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A Fighting Chance

by Ryan Corrigan

(English 1101)

The car pulled to the curb and the door swung open. I clambered inside with my duffel bag, my sweatshirt hood pulled low over my face. It was a cool September evening outside, the smell of the river on the air, and the sounds of downtown Davenport echoed through the streets. The smell of the cab driver's cigarette hit me as I buckled my seat belt. In a raspy tone he asked me for my destination; I informed him I was going to the Amsterdam Club. The drive was taken in complete silence, the kind that makes your hair stand up on the back of your neck. The driver slowed the cab as we approached the entrance to the club and I climbed out. The walk into the club was cold, but quick, and I was relieved when I entered and I felt the warm burst of air.

The smell of cigarettes, sweat, and spilt beer floated around the entranceway like a lingering mist clinging to the roadway on a cool spring evening. I was squinting in the low light, looking around confused, wondering where I was supposed to go, like a deer staring into the headlights of an oncoming semi-truck, when a short, heavyset man directed me down the hallway that led to the changing room for this evening's fighters. Men and women of all different builds lined the hallway, some talking in excitement, others standing silent, preparing themselves for their match. Each one of them had a gleam in his eye, the kind of shine that symbolizes a love for something, much like the gleam in the eyes of two long separated lovers. I turned to observe at a peculiar looking individual, covered in tattoos from head to toe, and accidentally bumped into a giant of a man. He was the kind of person who makes the gentle green giant look like one of Snow White's seven dwarfs. I politely apologized and made my way around him to the locker room.

I procured an empty locker and put my bag in there. I was in the seventh and final fight that night, so I would be fighting around ten forty-five. The time was only nine. I took my iPod out of my bag and slid the headphones into my ears. The sounds of Slipknot and Marilyn Manson flooded into my head, entirely cutting me off from the outside world. I removed the roll of tape from my pocket and proceeded to wrap my hand; my fingers were trembling with excitement as well as fear as I thought about my upcoming match. Even though I had the volume turned all the way up on my headphones, I could still here the booming voice of the announcer. I couldn't quite make out what he said but a few of the fighters wandered toward the door that led to the ring so I assumed the first fight was about to start. I checked my cell phone; the time was nine fifteen. I got comfortable on a seat, set my cell phone alarm for ten-fifteen, and closed my eyes.

I must have fallen asleep because in what seemed like five minutes my cell phone alarm was going off. I silenced the alarm and put the phone in my locker. I took my sweatshirt off and began to stretch. I walked myself through my breathing exercises and tried to visualize myself winning. I stretched out my legs and my arms. I put my iPod back on and practiced my punching form. My head was flowing freely with thoughts of the events that were about to take place. The ring girl walked into the locker room to let me know that my fight was next. Her name was Amanda; she was in my philosophy class. I pulled my tank top over my head, removed my warm-up pants and quickly folded my clothes and put them in my locker. I made my way down the hallway barefoot, the cold concrete numbing all sensation in the sole of my foot. I walked up to the doorway that led to the ring and asked one of the fighters who had already finished his match to tighten my gloves for me. As the participants from the current fight exited the ring, I could feel my heart start to pump in exhilaration, as if I was preparing to leap out of an airplane into the daunting darkness that is the night sky. The

kid I was fighting was six feet tall and weighed in at one hundred forty pounds; he was a lean wiry fellow. He looked like the starved and beaten inmate in an Eastern Europe prison. I however weighed in at one hundred and seventy-five pounds and was five foot eight. I had heard from others that he didn't hit hard, but that he had a devastating reach and excelled in ground fighting. If I was to win I would have to keep him on his feet and go punch for punch hoping for a knockout. If this fight went to the ground, he would undoubtedly win. The announcer looked to each of us to affirm we were ready for the fight. We both nodded and prepared to enter the ring. The announcer gave his little speech and introduced the two of us; the crowd roared in drunken cheers and applause, like gladiators in ancient Rome lusting only for blood, violence, and to be entertained. We both stepped into the ring and walked to our corners. The referee called us to the center, he explained the rules and we tapped gloves. The next time the bell rang we would come out swinging.

The first bell sounded and I stepped towards my opponent. We circled each other for a moment and he initiated contact with a quick, low kick to my shin. I took it in stride allowing him to gain a point advantage on me. The next time he went for a kick I countered by stepping forward and striking his face with a jab. His head snapped back and there was an audible crunching noise. When he brought his head forward again, there was blood flowing from his nose. My moment's distraction was enough for my opponent to hit me with a right cross that sent me into the ropes. The top rope caught me in the gut knocking the wind out of me. As I turned to face my opponent again, I was gasping for air. I could taste the bitter flavor of blood in my mouth and it made me nauseous, like I had just ridden a rollercoaster numerous times in a row. The anger that had been brought forth from my carelessness seemed to resonate into my arms, turning me more into an animal and less of a man. I stepped strongly towards my opponent and struck with a quick uppercut to his jaw. The height difference between us took the power off my punch and he merely stumbled back. I took that time to advance forward. When he collected himself I sent a left cross right into his jaw. He turned and spit a tooth out. Wallowing in my own pride for those two hits was a mistake. He caught my ribs with his right leg, and then came down and up with an uppercut of his own. This even exchange continued for the entirety of the round. When the bell tolled, we walked back to our corners. By this time my right eye was swollen shut, my lip was split and my nose was bleeding.

When the bell rang again my opponent and I shuffled to confront each other once again. Up until this point I had been performing fairly well. My opponent's kicks felt like I was being struck across the shins with baseball bats, but my punches devastated him each time I made contact. On one particular kick attempt my opponent made however, he turned the tide to his favor. I crouched to catch his kick, hoping to get him in a limb lock; however he managed to retract his leg and catch me on the ground. He hooked his arm around my neck and took me to the ground. I managed to scramble out of his hold and wrap my arms around his throat. However, being the wiry little man he was, he wormed out of my hold. At this point he was on top of me, effectively pinning me to the ground. I brought my arms to try to cover my face but I was too late. His punches felt like multiple freight trains plowing into my face. It was a matter of seconds before I lost consciousness.

When I came to I was in the locker room being treated by the very attractive on staff EMT. She made sure I was OK to leave and let me sign a release. I gathered my belongings from my locker, grabbed a beer from the locker room's mini-fridge and headed out into the cold air. It took me an hour to walk back to my dorm at St. Ambrose University and the walk had given me a chance to think. Even though I had lost tonight, I had enjoyed the experience and vowed to not give up. I would participate in fifteen fights in total before leaving St. Ambrose. At the end of the semester I had an impressive fight record of 11-4 and a not so impressive .8 GPA. My late Thursday night bouts of violence had made it nearly impossible to make my Friday classes and I had ditched every study group in favor of training in the gym. I had also visited the Davenport Medical Clinic eighteen times, twice for broken ribs. When I left St. Ambrose I may not have had a degree, but I had certainly learned some valuable lessons.