
Sailors' Grudge

by

Robert E. Howard

I COME ASHORE AT Los Angeles for peace and quiet. Being heavyweight champion of the _Sea Girl,_ whose captain boasts that he ships the toughest crews on the seven seas, ain't no joke. When we docked, I went ashore with the avowed intention of spending a couple of days in ease. I even went to the extent of leaving my white bulldog, Mike, on board. Not that I was intending to do Mike out of his shore leave, but we was to be docked a week at least, and I wanted a couple of days by myself to kinda soothe my nerves. Mike is always trying to remove somebody's leg, and then I have to either pay for the pants or lick the owner of the leg.

So I went ashore alone and drifted into the resident section along the beach. You know, where all them little summer cottages is that is occupied by nice people of modest means and habits.

I wandered up and down the beach watching the kids play in the sand and the girls sunning themselves, which many of them was knockouts, and I soon found I had got into a kind of secluded district where my kind seldom comes. I was dressed in good unassuming clothes, howthesomever, and could not understand the peculiar looks handed my way by the cottage owners.

It was with a start I heard someone say: "Oooh, sailor, yoo-hoo!"

I turned with some irritation. I am not ashamed of my profession, far from it, but I am unable to see why I am always spotted as a seaman even when I am not in my work clothes. But my irritation was removed instantly. A most beautiful little blonde flapper was coyly beckoning me and I lost no time starting in her direction. She was standing by a boat, holding a foolish little parasol over her curly head.

"Mr. Sailor, won't you row for me, please?" she cooed, letting her big baby blue eyes drift over my manly form. "I just adore sailors!"

"Miss," I said politely, rather dizzy from the look she gave me, "I will row you to Panama and back if you say the word!"

And with that I helped her in the boat and got in. That's me, always the perfect cavalier-- I have lived a rough life but I always found time to notice the higher and softer things, such as courtesy and etiquette.

Well, we rowed all over the bay--leastways, I rowed, while she laid back under her little pink parasol and eyed me admiringly from under her long silky eyelashes.

We talked about such things as how hot the weather was this time of the year, and how nasty cold weather was when it was cold, and she asked me what ship I was on, and I told her and also told her my name was Steve Costigan, which was the truth; and she said her name was Marjory Harper, and she got me to tell her about my voyages and the like, like girls will. So I told her a lot of stories, most of which I got out of Mushy Hansen's dime novel library.

Being gifted with consideration, I did not tell her that I was a fighting man, well known in all ports as a tough man with the gloves, and the terror of all first mates and buckos afloat, because I could see she was a nice kid of genteel folks, and did not know nothing much about the world at large, though she was a good deal of a little flirt.

When we parted that afternoon I'll admit I had fell for her strong. She promised to meet me at the same place next day and I wended my way back to my hotel, whistling merrily.

THE NEXT MORNING found me back on the beach though I knowed I wouldn't see Marjory till afternoon. I was strolling by a shaded nook, where couples often go in to spoon, when I heard voices raised in dispute. I'm no eavesdropper, but I couldn't help but hear what was said--by the man, at least, because he had a strong voice and was using it. Some kid getting called down by her steady, I thought.

--I told you to keep away from sailors, you little flirt!" he was saying angrily. "They're not your kind. Never mind how I know you were with some seagoing dub yesterday! That's all! Don't you talk back to me either. If I catch you with him, I'll spank you good. You're going home and stay there."

This was rather strong I ruminated, and took a dislike right away to this fellow because I despise to hear a man talking rough to a woman. But the next minute I was almost struck dead with surprise and rage. A girl and a man came out of the nook on the other side. Their backs were toward me, but I got a good look at the man's face when he turned his head for a minute, and I saw he was a big handsome young fellow, with a shock of curly golden hair--and the girl was Marjory Harper!

For an instant I stood rooted to the ground, as it were. The big ham! Forbidding a girl to go with me! Abusing sailors! Calling me a dub when he didn't even know me! I was also amazed and enraged at Marjory's actions; she comes along with him as meek as a child and didn't even talk back. Before I could get my scattered wits together, they got into a car and drove off.

Talk about seeing red! And I knowed from this young upstart's build and walk that he was a sailor, too. The hypocrite!

Well, promptly at the appointed time, I was at the place I'd met Marjory the day before, and I didn't much expect her to show up. But she did, looking rather downcast. Even her little parasol drooped.

"I just came to tell you," she said rather nervously, "that I couldn't go rowing today. I must go back home at once."

"I thought you told me you wasn't married," I said bitterly.

She looked rather startled. "I'm not!" she exclaims.

"Well," I said, "I might's well tell you: I heard you get bawled out this mornin' for bein' with me. And I don't understand how come you took it."

"You don't know Bert," she sighed. "He's a perfect tyrant and treats me like a child." She clenched her little fists angrily and tears come into her eyes. "He's a big bully! If I was a man, I'd knock his block off!"

"Where is this Bert now?" I asked with the old sinister calm.

"Over in Hollywood, somewhere," she answered. "I think he's got a small part in a movie. But I can't stay. I musn't let Bert know I've been out to see you."

"Well, ain't I ever goin' to see you again?" I asked plaintively.

"Oh, goodness, no!" she shivered, dabbing her eyes. "I wouldn't dare! It makes Bert furious for me to even look at a sailor."

I ground my teeth gently. "Ain't this boob a sailor hisself?" I asked mildly.

"Who? Bert? Yes, but he says as a rule they're no good for a nice girl to go with."

I restrained an impulse to howl and bite holes in the beach, and said with an effort at calmness: "Well, I'm goin' now. But remember, I'm comin' back to you."

"Oh, please don't!" she begged. "I'm terribly sorry, but if Bert catches us together, we'll both suffer."

Being unable to stand any more, I bowed politely and left for Hollywood at full speed. For a girl who seemed to have so much spunk, Bert sure had Marjory buffaloed. What kinda hold did he have over her, so he could talk to her like that? Why didn't she give him the gate? She couldn't love a ham like that, not with men like me around, and, anyway, if she'd loved him so much, she wouldn't have flirted with me.

I decided it must be something like I seen once in a movie called "The Curse of Rum," where the villain had so much on the heroine's old man that the heroine had to put up with his orneryness till the hero comes along and bumped him. I decided that Bert must have something on Marjory's old man, and was on the point of going back to ask her what it was, when I decided I'd make Bert tell me hisself.

WELL, I ARROVE in Hollywood and like a chump, started wandering around vaguely in the bare hopes I would run onto this Bert fellow. All to once I thought luck was with me. In a cafe three or four men was sitting talking earnestly and there was Bert! He was slicked up considerably, better dressed and even more handsome than ever. But I recognized that curly gold hair of his.

The next minute I was at the table and had hauled him out of the seat.

"Order my girl around, will ya?" I bellowed, aiming a terrible right at his jaw. He ducked and avoided complete annihilation by an inch, then to my utmost amazement he dived under the table, yelling for help. The next minute all the waiters in the world was on top of me but I flung 'em aside like chaff and yelled: "Come out from under that table, Bert, you big yellow-headed stiff! I'll show you--!"

"Bert--nothin'," howled a little short fat fellow hanging onto my right, "that's Reginald Van Veer, the famous movie star!"

At this startling bit of information I halted in amazement, and the aforesaid star sticking his frightened face out from under the table, I seen I had made a mistake. The resemblance between him and Bert was remarkable, but they wasn't the same man.

"My mistake," I growled. "Sorry to intrude on yuh." And so saying, I threw one waiter under the table and another into the corner and stalked out in silent majesty. Outside I ducked into a alley and beat it down a side street because I didn't know but what they'd have the cops on my neck.

Well, the street lights was burning when I decided to give it up. About this time who should I bump into but Tommy Marks, a kid I used to know in 'Frisco, and we had a reunion over a plate of corned beef and a stein of near beer. Tommy was sporting a small mustache and puttees and he told me that he was a assistant director, yes man, or something in the Tremendous Arts Movie Corporation, Inc.

"And boy," he splurged, "we are filming a peach, a pip and a wow! Is it a knockout? Oh, baby! A prize-fight picture entitled 'The Honor of the Champion,' starring Reginald Van Veer, with Honey Precious for the herowine. Boy, will it pack the theayters!"

"Baloney!" I sniffed. "You mean to tell me that wax-haired Van Veer will stand up and be pasted for art's sake?"

"Well, to tell you the truth." admitted Tommy, "he wouldn't; anyway, the company couldn't take a chance on a right hook ruinin' his profile. By sheer luck and wonderful chance, we found a fellow which looks enough like Reggie to be his twin brother. He's a tough sailor and a real fightin' man and we use him in the fights. For close-ups we use Reggie, made up to look sweaty and bloody, in a clinch with the other dub, y'see. We'll work the close-ups in between the long shots and nobody'll be able to tell the difference."

"Who's this double?" I asked, smit by a sudden thought.

"I dunno. I picked him up over in Los Angeles. His first name is--"

"Bert!" I yelled.

Tommy looked kinda surprised. "Yeah, it is, come to think of it."

"Ayargh!" I gnashed my teeth. "I'll be around on the lot tomorrer. I got a few words to say to this here Bert."

"Hey!" hollered Tommy, knowing something of my disposition. "You lay off him till this picture is finished! For cat's sake! Tomorrow we shoot the big fight scene. The climax of the picture, see? We got a real fighter for Reggie's opponent--Terry O'Rourke from Seattle and we're payin' him plenty. If you spoil Reggie's double, we'll be out of luck!"

"Well," I snarled, "I'll be on the lot the first thing in the mornin', see? I don't reckon they'll let me in, but I'll be waitin' for Bert when he comes out."

THE NEXT MORNING found me at the Tremendous Arts studio before it was open. Yet, early as it was, I found a group of tough looking gents collected outside the casting office. They was four of them and one I recognized as Spike Monahan, A.B. mariner on the _Hornswoggle,_ merchant ship, and as tough a nut as ever walked a deck.

"How come the thug convention, Spike?" I asked.

"Ain'tcha heard?" he responded. "Last night Terry O'Rourke broke his wrist swingin' at a bouncer in a night club and we're here to cop his job. Not that I care for the money so much," he ruminated, "but I want the job uh mussin' up Reggie Van Veer's beautiful countenance."

"Well, you're outa luck," I said, "because they're usin' a double."

"No matter," said all the tough birds, "we craves to bust into the movies."

"Boys," said I, taking off my coat, "consider the matter as closed. I've decided to take the job."

"Steve," said Spike, spitting in his hands, "I have nothin' agin' you. But it is my duty to the nation to put my map on the silver screen and rest the eyes of them fans which is tired of lookin' at varnished mugs like Reggie Van Veer's, and craves to gaze upon real he-men. Don't take this personal-like, Steve."

So saying, he shot over a right hook at my chin. I ducked and dropped him with an uppercut, blocked a swing from another thug and dropped him across Spike with a left hook to the stummick.

I then turned on the other two who was making war-like gestures, stopped a fist with my eye and crashed the owner of the fist with a left hook to the button.

The fourth man now raised a large lump on my head with a glancing blow of a blackjack, and slightly irritated, I flattened his nose with a straight left, jarred loose a couple of ribs with a right, and bringing the same hand up to his jaw, laid him stiff as a wedge.

Spike was now arising and noting the annoyance in his eye and the brass knuckles on his left hand, I did not wait for him to regain his feet but dropped my right behind his ear while he was still in a stooping position. Spike curled up with a cherubic smile on his frightful countenance.

I then threw my coat over my arm and went up to the door of the casting office and about this time it was opened by a small man in spectacles.

"Who are you?" he asked with some surprise, his gaze fixed on my fast blackening eye.

"I'm your new boxer," I answered gently, "takin' the place of Terry O'Rourke."

He looked puzzled.

"I know we sent the word out rather late last night," said he, "but I rather expected several men to be here, from which we could choose."

"They was four other fellers," I answered, "but they decided they wouldn't wait."

He looked past me to where the four galoots was weaving uncertainly off the lot, and he looked back at me and shuddered slightly.

"Come around next month," said he. "We're shooting a jungle picture then."

I didn't get him, but I said: "Well, you ain't tryin' to tell me I don't get this job, are you?"

"Oh, no," he said hastily. "Oh heavens, no! Come right in!"

I FOLLOWED HIM and after winding in and out among a lot of rooms and things I

didn't know the use or meaning of, we come into a place which was fixed up like a big stadium, seats, ring and everything. It was still very early, but already swarms of extras was coming in and being arranged in the seats.

The head director come bustling up and looked me over. He acted like he was about half cuckoo and I don't wonder, what with all the noise and the confusion and fellows running up every second to ask him about lights, or sets or costumes or something.

"What's your name?" he snapped. "You look like a fighter. Where're you from?"

"Steve Costi--" I began.

"All right--listen to me. You're Battling O'Hanlon, champion of the British Isles, see? Reggie Van Veer is the champion of America and you're fighting for the title of the world, see? Of course we have a double for Reggie. After we shoot the fight, we'll take some close-ups of you and Reggie in the clinches and run them in at the proper places. Tommy, take this man to the dressing room and fix him up."

Tommy Marks come up on the run and when he seen me, he stopped short and turned pale. He motioned me to follow him, but when I started to speak to him he hissed: "Shut up! I don't know you! I can see where you crumb the deal some way and if it looks like we're friends, I'll lose my job! They'll think I put you up to it!"

Seeing his point, I said nothing and he led me into a dressing room, where I allowed him to smear some kind of goo on my face and touch up my eye brows. I couldn't see that it improved my looks any, but Tommy said it didn't do them any damage because nothing could. I put on the swellest pair of trunks I ever wore and Tommy knotted a British flag about my waist which struck me funny because while I'd often fought men wearing that flag, naturally I'd never thought I'd ever wear it myself. I tried to make him put the flag of the Irish Free State on me instead, but he said they didn't have one. He then give me a fine silk bath robe to put on and so accoutered I sallied forth.

I heard a wild roar as I opened the dressing room door and peeking carefully forth, I saw Reggie Van Veer striding majestically down the aisle, dressed even sweller than I was. Two cameras was grinding away and the director was howling his lungs out, and the crowd of extras in the seats was jumping and whooping just like a fight crowd does when the favorite comes down the aisle.

He clumb into the ring with a swarm of seconds and handlers, and then Tommy told me to go into the ring. I come swaggering down the other aisle with a bigger gang than his behind me, carrying enough towels and buckets to fit out a army. I was astonished at the pains the movie people had took to make things realistic. I don't know how many extras was being used, but I saw right off that I'd never fought before a bigger crowd even in the real game itself.

I climbed through the ropes, following the instructions which the director yelled at me. I

was kind of surprised. I'd always thought they was a lot of rehearsing to do. The referee called us to the center of the ring and they took a close-up of Reggie shaking hands with me, then the cameras quit grinding and Reggie skipped out of the ring, and in come-- Bert! He was dressed just like Reggie had been and I was again struck by their strange resemblance.

"Now, then," bellowed the director, "this is going to be one picture that's going to look real! That's why I haven't rehearsed you boys. Go in and fight like you want to, so long as it's a fight! We got the ring well covered and can take you at any angle, so don't worry about getting out of range. This is going to be something new in pictures!"

"Now, forget you're actors for the time being. Get into your solid skulls that you're fighters, like you've always been! Make this real! Put everything you got into it for four rounds. Then, Bert, when I yell at you in the fifth round, you step back and shoot your left to the body. Steve, you drop your guard and then Bert, you crash the right to the jaw! And don't you pull the punch! I want this to be real. Steve, you drop when the right lands--"

I was thinking I'd be very likely to, anyway!

"I ain't going to have no knockout blows landing on the shoulder. The fight fans that see the shows have got so they spot 'em. This is going to appeal to those fans! If you boys get any teeth knocked out or noses broken, you get extra money. All right, get to your corners, and when the gong sounds, come out like they was a grudge between you!"

I COULD ASSURE him of that. I'd been watching Bert from under my lids while the director was talking. He stripped well and from his manner I knowed he was at home in a ring. He was broad-shouldered and lean-hipped and his muscles rolled beautifully. He was about six feet, one inch, and would weigh, I guess, a hundred and ninety-eight pounds, which was a inch taller and eight pounds heavier than me. Altogether he looked a lot like these Greek gods people rave about, but his firm square jaw and steely gray eyes told me I had my work cut out for me.

Well, the gong sounded and we went for each other. I wanted to give him fair warning, so I ducked his left and clinched.

"Never mind what that director cluck said," I snarled in his ear. "One of us is goin' out of here on a stretcher! I got your number, you big ham!"

"I don't even know you," he growled, jerking loose.

"You will!" I grinned savagely, throwing my right at his head with everything I had. He come back with a slashing left hook to the body and then we didn't have no more time for polite conversation.

This boy was fast, and cleverer than me, but he liked to mix it, too. He followed that left

hook with a crashing right. I blocked it and landed hard under the eye, then went into a clinch and clubbed him with my right until the referee broke us.

We traded rights to the head and lefts to the body and he brought up a sizzling uppercut which might of tore my head off, hadst it landed. I buckled his knees with a right hook under the heart and he opened a cut under my left eye with a venomous straight right.

He then backed away, sparring and working for my wounded eye with a sharp-shooting left. Much annoyed, I followed him about the ring and suddenly dropped him to his knees with a smashing right cross to the side of the head. He bounced up without a count and flashed a straight left to my sore eye, following it instantly with a right uppercut to the body. I missed a looping right, landed with my left, took two straight rights in the face to sink my left hook into his belly, and he went into a clinch. We worked out of it and was fighting along the ropes at the gong.

By this time the extras was whooping in earnest and the director was dancing with joy and yelling for us to keep it up. I growled and flashed a meaningful look across at my dancing partner and from the way he bared his strong white teeth at me, I knowed that the director was going to have his wish.

He come out at the gong like a wildcat and had rammed a straight left to my wind and two straight rights to my face before I could get collected. I came back with a wicked right hook under the heart, and missed with the same hand for the jaw. He had evidently decided his straight right was his best ace, for he kept shooting it over my guard and inside my looping left hook. Enraged, I suddenly slipped it, let it go over my left shoulder, and crossed my left hard to his jaw.

He grunted, and I sank my right deep into his ribs before he could recover his balance. He fell into a desperate clinch and hung on, shaking his head to clear it. The referee broke us, and Bert, evidently infuriated, crashed a haymaking right swing to the side of my head which knocked me into the ropes on the opposite side of the ring. As I come out of them, still dizzy, he was on me like a enraged wildcat and lifted me clear off the floor with a slung-shot right uppercut. Now it was me that clinched and it took all the referee's strength to tear us apart.

Bert fainted a straight right again, then shot his left to my heart. I missed a right, got in a good left and then the gong sounded.

AS I SET on my stool and my handlers and seconds went through a lot of motions which wasn't needed, I glanced out over the crowd. My heart give a leap right up into my mouth! On the first row, ringside, sat Marjory!

She was staring at the ring, rather pale. I give her a grin to show she needn't worry about me, but she just looked back kind of frightened. Poor kid, I reckoned she wasn't used to such tough work and was afraid Bert would hurt me. I chuckled gayly at the thought and felt a deep feeling of satisfaction, that she should see me give the big ham the lamming he

deserved.

The gong!

Bert come out kind of cautious. He feinted a left, swung his right at my head, missed and backed away. I followed him rather carelessly, ducking another right swing. I thought, the next time he does that I will block it with my left and step in with a right to the jaw. Well, he swung his left, then his right and mechanically I threw up my left to block it. Too late I noticed that he had changed his position in a curious manner and was a lot closer to me than he ought to be. *_Bam!_* I was on the canvas feeling like my midriff was caved in.

As I got my legs under me, I realized he'd played the old Fitzsimmons shift on me. As he swung his right for a feint, he'd stepped forward with the right leg which brought him inside my guard and in position to drive in a terrific left-hander to the solar plexus. Well, he done so, and it's a good thing for me he didn't land just where he wanted to, and that he didn't have old Fitz's trick of shooting in bone-crushers from a few inches. If he had, I'd still been out.

Well, I got up at nine, Bert rushing in eager-like to finish me. I snapped my right to his jaw and stopped him in his tracks, and followed with a left hook to the body which he partially blocked. Any man which had ever fought me could of told him that I, like most sluggers, was most dangerous when groggy. He seemed rather discouraged and played safe for the rest of the round, which was rather slow, as I wasn't in no mood to push things, myself.

On my stool I cast a jovial grin at Marjory but she didn't seem to be enjoying the game much. Poor kid, I thought, the sight of me on the canvas was too much for her tender little heart. I bet, thought I, that girl is as good as mine, right now.

So it was with visions of wedding rings and vine covered cottages dancing in my head that I went out for the fourth round. Almost instantly these beautiful visions was shook out of my head by a severe right hook and I settled down to the business at hand. Bert was inclined to end matters quick and we traded wallops toe to toe till the ring was swimming before my eyes and I could see from the glazed look in Bert's eyes that he wasn't in no better shape. We then went into a clinch and leaned on each other, shaking our heads till they was partly clear again.

Then Bert started working his old reliable straight right until I give a roar of rage, dived under it and sank my left hook into his midriff, bringing up a right from my knees that would of ended the fight had it landed. In a wild mix-up we both slipped to the canvas, but was up in a second, Bert closing my eye tight as a drum while I battered him with terrific body blows.

Baring his teeth at me, he shot a right to my bobbing head and suddenly bounded back from my return. We had got close to the ropes and he bounded right against them. The

next thing he bounced off of them right into me. I'd never seen a heavyweight try that trick before and he caught me off my guard. His right crashed against my chest and I hit the canvas so hard my feet flew straight up and I thought I'd go on through the boards.

But it was the force and weight of the blow that knocked me down; I didn't fall because I was stunned or badly hurt. I was up at the count of nine and opened a cut over Bert's eye with a wild right. I didn't think he'd try that bouncing trick so quick again and he nearly fooled me there. This time he drew my left, jumped back, hit the ropes and came for me so quick I didn't have time to think. By instinct I side-stepped and met him in mid-air with a right hook to the jaw. _Crash!_ He hit the canvas and rolled over and over. I ran back to the farthest corner, but it didn't look like anybody could get up after a wallop like that. But this Bert was a tough baby. The crowd wasn't yelling now.

At seven he had his legs under him and at nine he come up, wobbly, rubber-legged and glass-eyed, still full of fight. I hesitated; I hated to hit him again, but then the thought come of what he'd said about me, and how he'd bullied poor little Marjory and the way he'd abused sailors. I heard the director yell as I shot across the ring, but I paid no heed.

Bert tried to clinch as I came in, but I dropped him face down with a right hook to the jaw. The crowd began to howl and bellow as I went back to the corner, and through the noise I heard the director, who was jumping up and down and tearing his hair. He was yelling: "Bert, get up! Hey, hey! Get up, for cat's sake! If you get knocked out, you'll rooin the picture."

Bert give no sign of obeying and the director howled: "Sound the gong and drag him to his corner! The round's half a minute to go, but the movie fans won't know the difference!"

This was done, much to my disgust and the director began to yell caustic remarks at me.

"Aw, shut up!" I growled. "You said make it real, didn't you?" So he shut up. Well, I was kind of bothered about hitting Bert and him so near helpless, but it's all in the game; he'd of done the same thing to me, and I remembered that he was blackmailing old man Harper and holding Marjory in the grip of his hand--or why else did she take so much off him? So I decided that I ought not to worry over a black hearted villain like Bert, but go out and knock his head off.

THEY GIVE AN extra long time between rounds, to give Bert time to recover and his handlers was working like mad over him. At last I saw him shake his head, then raise it and glare across the ring at me like a hungry tiger. The director was yelling instructions.

"All right now, remember! When I yell: 'Now!' Bert, you shoot the left to the body and you, Steve, drop your guard."

The gong! We rushed together and Bert clinched and gripped me like a gorilla.

"I want to know if you're going to flop this round according to schedule?" he hissed in my ear.

"Be yourself!" I snarled. "Forget that director cluck! This here's between me and you! I'm goin' to lay you like a rug!"

"But what you got it in for me for!" he snarled bewilderedly. "I never saw you before?"

"Aragh!" I roared, jerking loose and whizzing a terrible right past his jaw. He came back with a hard left to the body and another to the jaw while I planted a wicked right under the heart. He threw a right which went over my shoulder, and falling into me, clinched and tied me up.

"You see that little blonde in the first row?" I hissed. "I heard you abusin' and bullyin' her, and if you want to know, that's why I'm goin' to knock you into her lap!"

He shot a quick glance in the direction I jerked my head, and a bewildered look came over his face.

"Why, that girl--" he began, but just then the referee pulled us apart.

"Now, Bert!" howled the director, "shoot the left! Steve, be ready to flop!"

"Baloney!" I snarled over my shoulder, and stuck my own left into Bert's eye. He retaliated with a terrific right to the ribs and the director, sensing that something was going on which wasn't according to schedule, began to leap up and down and tear his hair and doin' other foolish things like cussing and weeping and screaming. But the cameras kept on grinding and we kept on slugging.

Following the right to the body, Bert swished a left which glanced from my head and I crashed a right under his heart. My continual body punching had begun to take the steam out of him, but he made one more rally, landing two blows to my one, but mine had much more kick behind them. Suddenly I threw everything I had into one ferocious burst of slugging. I snapped Bert's head back with a left uppercut I brought from my knees, and crashed my right under his heart. He staggered and I shot my right twice to his head--hooked a left under his heart and crashed another right flush to the jaw. They'd been coming so fast and hard that Bert, in his weakened condition, couldn't stop them. The last right lifted him off his feet and dropped him under the ropes, right in front of Marjory, who had leaped to her feet, with both her little hands pressed to her cheeks, and her pretty mouth wide open.

The referee mechanically started counting, but it was unnecessary. I strode over to my corner, took my bathrobe from the limp hands of a dumfounded handler and was about to climb out of the ring, when the director, who had thrown himself on the ground and was biting the grass, came to life.

"Grab that idiot!" he howled. "Tie him up! Soak him! Get a cop! He's crazy! The picture's rooint! We're out heavy money! Grab him! If I got a friend in court, I'll send him up for life!"

"Aw, stand away!" I growled at the menials who approached me uncertainly, "this was a private matter between me and Bert."

"But it's going to cost us more than we can afford to pay!" wailed the director, plucking forth strands of his scanty locks and tossing them recklessly on the breeze. "Oh, why didn't you perform according to instructions? The first four rounds were pippins! But that finish--oh, that I should live to see this day!"

WELL, I FELT sorry for him and kind of wished that I'd waited and licked Bert outside, but I didn't see what I could do. Then up rushed Tommy Marks. He began yanking at the director's sleeve.

"Say, boss," he yelled, "I got a great idea! We'll cut that last round at the place where Bert got knocked down the last time! Then we'll start a scene with Reggie Van Veer, see? Splice the shots together--they can fix it in the cutting room, easy!"

"Yeah?" sniffed the director, wiping his eyes. "I should throw Reggie in with that man-eater. He's crazy; I think he's the maniac that tried to kill Reggie down-town yesterday."

"I thought he was Bert," I said.

"And listen," cried Tommy, "the shot will show Reggie getting up off the canvas slowly, with Steve waiting in his corner. Then Steve rushes out, Reggie meets him with a right to the jaw and Steve flops! A sensational k.o. at the end of the greatest fight ever filmed! See? Reggie won't even get hit at all. And nobody can tell the difference."

"Well, how'll I know this cave man won't take a notion to flatten Reggie when he gets him in the ring?"

"Aw, he's got nothin' against Reggie, have you, Steve? That was a private feud between him and Bert, wasn't it, Steve? You'll do it, won't you, Steve?"

"All right," muttered the director. "We'll try it, but don't rush at Reggie too ferociously or he'll jump clean out of the ring."

I had listened to this talk with much impatience. I wanted to square myself with the movie people and was willing to do what I could, but just now I had other business. I signified my willingness to do what they wanted me to do, then I hurried over to the seat where Marjory sat. She was not in it, and I seen her following close behind the handlers which was taking the still groggy blonde battler to his dressing room.

I hastened to her and laid a gentle hand on her little shoulder.

"Marjory," I said, "fear that big fellow no more! I have avenged us both! He will not be apt to bother you again! Tell your old man not to be afraid, no matter what this big flop has on him! Bert will not come between true lovers again, I bet you!"

To my utter amazement and horror, she turned on me with flashing eyes.

"What kind of gibberish are you talking?" she cried furiously. "You big brute! If you ever speak to me again, I'll call a policeman! How dare you speak to me after what you've done to poor Bert? You beast! You villain!"

And with that she swung her little hand and slapped me smack in the face, then with a stamp of her little foot and a burst of tears, she run forward and gently slipped one of Bert's arms about her slim shoulders, cooing to him gently.

I stood gaping after them like a fool, when Tommy pulled my sleeve.

"Hey, let's get on that shot, Steve."

"Say, Tommy," I said, a bit dazed as I followed him, "you see that little dame that belted me in the map just now? Well, what's that bozo, to her?"

"Him?" said Tommy, biting off a chew of tobacco. "Oh, nobody much--just only merely nobody but her big brother!"

At that I let out a howl that could of been heard in Labrador, and right after that I have to act as nurse to Tommy, he havin' swallowed his tobacco when he hears me yap.

Anyhow, I learned you never can tell when women is holdin' something out on you.

THE END

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