted wearily on the canvas. His arms hang loosely at his sides. He usually feels this way at the end of a long, hard, tough contest and it's only the second round coming up!

Graziano shoots from his stool at the bell. The wild dark eyes flash before Tony's face again. Bludgeoning leather booms at Zale and drives him back. The champion draws deep breaths. He must stand right up to Graziano. He must face up to him and trade blow for blow. Resolute, grim lipped, Zale fires back. The fans sit at the edge of their seats. The

smack of leather on hard muscles echoes along the outer rows of the stadium.

Tony rolls beneath the crash of Graziano's right. The champ snorts and gulps. He can feel the tremendous animal energy of Graziano as they bump gloves and shoulders. The unceasing, weighty beat of Rock's fists on his body. Zale squints beneath the lights. Shifting, weaving, tearing at him, that's Graziano, without a vulnerable spot on his tough frame. That right uppercut in the first round was enough to daze a horse but it only served to pour fresh vitality into Graziano.

The steel city slugger is trying desperately to keep up with the challenger. Boom! Graziano's right rams into his head like a crow bar. Tony sees the lights shiver and lurch overhead. He's on the canvas and the crowd faces begin to whirl like a merry go round. Graziano is a blur moving along the ropes. The referee counts to three. Tony is shaking his head. He draws his right glove in a vague gesture across his blood stained mouth. Graziano is coiled on the ropes waiting for the champ to stagger to his feet before he bulls in for the kill. The sharp clang of the bell stops the official's count. Rocky swears and spits on the canvas.

Tony flops on the green stool. Sam Pian speaks with a kind of rapid calm. He's excited but confident that his man will weather the storm. Zale's corner has implicit faith in their man. They've seen Tony come off the deck many times in the past, Hostak, Mamakos, almost had him. But neither of them could hit like this Graziano. Tony's face has never been so cut up before.

Whitey Bimstein taps Graziano's powerful shoulders as the warning buzzer makes the crowd tense. "This is it." Whitey whispers hoarsely. Rocky nods, Zale is scheduled to go out, in this, the third round. The champion is met with a two fisted barrage. He staggers and rolls beneath the punches. Graziano is turning the knockout current on with fierce heat.

Zale tells himself to fight back, but his weary arms are ridiculous weapons against his enemy's rapid-fire dynamite. Tony rolls beneath crude swings and he crouches and

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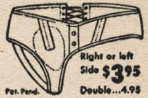
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takes those he can't get away from. He refuses to step back or go down. Graziano is punching at a shifting, weary target held up by stamina and courage alone. The Zaleski boys turn away from the ring and they're not squeamish. The crowd is yelling. "Stop it!" at referee Ruby Goldstein.

The champions face is an inhuman, blood stained mask. The crowd squirms before the sickening, unending chain of Graziano's punches. They gaze in silent awe as Zale throws his shoulders back and marches proudly to his corner at the bell. His battered face is held high, a coldly confident stare still in his eyes. Sam Pian and Art Winch throw their arms around him win or lose they've got a fighter in their corner tonight. A man any manager can be proud of.

GRAZIANO shakes his head in disbelief as he stares across the ring at Zale. His arms are beginning to feel weary from the hundreds of punches he's tossed at the champion. Surely Zale will not be able to weather the fourth. Rocky tears out to renew the onslaught and the plucky champion is there to pick up the challenge. Some of the flame has been taken from Graziano's blows, some of the shock of his power removed through sheer tiredness.

Zale can feel the strength flow into his body again. Long years of clean living and arduous training is paying him back in a pinch like he always knew it would.

Tony brings the crowd to their feet again with a savage rally. Head and body, head and body, Zale drives at his enemy with short, steel packed punches. The blood trickles from Graziano's startled face as the Gary slugger moves in with a vicious, swinging attack. The steel workers shout themselves hoarse in the shadows of the stadium.

The old timers are reminded of Harry Greb and Stanley Ketchell. What a match that would have been had these two great middleweights clashed. And now the argument as to the superiority of each is being settled in replica tonight. Zale is Greb, Graziano is Ketchell, for the old timers.

At the ringside Damon Runyon says,

"I'll take ten to one on Zale." Just three short minutes later the dean of sports-writers reverses his opinion as Graziano turns the tide again in the fifth. See-saw betting around the ringside makes the place look like a panic on the stock exchange. One moment someone holding a fistfull of greenbacks is shouting himself hoarse for Zale only to place his money on Graziano a second later. Nobody knows the outcome of this fight, not even the experts, for there are no experts, everybody is a fan tonight from the gate crashers to the silk hats.

The tide has turned completely against Zale again. His fourth round rally is just a memory. He wobbles without being hit, he staggers from the breeze of Graziano's wild swings. He barely makes it to his corner and falls exhausted on his stool. Only a miracle will carry his blood-flecked body through another session.

Tony is given the last rites. His aching head doused with a bucket of cold water. An ice pack placed at the base of his brain, smelling salts waved beneath his battered nose. Joe Neidwick kneads his leg muscles. Art Winch works on his arms, Sam Pian pulls the elastic band of his trunks out and makes it easier for him to breath. Despite his beaten condition a coldly frozen look of determination is riveted in Zale's eyes. Tony isn't through yet.

Sam Pian can see that. Maybe he can take one more solid punch, or two, or three. Maybe he'll just go out there and hang on to Graziano until the referee stops the fight. But go out there he must. Sam knows his fighter, Tony isn't licked until they've counted ten over him. Sam knows it doesn't make sense but not even Graziano can shatter his faith in Tony Zale. At the bell he keeps telling the others that Tony will win. "You'll see, you'll see, he'll win." Sam repeats blindly. Nothing can diminish his faith in Tony Zale.

The champion has barely moved from his corner when Graziano is in on him again. Zale is a pitiful spectacle, wobbly legged, punching back feebly with nothing but instinct and heart to back him up. The betting is over. The see-saw is coming down at one end with Graziano on top.

Tony's pale eyes narrow. He stares at the vicious curl of his enemy's mouth. The square, battered face of Zale is impassive. Suddenly, with terrible energy, Tony Zale drives a crushing right against Rocky's heart.

Graziano reels, he's concrete tough and doubly dangerous when wounded. Zale clips him on the head with a neat, sharp, shattering left hook. The challenger bounces to a sitting position with one leg curled beneath the other. "One-two-three. . ."

Graziano is resting on one knee. His wild dark eyes are dazed and out of focus; his bloodied lower lip hangs loosely. His arm loops through the lower rope and then his glove reaches up uncertainly for the top strand. Zale is gasping in a neutral corner. Rocky clings to the topmost rope. "Nine-Ten!" he pulls himself up as the referee completes the count. The ring is thick with seconds, officials and policemen. Pian and Winch run to Zale and hug him with delirious joy.

Referee Ruby Goldstein's arms are locked around Graziano for a different reason. The former Dead End kid is a snarling madman. He curses and beats the air wildly with his gloves.

He fights to free himself from the officials grasp in order to get at Zale again. Cordon of policemen close in on him. Goldstein is shouting that the fight is over, he's been counted out. There is no reasoning with the rough, tough, caveman from the slums. Graziano has to be forcibly removed from the ring.

He swaggers up the aisle, red faced, angry, feeling cheated and smarting under the raw wound of his defeat. 40,000 faces stare at him and Graziano is like an enraged bull looking for some object to vent his fury on. Someone nearby cups his hands over his mouth and shouts, "Yellow bum!" Instantly Graziano is ablaze, he breaks through his guard of burly policemen while his tormentor flees towards the bleachers. The slugger from the sidewalks calms down in his dressing room. He looks amazingly fresh as the scribes close in on him and fire questions.

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fight started wasn't nothin'." he waves a bandaged hand for emphasis. "Sure, it hurt. That Zale can hit. But this last one . . ." Rocky tapped his hand over his solar plexus, ". . . it took my wind." He hops from the rubbing table and grabs a towel, "Do I wanna fight him again? Damn right I do!"

The champion, Zale, was unable to speak with the reporters. The excitement in his dressing room reached everyone but Tony. The titleholder lay stretched on a rubbing table. His swollen right hand soaking in a bucket of ice water. His eyes closed, his face nicked with cuts. The doctor kneeled over him and carefully cleaned his mouth wounds. The mob had almost torn him apart as the police fought their way back to his dressing room. In the space of an hour Tony Zale had risen from an unpublicized champion to the status of hero, his name spoken of as often as Graziano's now. No longer would they ask who the middleweight champion was. True, Tony had taken a worse beating than Graziano, but he had delivered the payoff punch and won. Tony could return to Gary now with a heart full of pride while his wounds healed. There was a long winter of rest ahead of the champion before he faced Rocky Graziano again in the spring. The Zaleski family, Adeline his wife, and his two cute daughters, Mary and Terry, would always be at his side. The champion would forget about his brutal struggle with Graziano, the stitches in his mouth, the ache in his swollen right hand, until the spring, when he would have to remember Rocky Graziano again.

V

ROCKY GRAZIANO, the bad boy of boxing, bounced back into the headlines again shortly before his re-match with Tony Zale. Big black ugly headlines that half told the story of a bribe. The Rock had withdrawn from a scheduled Garden clash with Cowboy Reuben Shank. The commission approved of his withdrawal at the time and let it go at that. A month later the headlines screamed from the stands:

GRAND JURY PROBES GRAZIANO BRIBE OFFER

Confused, almost completely bewildered by the courtroom proceedings, Graziano sat between his manager and lawyer while his case was reviewed. He was placed on the witness stand and admitted a bribe offer to lay down for Shank had been proposed in the dressing room of a gym some time back. Graziano said he didn't know who the man was and certainly didn't take the bribe for the fight that never came off. Previously Rocky had blurted quite honestly that he might have accepted a bribe in his earlier fighting days had one been offered him. He said he was broke when he started out and probably would have engaged in a fixed fight had he been approached with enough money.

The dark light of suspicion was cast on Rocky. His brutally frank testimony didn't help him any. In a cleanup drive by the boxing commission Graziano was selected as a number one example. His dishonorable discharge record from the Army was given wide play.

Although Rocky Graziano had never engaged in a phony fight in his career never taken a bribe, and didn't know who the thugs were who had propositioned him, he was banned for life by the New York Commission and its affiliates. The charges leveled against him were failure to report a bribe at the time it happened and his poor Army record which was considered a bad example for youthful followers of boxing.

The proposed March 21st, clash with Zale was driven out of the Garden and New York State. The Twentieth Century Sporting Club sought frantically for a new site. Many states joined New York's outlawing of Graziano and for awhile it looked as though the re-match of the decade might never come off. Chicago finally approved of the match and the Windy City was an ideal spot. The champion had a huge following in Chicago with Gary being right next door.

Zale entered the ring as a favorite for the only time in his series with Graziano. It was a scorching summer night and the

fight was held indoors at the Chicago Stadium. The coffers of the promoters were swelled by an enormous gate of nearly half a million dollars. Fans travelled from both coasts to witness the great middleweight title battle. Graziano's bad publicity had only served to increase the public's curiosity over the second bid of the lawless caveman from the sidewalks of New York.

The champion stepped into the familiar Chicago ring. He was instantly aware of the terrific heat from the new, suped up lighting system. The ring was like an oven, over one hundred degrees beneath those blazing lights. Tony Zale sat quietly and confidently in his corner. Pian spoke briefly of their ring strategy. Rush him, body, head, don't give Graziano a chance to open up and watch that right. Zale nodded. He winked at a friend along the ringside, mopped the perspiration from his brow, and stepped gingerly across the ring at the bell.

Tony's cold pale eyes concentrated on the dark, savage leer that twisted Graziano's face. The challenger was dying to get at him. But he had gathered some respect for Zale's hitting power since their first clash. Tony hammered at his enemy's weaving body. Sharp, short, jolting smashes that made Graziano gasp. The champion rolled expertly beneath the crude slugger's attempts to bash his blond head in with a single crack of his right.

Zale had the situation under control. The Rock constantly missed fire and was beaten off each time he tore at Tony. Zale was certainly a master boxer tonight. He switched to the head with ease and cut Rocky over the left eye with needling rights. Tony drilled rights at the eye until the blood flowed freely. Graziano bounced energetically and awkwardly around the ring and wiped the gore from his eye.

As they slammed at each other during the third stanza Tony felt the unmistakable power of Graziano's blows. He must damage Rocky, cut down on that terrific power. Zale hunched in with his left working like a tiger's paw, silent and fast. Graziano caught a shattering hook and his right

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eye became discolored and swelled instantly. Once more he plugged at Zale, the savage leer still on his face.

The crowd was hypnotized by the grim, gory struggle. The sweating backs of the fighters glistened beneath the blazing lights. Desperate, rib-aching punches echoed around the ringside. No matter who had the edge, the mob knew either one could hit the deck at any moment. Zale flung a lot of weight behind a wicked, curling right. Graziano buckled and struck the canvas. The fans were delirious with excitement, the thunder had burst.

Rocky swept up from the floor at the count of one. A strange, nasty gleam clouded his wild dark eyes. He grinned at Tony Zale with contempt. Is that all you can do chump? The words were written on his face.

It was Tony Zale all the way now. Hooking lefts to the head and body, bearing his curling right hand down on Graziano's battered eyes. The champion's torso was drenched with sweat beneath the burning blaze of lights. The heat was well over one hundred degrees in the smoke choked arena. Graziano, nine years younger than the thirty-three year old steel city slugger seemed little affected by it.

As the bell ended the fifth Zale walked slowly and confidently towards his corner. He lay back against the ropes and breathed heavily. He had been forcing the fight and the pace was beginning to tell. But never for a moment did he doubt his ability to keep pushing the match. His cold pale eyes were calm with assurance. The steel workers shouted at him to keep up the good work from various parts of the hot arena. Zale grinned inwardly. The bets of the Mikes, Joes, Tonys, Steves and Als, from the open hearth furnaces were safe. Gary, Indiana could pull in the sidewalks tonight and celebrate.

Graziano sneered at Tony as they came out for the sixth. A smoldering, savage gleam in his bruised eyes. Sam Pian nodded with approval as Tony pumped a steady stream of lefts at his opponent's body. Once again Zale felt Graziano's raw strength in close and realized the challenger was far from beaten. The champion

trained his fire on the battered eyes of his enemy. The tough, chunky muscled challenger rammed back with vicious lefts.

Zale felt a right crash against his face with sudden fury. Graziano's thumping punches splattered him against the ropes. Graziano was all over him, ripping leather through the air like a madman. Zale's head bounced back like a rubber ball from the fierce jolt of Graziano's rights.

The champion's legs began to give. Wherever he turned Garziano was there, pouring a roaring Niagara of leather in his face. Tony began to lose consciousness. His arms dangled loosely, he wobbled along the ropes, refusing to go down.

He barely heard the roar of the crowd as Graziano drove him against the ropes. The blazing lights whirled before his eyes. The canvas rocked beneath his feet. The mid-rope dug into his waist as he bent double over it. Graziano slashed at him until the referee removed the fury of the former Dead End Kid.

Pian and Winch led Tony back to his corner. The beaten champion shook his head and mumbled something about continuing the fight. Rocky Graziano, the conqueror, was paraded around the ring with his right hand help up. The crowd roared their approval and the beaten Tony Zale was cheered as he passed along the aisle. It was hard for Tony to accept defeat. Almost impossible for him to believe that Graziano had licked him. He complained of the sweltering heat, of the referee's hastiness in stopping the match. The scribes shrugged their shoulders at Tony's alibi. Graziano had broken him with his thunder. The champion was thirty-three, he was old, decrepit, tough yes, game to the core, but unable to stand against the youthful fury of Graziano. It would be a great match, another thrilling contest if he was thrown in with Graziano again, but inevitable that Tony Zale had passed his peak and Graziano was his master.

THE defeated champion returned to Gary. The steel workers, his family and his pals, ever loyal, welcomed him warmly. He was still their Tony, the kid from the mills who had made good. Maybe

the rest of the country didn't believe Zale could lick Graziano in a pay-off match but Gary was behind him, perhaps more out of loyalty than knowledge.


Tony didn't have to fight Graziano again. At last he had made enough money to retire on, the steels mills were safely behind him. He could buy a house in Gary for his wife and children and live peacefully without ever having to go through the grind of gruelling ring warfare again. He was thirty-four now, old for a fighter. Including his amateur days Tony had been pushing leather for nearly eighteen years.

He had beaten several champions, stood up to Billy Conn and knocked out Rocky Graziano. For six years he had been the undisputed middleweight champion of the world. Add this to years of active service in the Navy and you have a fighter who can retire on his laurels. Nobody would have called Tony Zale a quitter if he hadn't faced Graziano for a third time. That is nobody except Tony Zale himself.

The steel city slugger not only thought he could trim Graziano, he was positive of it. Sam Pian and Art Winch were always there to back his confidence. Some quarters criticized Pian and Winch for signing for a third bout. Anybody could see that Tony was an aging fighter. His nose was spread in the center, the flesh above his eyes permanently hammered into twin swellings. His ears were thickening, the boyish look had long since vanished from his face. Tony Zale had the marked features of a veteran who had been to the wars often and long.

When Pian and Winch signed for the rubber match with Graziano they remembered what a lot of people had forgotten. A younger, cruder hitting Tony Zale, quite ferocious beneath the deceptive calm of those cold, pale eyes. A Tony Zale who never quit, who was dead game, a fighter to the core of his knuckles. A man who was always better after he had been licked.

Maybe Zale's face had changed, maybe he was a little older but his fierce courage burned as brightly as ever. His skill and power was greater than it was even though his stamina might lag in a long contest.




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But there never could be a lengthy contest with Graziano. His managers recalled those early days with Tony, and remembering them made them sure they were right in sending Zale in against the dreaded power of Graziano once more.

Sam Pian recalled those early Chicago days. Benny Ray turning Tony over to him.

Young Zale, quietly tough, eager to learn, right hand crazy in those days. Burning with an ambition to make good as few fighters Pian and Winch had ever seen. "He's a great kid," Benny had said, "Even if he gets licked you can be sure he'll lick the pants off his opponent in a return go."

Pian remembered that trip to Youngstown, Ohio with Tony. The Zale kid had picked up a lot since they had taken him over.

He had learned to put punches together in combinations and dropped his right hand crazy stance. Youngstown and Al Wardlow were to be the acid test for Tony. Wardlow was a good boxer, a puncher and a southpaw to boot. Pian said nothing to Tony, "Just go in there and see what you can do." The kid from Gary did plenty. He knocked out Wardlow in three rounds. Pian and Winch were sold for life.

The series with Hostak clinched everything. Tony coming off the canvas to breeze through by a close decision the first time. Flattening Hostak in 13 rounds the second time out. Kayoing him in 2 rounds during their third clash. Tony Zale always improved in a series and Graziano was no exception, Pian and Winch were sure of that. Besides, Tony carried a memory of Graziano's savage, boastful leer around with him. He hadn't forgotten the contempt in the wild dark eyes either. And then there was all of Gary, one hundred thirty thousand strong, praying that their boy from the steel mills would regain his title.

They showed up in Ruppert Stadium, Jersey City, on the cool June night marking the third and final clash of the middleweight feudists. They came in droves, in trains, buses, cars, by planes, the citizens and steelworkers of Gary.

VI

TEN P. M. The ring is cleared. The announcer bellows the names of the contestants. The Tournament of Champions is staging the show instead of Mike Jacobs. If Pian and Winch ever wanted to get back at Uncle Mike for snubbing Tony in the past this was the night to do it.

Rocky Graziano bounces through the ropes. A cocky sneer on his face. He glares at Zale. Rocky is the champion now and he lets Tony know it. Pian, Winch, Ray Arcel and Tony Zale huddle beneath the lights as the referee speaks. Graziano slices the air with anxious gloves. Tony Zale tenses in his corner. This is the crowning fight of his career and he knows it. He drinks deeply of the cool night air. No blazing heat to sap his strength tonight.

He bites hard on his mouthpiece and grinds his toes into the resin. Cold, murderous blue fire sparkles in Zale's eyes. The casually calm, phlegmatic Tony is on edge tonight. He hammers his gloves together and waits anxiously for the bell.

The warning buzzer. Zale is on his feet. Graziano, cocksure, supremely confident, turns his back on the Gary Slugger and waves his glove at a friend. The gong. Zale and Graziano crash head on. Tony jars his enemy with a cracking left, slips beneath Graziano's flailing arms and drives him against the ropes with a relentless two-fisted attack. Rocky sneers and slugs back. Zale's punches are sharply accurate. Graziano's somewhat wild.

Zale tries for a quick kill. Right, left to the jaw, stunning blows. Graziano is dumped on the canvas. He stares wild eyed at the howling mob. One minute of the fight gone and he's taking the count. The sneer comes slowly back again. Tony Zale works his gloves against his trunks and waits for Rocky to come off the deck.

Graziano is up at three. Tony Zale is the unrestrained, mad puncher tonight. He hammers at Rocky with a rolling, shifting, overwhelming attack.

Rocky Graziano, the king-puncher of the middleweights can't stand up to Zale. The steel city slugger drives mercilessly

for a one round kayo. Rocky reels and staggers beneath the leather storm. Lefts jar him to his ankles, rights punch his head back. Baffled, hurt, shocked out of his confidence, Graziano strikes back blindly against the cyclone socking Zale.

The mob roar drowns out the bell. Neither fighters nor referee are aware that the round had ended. Zale anchors a looping right beneath his opponent's heart, beats him back on his heels with a rushing attack before the referee prys them apart and shouts, "The round is over!"

Rocky comes out smoldering for revenge in the next round. A dark flame burns in his eyes, his teeth are bared as he rushed Zale. Tony beats off one attack, counter-punches another, but the fury of Graziano's revenge cannot be denied. The steel city slugger's legs wobble beneath the shattering, unending wave of gloves. Grimly, defiantly, Tony sticks with him. Punch for punch, shoulder to shoulder, Zale stands up to the champion and bends but does not break.

The men in Zale's corner glance at each other with assurance. If Tony can take this he can take anything. The sneers, the snarls, the murderous assault of Graziano will be swallowed by the challenger and hurled back at Rocky in the end. Tony Zale is out to win or die. Rocky Graziano must be beaten along with the steel mills, the early set-backs, the hard, tough road to the top that Tony managed to master. Graziano is as much a part of his past as the present fighter. Rocky represents all the obstacles that Tony had to overcome and Tony Zale must win or die.

Back in his corner Tony snaps through parched lips, "I'll get him in this round, the third. I've got to get him." Arcel tells him to take it easy, be careful. Rocky is always dangerous, even when he's on the canvas, because he gets up twice as mad and hits three times as hard.

The third round, the session in which Tony made one of his rare boasts to sportswriters while training. "The Rock will never get past the third." The mob seems to remember it as they edge forward. Its one round apiece and one fight apiece. Betting is as feverish as it was in

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their first clash. There's no telling which way the tide will turn and who will beat whom.

Zale comes out with the straightest left seen since Gene Tunney's day. It javelins into Graziano's face and shoves him off balance. Once again, with the amazing precision of a Tunney, Tony follows quickly with a bitterly sharp left hook. The kind of blow that stuns and cuts and makes you feel that your opponent is wielding a knife.

Tony bucks his shoulders behind some of the most vicious punches ever tossed by a fighter. Each one is calculated to end the fight, each one carried enough lead to sink a ship. Rocky Graziano is no ordinary mauler. He's hurt, very badly hurt, but the rugged veteran of a thousand street brawls cannot be brought down so easily.

Zale switches to the body. The crowd spills into the aisles. The partisans of both fighters shout frantic advice at them. Graziano is dazed, he goes through the motions of fighting. Instinctively he seeks the ropes for protection. He can hang on the ropes, he can recover on the ropes he can come back from the ropes.

Only Tony Zale won't let him. The Gary slugger tosses everything into a double barreled drive at the head and body. Rocky is broken by the drive and collapses on the canvas. One leg rises disjointedly in the air. One arm is crushed beneath his torso. His eyes half closed, his mouth wide open, he takes the count. Five-six-seven. Rocky is up on his feet again!

TONY pounces at the stricken champion. Graziano whips over a left and leaves himself open for retaliation. Zale misses nothing tonight. He rockets half a dozen beautifully timed punches at the champion. The mob howls as Graziano's legs spread wide. His knees jerk and he bounces on the canvas. His arms curl around his head, the wild dark eyes are dazed and silent.

Zale moves to a neutral corner. His face impassive, his eyes coldly regarding his fallen enemy. The referee sweeps his hand over the prostrate figure of Graziano with

a mournful cry of—ten and out! Tony Zale has succeeded in doing what only the great Stanley Ketchell has ever accomplished. The winning of the middleweight championship from the same fighter he lost it to.

Zale is mobbed as he leaves the ring. A broad grin creases his face. But there is no gloating in the cold pale eyes as he glances back at Graziano. The former dead end kid is a real fighter to the core and Tony has respect for a guy like himself who came up the hard way. The Rock shakes his head bitterly as he passes along the aisle and Tony knows just how he feels.

The steelworkers pour all their winning bets into a basket. One of them is elected custodian of the pooled money and they head for the night spots to celebrate in the name of Tony Zale. A huge parade was staged in the re-crowned champion's honor when he returned to Gary. Tony was back again amongst his wife, kids and family. He came home with the title and he was happy. The Zaleski boys welcomed him with iron handshakes and backslaps. The steel city slugger had earned ring immortality and brought fame to Gary.

Nobody noticed a small item in the paper that day. A sports note from a European ring. A Frenchman by the name of Cerdan had fought a Belgium by the name of Delannoit. Cerdan, the champion of Europe had lost an unfair decision and was going to fight Delannoit again.

Cerdan licked him subsequently and not many people noticed that either. Marcel was well known in American rings, he had fought in the Garden, out of town, he was popular. A stocky, powerfully built middleweight with gold capped teeth, and an odd, perpetual style of fighting coupled with an expert left hook. But how good could this Cerdan be if this Delannoit had given him trouble?

Georges Carpenter, the old time French light-heavyweight champ, arrived with Cerdan and said Zale had better watch out. Chunky Marcel was an exceptionally good fighter, the best France had to offer in years. The Tournament of Champions wanted to know if Winch and Pian would let their world champion defend his title against Cerdan. Winch and Pian knew

of Marcel's ability and they knew Tony Zale's likewise. Still, it was a risky fight, Cerdan was faster, hard to figure, he could make trouble. Tony had just completed a gruelling series with Graziano.

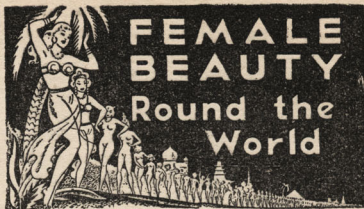
"Sure, I'll fight him," Tony said. "I'm the champ. I've got to defend my title." He figured a champion like himself couldn't have too many fights left in him at the age of thirty-four. The sooner he took on this new challenger, the better. Winch and Pian got Tony \$120,000 for the match. Just in case Tony lost he would be well paid for the effort. Not that they expected him to lose. Zale was a better ringman than Cerdan, he had proved himself against Graziano. While proving himself he had burnt a lot of energy, taken a lot of punches, and he was thirty-four with eighteen long years of glove slinging behind him.

In September, 1948, Tony was back in Ruppert Stadium again. The same ring in which he had humbled Graziano just a few months before. Paul Cavalier, the same referee. Cerdan even looked like Graziano a bit. But the resemblance ended there. The Frenchman was a far cleverer boxer and certainly as rugged.

It was a cold night and Sam Pian wrapped a towel around Tony's blond head to keep him warm. The French boxer and his managers had difficulty understanding the referee's instructions. Cavalier crossed his hand impatiently along Cerdan's waist to indicate the foul line. Neither fighter glanced at the other.

Tony shadow boxed in his corner. He was the champion, the favorite. He appeared to be in magnificent shape although his face showed clearly the battlemarks of the ring. The hammered flesh above the eyes, stitches webbed through his blond brows, scars around his mouth, both ears thickened. Tony certainly looked like the aging, tough fighter that he was.

Cerdan moved deftly at the bell, gloves close to each other. His body was heavy-set, brutally powerful, and yet he moved with the speed of a thin, fast, terribly fast boxer. In a sense there was something unnatural about all that bulk moving with the lithe and grace of a sleek animal. Zale



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paid no attention to Cerdan's shifting speed. He was fighting the Frenchman, not a spectator watching him. Cerdan let Tony do all the leading, most of the fighting in the early rounds.

Every so often the Frenchman would break into a flurry of fast, hitting, vicious counter punching, curling his right, striking his left with deft, deadly fury. Tony blinked his eyes and covered up. As the fight progressed he continued covering up more and more. He still sought the Frenchman with a jab, a hook, sometimes he would risk a swinging right. But Marcel Cerdan was incredibly fast and clever. He let Tony push the fight. He laid back and countered without wasting a motion. His sense of pace was constant. Cerdan's corner had plotted a brilliant strategy. Zale would be made to force things. It had been several years since the champion had gone more than six rounds. Zale would punch himself out while Marcel waited.

The strategy of the Frenchman was precisely the opposite of Graziano's. He blocked patiently, led Tony into false leads, countered with sparkling skill and landed several lefts to the head.

TONY began breathing heavily. The fast, shifting pace was beginning to tell after a few rounds. The blond, battered champion wore a worried frown. Marcel Cerdan was damned elusive. His gloves were glued beneath his chin, he never led, never indicated any move he might make. If it hadn't been for Tony Zale there might not have been any fight to speak of. It was Tony who forced the openings, pushed the action, sought at first with confidence, now with desperation, a clean shot at Cerdan's jaw.

The sixth, seventh, eighth. The fight wore on, the champion stalked and was clouted with short, heavy, breath-taking punches. Zale gasped and hitched up his trunks. He lunged several times and missed. Always Cerdan caught him with shattering left hooks when he missed. The Frenchman punched with frightening speed. Not that Tony was afraid, but there was just no way to get at this man and fatigue was stabbing at his legs.

As the bout pushed into the ninth and

tenth rounds Tony was too tired to try a savage rally as he had done against Graziano. Besides, Cerdan was remarkably crafty. He blocked skillfully with his arms and shoulders while his poised gloves were ready to strike at a split seconds notice. Tony was very tired as the bell sounded for the eleventh. The left hooks, the hooks he never really learned to stop, were piling up against his face and made his eyes tear and his ears ring. Cerdan was a hard puncher, not a one punch hitter like Graziano, but a man who kept adding one blow to another until his opponent was subtracted.

Tony's head ached. He had been staggered several times. The breath was knocked out of him from rattling, snaking blows to the pit of his stomach. His legs dragged over the canvas and his arms were leaden. Then Cerdan opened up with everything he had. The cagey Frenchman dropped depth bombs on Tony's jaw in the form of snapping left hooks and clubbing rights that stunned the senses. Tony wavered near the ropes, then all the lights went out in his brain and he was pitched into darkness.

Smelling salts, ice packs, and the champion came around again only to learn that he was an ex-champion. Tony had collapsed at the bell from sheer exhaustion and the compilation of Marcel Cerdan's steady pounding. The crowd gave the steel city slugger a rousing hand for his game stand. Tony took the loss of his championship philosophically. He was thirty-four, battle scarred, with eighteen years of ring warfare behind him. The Graziano fights had seen him at his peak, the Cerdan loss had seen him sliding down that peak. A man couldn't stay on top forever.

Win or lose, his old pals mobbed him when he returned to Gary. As Tony gazed at the reddish glow of the night sky he knew he had won his greatest fight. The battle to stay out of the steel mills. The fight to make a better life for himself and those who would come after him. He listened to the mournful cry of the factory whistles and he saw the steel laborers going to work with their green lunch pails. The end of one dreary shift, the beginning of another. Nothing had

changed in Gary since he was a kid and first saw the reddish glow in the night sky. Nothing had changed except Tony Zale who had gone far beyond Gary to win fame and fortune in the prize-ring.

Tony, acting on the advice of his manager, his friends, and many sports writers throughout the country, decided to hang up his gloves for good the early part of this year. Good luck, Tony.

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"It was early in 1919 when Dumb Dan Morgan took Battling Levinsky, world light-heavyweight champion, to Canton, Ohio, to fight a ten rounder. On the train I asked Levinsky who his opponent was. The Battler nonchalantly put his hand on my knee and grinned, 'It's some mugg named Greb. I'll take him in a round or two, Packey.'

"On the morning of the fight while Levinsky, Morgan and I were having breakfast, in walked a chap who resembled a Harvard freshman. He was accompanied by his wife, a nifty looking number, and his manager, Reddy Mason. We were then introduced to the 'sucker', Harry Greb.

"He was such a nice fellow I really felt sorry for him. After my own fight on the same card, I rushed from my dressing room to watch the poor kid get stiffened. Instead, Battling Levinsky took an unmerciful mauling. Say, before that fight was over I was weeping for the Battler. From that day on Harry Greb was in a class by himself."

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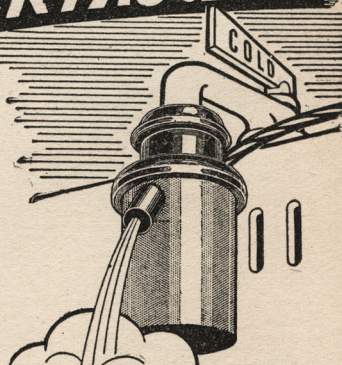
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