

Sentiment and Socks

By JAMES A. GARNER

Continued from Page Four

Are you goofy or something?"

"Aw, you don't understand. You see, she got me the drug store job so I would be something she liked. And I took it so that she would like me," my lad replied as he pulled on his coat.

"Wait a minute, Kid; let me get this thing right. This dame gets you a soft job. You like her and want her to like you. You come up here to fight and make me keep your name secret so that the folks back home won't know, and then you tell this skirt where you are. She comes and sees you get a cut. Now you are trying to tell me it is all off. For the love of good cheese, tell me the straight of it. Will you?"

"Tain't nothing much," he began, but by the time he had finished I had learned that the lady in question could get the truth out of him when his mother could not.

He told me of that last evening he had spent with her in Baltimore and how he had kept his whereabouts a secret until he became lonesome for her.

He simply had to hear from her so he wrote her a letter. Then to his surprise and dismay, she came to New York to see him the very day he was supposed to box. He had to explain. Then she came to see him box

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and he knew she disapproved of his ever entering the ring again.

"There's no use of your feeling so badly about all that," I told him.

"See, I knew you wouldn't understand," he chided me. "This girl and I are the best of friends and I don't want anything—"

There was a great disturbance outside and amid it I could hear the high pitched voice of a woman.

"Take your hands off of me!" she yelled at some one, "I'm going in and see for myself that he isn't hurt."

A sudden start by Johnnie caused me to look at him. His eyes were fastened on the door. His hand brushed lightly over the cut jaw. Then a smile came across his lips and a twinkle in his eyes as he took his hat and started for the door. With his hand on the knob he bowed and in departing said:

"You and I have been the best of friends. I thank you for all that you have done for me. I will see you later and try to make you understand." Then glancing around the room at the rest he grinned and said, "Well, good night, boys, see you later." And he was through the door and amid the cheers of those admirers who will gather after a fight is over.

I had just gone to my rooms and was getting settled behind one of those celebration cigars, the kind we love so well but only smoke after something has happened to exceedingly please us. Then the phone rang. I let it ring a second time, when a knock came at the door. I opened the door first. I felt more like talking to some one near than at a distance.

"How do you do? When I heard the phone ringing I had a fear that you had not returned yet." It was Ben, the person whom I had induced to promote the bout. He went on in his own progressive manner. "I was here before but you were not in. The clerk told me you had returned so I had him ring to tell you I was on my way up. Don't like to talk in lobbies, you know."

"I really feel honored," I told him. "It is usually managers who go to the promoters." I would have offered him a seat but he was already in the easy chair in which I had intended to enjoy my cigar.

"That tip you gave me about your boy was all right; but what leaked out about Dorsey putting McKay away was better. Was that your work?" Ben asked with a devilish twinkle in his eyes.

"No, I did not know a thing until tonight," I informed him.

"Maybe. But let me tell you this before it busts me open. That information got to the gamblers and made Dorsey a big favorite. Naturally, of course. Your boy had been champion of the South, but that did not mean much to them. Anyway, I took your word for what it was worth and placed a little on the short end." He reached in his pocket and produced a pack of bills. "Here," he went on, "is a little present for you and the boy. Only fifteen hundred, but it's half of my winnings on your tip."

I was abashed. Ben had paid us our money when Johnnie entered the ring; but here he was giving us an unexpected bonus, as it were, from his profits.

"I'm going to give this to the kid," I said with enthusiasm.

"Oh, I didn't mean to insult you with such a paltry sum." Ben apologized, "I only meant to give you half of what I made on the tip."

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"I ain't insulted, Ben. I'm pleased, and it will be very encouraging to the boy."

"Good! I got something to encourage him more than that."

"What is it?" I asked eagerly for I could think of nothing better than money.

"A chance for the lightweight championship of the world."

"Lightweight championship! But my boy only weighs twenty-six."

"Then he won't have to bother about the weight."

"Can you get McKay to agree to that?" I asked.

"Personally, I believe McKay would rather fight any man in the world than Dorsey. I'll tell him your boy is easy." Ben winked.

"You talk it over with him nice and quiet like and I will get my boy to look at the pot of gold. Very few men have had a chance to step from the dark into a world's championship in two fights."

"Guess that's all. But before I go let me tell you, that boy of yours is the class of them all at his weight. Good night."

He was gone. It all seemed like a dream—a pleasant dream in which I wished to continue to drift. I counted the money then gave myself a shake to see if the fight was yet in the offing. Gosh, what a night! From salesman and manager of an unknown fighter to salesman and manager of the man who beat the man who had beaten the champion!

It was all too good to last. Would it be when Johnnie climbed through the ropes to meet the champion? No, my friends, sooner, much sooner, than that.

The next morning as I lay ruminating over the events of the night before, the phone rang and disturbed the pleasantness.

"Yes. This is he." I answered.

"Send him up," I finished.

Two minutes later John Larkins stood before me. Until now there had been something admirable in his frank gaze. But now as he stood there looking, not at me, but past me, I sensed something wrong.

"What is it, boy? Say it." I broke the silence.

"It's nothing but this." He replied pushing toward me the morning paper.

I took it and read the lines over the fight. Then the paragraphs that followed. "They don't do you justice." I offered as I was in the act of returning the paper.

"I don't mean the fight," he grumbled. "Look over in the fourth column." I did.

Ben had not lost a minute in starting paper work for what he thought would surely be Larkins' next bout. There was a column devoted to the wonderful work of my boy and its text was a neat and undeniable challenge to the lightweight champion of the world, McKay.

"That's good," I said when I had finished. "All you have to do now is to keep in condition and you will be the second man to bring home the bacon to Baltimore."

"When I was a kid, I had but one purpose in life and that was to beat the man who had beaten Gans. Later that aim grew to be, beat any man who had beaten a champion. Last night I did that. Now I am through with the boxing game from a competitive angle." His voice, though soft, rang with the note of finality.

"Surely you don't intend to let this opportunity of fame and fortune to slip through your fingers!" I urged. "Just think. One night's work and you will be a champion who can demand what you want for a fight. Your friends will be proud of you."

The craftiness left his eyes and he gazed at me honestly.

"I promised you one fight. I have given it and given my best in it. You should be satisfied. There are others to be considered now." As he finished my thoughts leaped back to his mother who wanted him to be a gentleman and the girl who had come to see him.

"Then for the sake of those others fight the champion and win. They will be much better off with a few thousand more. They will be proud to know that you can conquer any man in the world at your weight. Think, Johnnie, think! Fame and fortune await you!"

A supercilious smile, almost a sneer, came to his lips. "I thought it all over before I accepted your offer to fight last night. I needed the money then. I have it now. If I fight again,

I will lose more than money can ever replace," he replied calmly.

"There is but one thing money cannot buy—health," I assured him.

"You have omitted the greatest thing in the world—Love!" Johnnie spoke like a Romeo.

"No," I agreed, "But a true love is lasting and will live though you are a fighter for a few months longer."

"Yes. But a true love will not offend its beloved," he came back softly.

"Your case is hopeless. Still if you decide to fight before you are too old, just let me know. By the way! Here is a little present for you from the promoter." I handed him the money Ben had given me.

"Thanks. But I don't understand why I should be given a present after I have been paid once." He was still holding the money in the position he had taken it.

"I felt that way about it. But Big Ben brought it in last night and gave it to me. Now I am giving it to you because a fighter who won't fight may need it before long." I played my last card.

"Never mind that," he half laughed—I had lost. "We will divide this and part good friends."

"No. I don't want any of the money," I protested, "But we can still be good friends. Here's my hand on it."

We shook hands and he left me gazing at a closed door and thinking. Thinking how this lad, in whom was the makings of the greatest fighter the world had ever seen, had allowed sentiment to interfere with the career

ever place," he replied calmly. and beloved boxer.

THE END



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