

ROUND THREE

by Marion Lawrence, Harry Posner, and Ruth Robertson

I was the best, says Jerry, scratching his bent nose, *for a time, anyway*. He peers out of his one good eye at Noah, hunched on the bench—like the old man he is, like the pair of old boys they are—over a cupped cigarette. Noah stares down at the leaves swirling beneath the bench, and nods imperceptibly. *That'd be true*, he says, *except for maybe the Conti fight*. Jerry wants to say *Screw you*, but holds his tongue.

During the war years, in Laval, Noah Dawson lived next door to the O'Brien family, and became Jerry's best and maybe only friend. His 'brother's keeper', as Tessa never failed to remind her husband whenever he got his badmouth on. *Noah's always been there for you, thick and thin, don't forget that*, she'd say.

Jerry holds his tongue because, well, his wife was right. Noah had been there through it all. From the time they were a pair of snot-nosed troublemakers lurking around his dad's pool hall, into high school, girls, and schoolyard fights (*Shake it off, Jer. You'll get him next time*), the wrestling team, standing beside him at graduation. He looks over at Noah, nicotine fingers cradling the cigarette like a warm piece of coal, and regrets everything bad he'd ever said or done to his best friend.

Like the time they were double-dating and Noah's girl kept smiling in Jerry's direction, which he could have ignored out of respect for his buddy. But didn't, and it wasn't long before she ditched Noah for a chance at the captain of the wrestling team. Noah never said anything about it. Not a word. It was as if he were some kind of weird uncomplaining angel put there to keep his dreams alive. And when he found himself in the boxing ring down at Dooney's gym, taking beating after beating, with Golden Glove dreams in his head, it was Noah who reassured him with, *Work on your hook and you'll be fine*.

And he did. Work on his hook and his right cross, left jab, footwork, bob and weave. Got himself some ring savvy. With great hand speed and a heart that wouldn't quit, he came to be known as 3rd Round O'Brien because that was the round he'd typically unleash that devastating hook. He wasn't untouchable, though, staggering out of his victories with busted noses, swollen eyes, and aching knuckles.

And who was there to gently kiss the black eyes and bruised ribs? Feed him tea and tenderness? Tessa, love of his life. Prom queen and boxing king, made for each other. How many times had she been there at ringside, Noah close by, to shout encouragement, flash him that dangerous smile of hers, that smile that never failed to lift him up, to remind him that he was loved? And suddenly he'd find his rhythm, cock that deadly left hook, and bam, knockout. Because of her. Because of Noah.

Where have the years gone? says Jerry, thinking about those days, about how much Tessa had to endure for his sake, for his ego, and how Noah was always close, within reach of his best friend, within reach of his wife. How, one day, she walked out of his life, caught with too many crazy left hooks (*Shut up, you nagging witch!*), and fell into the angelic arms of Noah Dawson.

Jerry stubs out his cigarette and turns to his friend. *Let's go for a beer, you old bastard*.

Patient found at 3:00 AM in his underwear on St. Catherine Street. Once in the ambulance became weepy and begged for a cup of 'special' tea. Delusional, paranoid and prone to frequent outbursts of violent behavior. Staff advised to deal with him in pairs.

Patient had been placed on the shower chair for his bi-weekly when he suddenly demanded to know what I was doing in his house. He said he was the king here and that I should "get the fuck out". Extra staff was needed to get him back into his bed. He kept demanding his 'special' cup of tea with Tessa. He said it would fix everything. Recommend security staff be on constant alert in his presence.

**March 5 1978
Montreal Forum
The Fight of the
Century
Jerome O'Brien
vs
Fabio Conti**

Patient presents as suffering severe headaches and fatigue. He shows signs of drug use, and is in poor physical condition. Exhibits fluctuating rage followed by uncontrolled weeping. Recommend a review of medication.