

Saturday Night Fights

Bill had been in a lengthy relationship with a drag queen named Marvin, also known as Marvelisa. They lived together in a pleasant guppie apartment on Tenth Avenue in Chelsea, mostly paid for by Marvin's trust fund, and for the first few years, they had been happy. Marvin cooked all the meals, made the bed, straightened up the apartment so it was presentable. He worked as a secretary for an entertainment lawyer, and made a decent living, but Manhattan is expensive and they spent a lot of money on drugs, glittery dresses and shoes for Marvelisa's act, and nights out at the clubs. Bill made far less money as a warehouseman. Nonetheless, they were happy, at first.

As the years dragged on, things changed. Marvelisa gained a certain notoriety, but Bill got bored with the drag clubs. Since they were frequently wasted when it came time to have sex on Saturday nights, their sex life was unsatisfying, although they never discussed it. Bill caught Marvin giving head a number of times at the club where Marvelisa performed. He thought he was required to object, so he would pout and threaten to leave, but his heart wasn't really in it. Bill would get drunk at the bar while Marvelisa performed her numbers. Then the pair would go home and have non-descript makeup sex.

One night Marvelisa escorted drunk Bill back to their apartment from the club. Marvelisa offered, with a big smile on her face, to suck Bill's cock. She was still covered with shiny glitter and dust. Bill sat down on the cream sofa, and Marvelisa said, "Uh, uh, uh, no, no, no, not on the furniture, Billy. Come on in the bedroom." Then she lifted the drunk man off the couch, and aimed him toward the bedroom. Bill collapsed onto the bed, and immediately fell asleep.

Marvin had a big dick, and Bill would help him tape it to his thigh when he dressed in drag. Bill liked to play with Marvin's big dick, but when it came time for sex on Saturday night, Marvin was always Marvelisa, and Bill was always drunk or high. In their last months, they stopped having sex altogether. Presumably, Marvin was having sex with stagehands at the club, but Bill wasn't having any sex at all. It was difficult for him even to find time to jerk off, since they both had the same work hours.

On their last night together, Bill suffered a bad case of blueballs, so he tore into the whiskey with a vengeance. He looked at himself in the mirror above the bar. He wasn't young anymore. He was in his mid-thirties, and forty was right around the corner. This, combined with the blueballs, irritated him still more. By the time Marvelisa came to get him, high heels clicking on the tile floor, he was smashed. "Oh, honey," she said with a sting in her voice. "My fucking drunk boyfriend. Don't you care how this reflects on me, you ass?"

Bill was not too drunk to understand what was being said. "Fuck you, Marvin," he uttered. The hair stood up on the back of his neck. He was drunk, but fully alert, like a man who has imbibed a couple cups of coffee.

Marvelisa was taken aback. She withdrew her hand from his shoulder, and retorted, "Well, fuck you too, Billy. Find your own way home." Bill made a fist with his right hand, and swung at Marvelisa with all his might. He hit her square

in the jaw, and she produced a sharp, feminine noise of surprise, tinged with fear. She also fell down onto the tile floor, which the bouncer witnessed from the front door. He ran over, grabbed Bill, and removed him.

This was the first time Bill had ever thrown a punch, and he immediately felt bad about it. He remembered his father telling him years before, "Don't ever hit a woman, Bill." The bouncer directed him toward home, and he stumbled through the streets until he reached the apartment, balls on fire, with glittery fist. Marvelisa didn't come home that night. Bill watched porn on the Internet and relieved his aching balls. Then he went to bed. While he lay there, he knew what was coming. He was going to be alienated from all of Marvelisa's friends, who were also his friends, and he was going to be thrown out of the apartment.

When Marvelisa, still in drag, returned the next afternoon, her friends Todd and Paul accompanied her. Marvelisa refused to say a word to Bill, but Todd had some choice comments to make. How could he hit her? That was totally uncalled for, wrong, and out of the question. Bill would have to find someplace to go immediately. Todd wouldn't leave until Bill was out of the apartment. Marvelisa went into the bathroom to get out of costume, and that was the last time Bill ever saw her. Todd followed Bill around the apartment while he gathered some meager possessions, stuffed them in a suitcase and backpack, and prepared to leave. He had a splitting headache.

Bill had a friend in the West Village who offered to let him stay with her until he found a place. But it was going to have to be temporary. He was thankful for someplace to stay. He had to sleep on the couch, which precluded masturbation, or any privacy at all for that matter. His friend, Ginny, hovered over him. He had to wash his dishes and put them away as soon as he was finished eating. He had to cover the sofa with a sheet, and tuck it in just right, every evening. When he got

up in the morning, he had to fold the sheet neatly and put it in the closet. His clothes needed to be folded and placed in cubbyholes against the wall. Ginny was a health nut, so he couldn't drink beer or smoke pot in the apartment. Once he knocked a plant, damaging one of its shoots. Ginny cried.

During the first three nights of his stay on Ginny's couch, one of her cats shat in his workboot. The first time, he didn't expect it, and when he put on his boot in the morning, he felt the soft, wet shit under his sock. He didn't have any other clean socks, so he had to wear another dirty pair. All day long, he thought he could feel shit between his toes.

This went on for three weeks. He spent many weeknights and every Saturday afternoon combing the papers. He didn't have the money for a rental agent. In fact, he didn't have the money for most of the apartments he saw. He was beginning to think he was going to have to move to distant Queens or Brooklyn, but then he read an ad in one of the gay papers. "GWM, 35, single, disorderly, seeks roommate to share low-rent 1-bedroom, 11th Ave apartment." The ad came with a cell phone number.

Tyler's decrepit apartment was indeed disorderly. There were no bookshelves; piles of books were stacked in the corners and along the walls. Dirty clothes and empty beer and whiskey bottles littered the floor. Food-encrusted dishes sat in the sink. Tyler's dog, a seventy-pound gray pit bull, smiled up at Bill and then jumped, knocking him backward. "Come on, Spike," Tyler hollered, grabbing him by the scruff of the neck and sending him to lie down on a filthy pile of dog blankets next to the couch. "It's not much, but let me show you around."

The apartment essentially consisted of one large rectangular room. The far end contained what might once have been a dining area looking out over Eleventh Avenue, now sporting a bed and an armoire. The other two-thirds featured a kitchen and living area, with a couch and two old, mismatched leather

recliners. To one side was an entry to a short hallway. Down the hallway was Tyler's bedroom, and a tiny bathroom with loose and dirty tiles. The bathtub was coated with soap scum and hair.

"You can do whatever you want. Your room will be up front by the windows. I don't have bedbugs. The bed is clean. Spike won't bother you much." Tyler sounded like the purveyor of a fleabag motel.

After life with Marvin, this was going to be a real step down, but somehow, that didn't bother Bill. He would be able to stay in Chelsea, and he really didn't think Tyler was going to be difficult to live with. There would be no "no jerking off on the couch" rule here. The price was low for Manhattan, of course, but Bill suspected Tyler might be paying even less rent than he. He hadn't seen anything else in his price range at all, and this would leave him with enough left over from his warehouse job to live adequately. And Spike was sitting, panting, smiling up at him. "Yeah, listen, I'll take it. Can I move in tonight?" Bill asked.

"Absolutely." Tyler collected two months' rent in exchange for a set of keys. Then he took Bill downstairs to show him where the garbage went. Bill returned to Ginny's and retrieved his belongings. Ginny cried, and hugged him. And he went back to Eleventh Avenue to his new home.

* * *

Tyler was at least three inches taller than Bill. He had a full mane of neck-length brown hair; an oblong, not handsome face with dark whiskers that began sparsely below his eyes and covered his cheeks and chin, and a mesomorphic but lean build, with powerful, compact muscles. His arms had thick veins feeding their mass. He had defined abs, which Bill got to see because Tyler walked around naked at home.

At first, Bill wore clothes because Tyler was so chiseled that Bill felt intimidated. Bill also had a mesomorphic build, but he was much less developed than Tyler. He had a gut, for one thing, and his gut was bigger than his chest. On the other hand, he was strong from hoisting heavy boxes at the warehouse, so he was not ashamed of his body. Also, Bill's face was round and handsome. He had never had trouble picking guys up before he settled down with Marvin. By the end of the second week at Tyler's, he gave up on clothes. When either of them entered the apartment, they stripped and tossed their clothes on the floor near their respective beds.

Three weeks after Bill moved in, Tyler announced that he was going to be gone with Spike from Thursday to Monday. Bill smiled and said he'd hold down the fort. When Bill got home from work on Thursday night, he stripped and sat on the couch, wondering what to do first. The apartment was not just untidy; it was filthy. Cleaning was not his forte, but he remembered his mom, and Marvin, scrubbing and polishing. Friday night he bought bracket shelves and installed them on one side of the room. Then he moved all the books to them. It was possibly the first time the books had stood on end in years. A copy of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* slipped his grip and fell to the floor. Out of curiosity, he flipped through it and read:

Mighty Gilgamesh came on and Enkidu met him at the gate. He put out his foot and prevented Gilgamesh from entering the house, so they grappled, holding each other like bulls. They broke the doorposts and the walls shook, they snorted like bulls locked together. They shattered the doorposts and the walls shook. Gilgamesh bent his knee with his foot planted on the ground and with a turn Enkidu was thrown. Then immediately his fury died. When Enkidu was thrown he said to Gilgamesh, 'There is not another like you in the world. Ninsun, who is as strong as a

wild ox in the byre, she was the mother who bore you, and now you are raised above all men, and Enlil has given you the kingship, for your strength surpasses the strength of men.' So Enkidu and Gilgamesh embraced and their friendship was sealed.

Bill dutifully replaced it on the shelf. There were all sorts of books: ancient and medieval plays, epics, poem collections; history books covering every age; art books; a Bible; Buddhist and Hindu texts; self-help and do-it-yourself books; and a whole bunch of workout manuals. Bill had his own collection of books, but his were in storage back in his parents' attic.

Then he moved the CDs and DVDs to shelves. The CDs were all rock, and the DVDs were mostly porn. There were some fifty porn videos, ten of which were straight gangbang videos, and five regular movies: *Spartacus*, *Rocky*, *Cape Fear* (1991), *Fight Club*, and *The Wrestler*. There were also a handful of WWF compilation videos. Tyler had very specific tastes. Bill was eager to get everything shelved, so he didn't bother arranging the books and videos.

On Saturday, he tackled the kitchen. He scrubbed all the dishes and put them in the cabinets. He had bought a silverware caddy, and arranged the silverware neatly therein. He washed the linoleum floors on his hands and knees. Then he picked up everything on the wooden floors and washed them with Murphy Oil Soap. He had also bought a thirty-gallon outdoor garbage can, and bags, which he put next to the island in the kitchen. He stopped short of entering Tyler's room. Tyler would have to clean his own room. But Bill did his own laundry, and he washed the dog's blankets, and arranged them neatly. The apartment still didn't look like his mother or Marvin would have liked it, but *he* thought it was just great.

On Sunday, he tapped his credit card, and bought new clothes at Kmart, filling his armoire. By Sunday night, he felt

comfortable, and proud of himself. He watched Tyler's porn videos, being careful to put each one back on the shelf when he was done. By the fourth video he shot his load all over himself. What a great weekend.

Tyler had said he was going to his parents' house. He was due back on Monday night, so Bill made sure he was there waiting when Tyler got back. The apartment even smelled good. When Tyler and Spike walked through the front door, his roommate greeted Bill and went directly to his bedroom. He was carrying fresh laundry bags. Bill waited anxiously for him to come back out, and when he did, he walked straight to the kitchen, fed the dog, and sat down on the couch next to Bill. "I see you've been busy," he said nonchalantly.

"So, what do you think?" Bill beamed.

"Oh, yeah." Tyler looked around. "It's fine—whatever." Then he turned on the TV.

* * *

Tyler spent lots of time away from the apartment. He always made sure Spike was fed and walked, but eventually Bill offered to pitch in, because he liked Spike. Bill didn't know if he would ever get used to picking up dog shit with a plastic bag glove, but within a week he thought nothing of it. Spike looked quizzical and thankful when Bill picked up his poop.

Frequently, Spike would lunge and growl at other dogs. It didn't matter the size; in fact, the larger Spike's opponent, the more Spike challenged. Bill would have to pull back on the leash, which took effort. He could feel Spike's sinew and muscle straining in aggression. Tyler had warned him. Spike was a pit, and as much as he often liked to play and wag his tail sniffing other dogs' butts, he also wanted to fight and challenge. Under no circumstances could Tyler or Bill allow him to bite into another dog. Tyler felt bad about restraining

the dog's natural impulses, but he didn't want to lose Spike to the authorities.

When he put down Spike's big metal bowl with kibble and gravy, the dog lunged at it, gobbling it up in seconds. Then he would sit next to Bill, who sat in the recliner. If Tyler was there, though, Spike sat next to him, which was fine with Bill.

Without Marvin's money, Bill was poor for New York. He had to ration his forays out to bars. He avoided the clubs, where Marvin's friends hung out, and eventually he found that it was cheaper to buy a six-pack or a bottle than to go out. That, of course, meant that his sex life suffered, but he wasn't actually ready to hook up with another partner. He was happy in Tyler's apartment; and if he got really horny, he went to an active boothstore in Chelsea. This approach to life left him with a hundred dollars at the end of the month.

He also started substituting jerking off to Tyler's video collection for actual sex with guys. He began a systematic exploration of Tyler's stash. He didn't choose which ones most attracted his interest. Instead, he simply moved from left to right across the new shelves watching the videos. Tyler had eclectic tastes. Some of the movies were hot, but with ordinary guys sucking and fucking. As mentioned, several were straight gangbang films, which he watched with great interest, sometimes identifying with the women, sometimes wishing he could join the gang. Other movies were Leatherdudes engaging in mild SM and bondage. The first movie of this sort, he almost ejected. Leather and SM had never attracted him. But he gave it a chance. By the middle of the third scene, he was pumping his cock furiously, and he blew a profound load. What was *that* all about? He chalked it up to the hypermasculinity of the Tops in the video. Finally, there was an assortment of gym-centric and even boxing-centric movies. He liked them OK, but he preferred it when they got to the sucking and fucking.

Not long after he began his extensive daily movie marathon, Tyler interrupted him one night. He didn't seem to mind Bill jerking off at all. He collected Spike for a walk. Then, when the pair returned, Tyler stripped, threw his clothes in the bedroom, and joined Bill in front of the TV. At first, Bill lost his erection, but once Tyler's sprang up, he felt comfortable jerking off in front of his roommate. They had a good time. They talked about the action on the screen: whose dick was hot, whose pecs were hot, whose attitude was the hottest. Bill sat in the recliner, but he kept looking over at the lanky but powerful man on the couch. Somehow, he didn't feel comfortable making a move on Tyler, and Tyler never seemed to create an opening for him to do so, so Bill kept his hands to himself. Eventually, Tyler shot his load, excused himself, and went to bed. Spike moved over to Bill's recliner and curled up on the blanket.

Subsequently, Tyler, Bill, and Spike established a pattern. Tyler took Spike out in the morning and late at night. Bill took him out when he got home in the early evening. Bill made sure he was jerking off in the recliner when Tyler got home, around 11:00 PM. Tyler would join him. The weekend was up for grabs. Sometimes, Tyler would go to his parents'; sometimes Bill would make easy meals and they would eat together. Bill's favorite was frozen, microwaved peas with mayonnaise and Worcestershire sauce stirred in. Tyler loved it. Usually, each of them did their own thing, but increasingly, they spent time together drinking and talking, or walking the dog. Nevertheless, whether they were jerking off or sitting talking, Tyler never seemed to give Bill an entrée to make a move on him, and Tyler never made a move on Bill.

While Bill's sex life had taken an exclusively masturbatory turn, he wondered about Tyler's. The guy never had a guest. Because of Spike, he never stayed out all night, although Bill would have taken care of him. In fact, Tyler never seemed to

stay out past 11:00 PM. He told Bill that he worked at a gym during the afternoons and evenings. Bill wasn't there when Tyler got up in the morning, so during the week, they encountered each other only at night. Still, it seemed like Tyler never got laid.

"Do you ever get laid, Tyler?" Bill asked him one Saturday afternoon.

"Not really. I don't have much need. I have kind of esoteric tastes," he answered. Bill didn't feel comfortable asking him what those esoteric tastes were. Or maybe he didn't *want* to know. Whatever the case, the conversation turned to other things.

After some three months of living together, Bill and Tyler found themselves jerking off on a Sunday evening. As usual, Tyler came first. When he had collected himself, he took the remote and muted the TV. Bill looked at him, trying to guess what Tyler was up to. "Bill, you need to work out."

Bill smiled. "Yeah, OK, I know, but I don't think I can afford a gym membership right now, and I've never been in the habit, you know. I get a pretty good workout at work."

"You get laid, if you want, right? But it's getting tougher, isn't it?" Tyler asked.

"I don't know. Maybe."

"Work out, build some muscles—you don't even have to get some abs. Just working out hard will give you more of a build—and get you better-looking partners." Tyler stood up, his hairy, muscular body on full display for Bill's gaze.

Bill hesitated. "I just don't think I can swing the money," he said sheepishly.

Tyler went into his bedroom and came back with a business card. "Come to this address tomorrow night after work. I'll get you a free membership. Who knows? With time, and hard work, you might just get what you really want out of life."

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Bill shot home after work on Monday, and leashed the dog for his walk. Spike wanted to sniff and stroll, but Bill kept pulling him to move faster. He didn't eat anything. He fed Spike and got some shorts, a T-shirt, and his old sneakers. Then he raced out the door and headed for the subway.

The gym was in the Dumbo neighborhood in Brooklyn. It was an atmosphere Bill was familiar with—great warehouses, empty streets. He found the gym with no problem, but when he walked in, he thought he was in the wrong place. There were two full-size boxing rings, replete with elastic mats and ropes. The other half of the huge room contained punching bags of various shapes and sizes on one side, and a full weight lifting and cardio area on the other. He was unsure of himself in this environment. He had never been to a boxing gym before. He stood there, mouth agape, until Tyler walked over and slapped him on the back.

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life," Tyler belated. He guided Bill toward the office. Tyler asked Bill to fill out and sign some documents, which he did. The main document stated that his fee would be zero dollars. The rest were liability releases and declarations that Bill would follow the rules.

"What's my training going to be?" Bill asked quietly.

"At first, just weight training and cardio. Maybe a month. Then, if you want, we'll set you up on a fighting schedule. You decide if you want to go there, but I work *here*, and I can offer you free membership *here*, so you should try it out. Down the road . . . we'll cross that bridge."

"OK, great, Tyler. I'm game," Bill told him.

Tyler took him out on the floor and set him up on a treadmill. He taught Bill how to monitor his pulse, and how to regulate the treadmill speed and incline it to get his pulse into

that perfect window. Tyler came back thirty minutes later and gave him twelve different weight-lifting sets, working every part of his body except his head and feet. The routine took an hour and a half to complete.

While Bill walked the treadmill, curled his arms and legs, and pulled and pushed bars on machines designed to strengthen his torso, he surreptitiously surveyed the room. It appeared that 30 percent of those in the room were women. Thirty percent seemed to be tough dudes right off the streets of Brooklyn. The other 40 percent were white-collar types from Manhattan. Somehow, in gym gear, any differences in class or background were equalized. The rings were used for teaching and practicing fighting—two at a time, with a coach. The gym was successful. At least at that hour, it was quite busy, but not so busy that there was any standing around waiting for access. It smelled like sweat, which turned Bill on.

At first, Tyler ignored Bill. Bill came to do his routine and left without Tyler saying a word. He worked out three days a week, until the start of the fourth week, when Tyler interrupted his curls.

“You need to start coming here five days a week, Billy,” Tyler told him. And Bill complied. This meant that Bill didn’t settle in from his day until nine-thirty at night. He was tired, and by the time he had some chow, all he could do was lie on the couch and flick through the channels on the TV. He didn’t feel much like jerking off either, although when Tyler came in, *he* would jerk off after walking the dog. Bill would lie down on his bed and fall asleep to the sound of porn actors grunting and moaning.

The end of four weeks of training saw the beginning of summer. The gym was hot, cooled only by fans and old air conditioners that were too small. Bill sweated profusely, but strangely, he liked it. Also, Tyler came over to him more often. At first, it was to criticize his technique. “Lift with your mus-

cle not by swinging your arm” or “Increase that weight—you’re not even straining.” Nevertheless, Bill was getting some of the attention he craved. His body was changing as well. His biceps were growing, and his waist was thinning out. The pace was glacial, it seemed, but Tyler noticed. He encouraged him by snapping him with a towel in the locker room and calling him “sexy.”

Shortly after Independence Day, Tyler stood over Bill while he did his bicep curls. He looked perplexed. Bill concentrated on his reps while Tyler glowered. “You know, buddy, I think you could use some extra help,” Tyler mused.

“How so?”

“Why don’t we try the bags?” Tyler urged him. He looked like a doctor trying to come up with a diagnosis. Bill shifted his gaze toward the other side of the room. People were busy punching various black leather bags.

“How will that help?”

“It’ll give your arms and upper body a real workout. Try it. If you don’t like it, you can come back here,” Tyler instructed.

Tyler took him to a speed bag—a relatively small pear-shaped bag hanging from a hook and chain above. He showed him how to stand in front of it and punch the bag, first with his right, then his left, in quick succession. Tyler told him to keep up the motion for ten minutes. Bill thought, “This is easy.” The bag was surprisingly light, but as the minutes dragged on, he felt every muscle in his arm tighten. At five minutes, his arms dropped.

“No, keep going. You can do it, bud,” Tyler insisted. He had thought Tyler had gone away. He lifted his arms, which had started to feel like lead weights, and began the rhythmic motion once again. At eight minutes, it felt like he would die. His arms were on fire. Even his shoulders started to ache. He couldn’t go on, but he didn’t want to let Tyler down, so he

kept going. He didn't know where the strength was coming from. He glanced over to see if Tyler was still standing there. He was. At nine minutes, his arms began to drop by themselves. No matter how much will he engendered, his fists were falling away from the bag. When he got to ten minutes, his fists were just tapping the bottom of the pear. But he had won.

Tyler put his arm around Bill's shoulder. "I want you to do that every other day. Ten minutes for the time being. Do this before your arm and pec workout. Then give yourself fifteen minutes to rest, and do your arms and pecs with heavier weights and fewer reps. OK?"

If Tyler hadn't put his arm around his shoulder, Bill would never have consented, but now he felt encouraged not to resist. He punched the bag as directed. Sometimes he wondered why he was doing all this. Tyler still didn't seem interested in having sex with him, and besides, he didn't feel like having sex anymore at all, during the week at least. Increasingly, he came home exhausted. When the speed bag became easy, Tyler increased the time. Then, he told him he would have to start on a heavy bag. When he was finished with the little speed bag, he would move to the heavy bag, which stretched from above Bill's head to the floor. Tyler had him practice for twenty minutes fighting the motionless target. Tyler would correct his technique now and then. "More power," "Say it like you mean it," were the kinds of instructions Tyler would give him. Bill's nights began at ten-thirty now. If Tyler hadn't told him to start eating more, Bill probably wouldn't have exerted himself enough to make a meal.

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In August, Tyler arranged for Bill to get in the ring. His opponent was an employee of the gym, and his coach was an older man, Rip, with profuse whisker stubble. Bill got time in

the ring twice a week, for fifteen minutes. He had to put on red leather boxing gloves, which a skinny young guy would tie for him. Rip taught him to dance around his opponent and to seek opportunities to strike blows. They spent weeks on jabbing the opponent with a direct punch with the right, a cross punch with the left and a swivel of the hips, or an uppercut, a vertical blow to the chin between the opponent's guarding forearms. Rip taught him how to avoid punches, how to distract and find ways to disarm his opponent.

Bill loved it. It made him feel powerful. Even when he was getting the shit kicked out of him by his opponent, he felt powerful. He forgot all about Tyler, he forgot all about the gym around him. He became nothing but a bolus of force. The workouts had developed his arms and torso. He wasn't huge, and he still didn't have abs, but he struck his opponent in the second week of training with a force that made the guy fall to his knees. Rip stopped the action, Bill backed off, and his opponent stood up right away, but Bill felt like a truck that had plowed into a compact car.

The world is a place where people have to get along. There is little room for expressions of dominance. In the ring, Bill felt all of the force and might of the heroes of the ages flowing in his blood. The ring, Rip, the opponent, and Bill's body all had a Technicolor hue unlike anything he had ever experienced. His focus was as intense as the fiery light of the sun concentrated by a young boy with a magnifying glass.

Nevertheless, Bill usually lost his mini-bouts. Rip and his opponent knew exactly what was going on, but Bill was inexperienced. Only gradually did he begin to learn the punches, the defense, and the strategies by heart. It wasn't until the latter half of September that Bill had a moment of glory. He suddenly noticed his opponent glancing in distraction out of the ring. Uppercut—the opponent's gloves fell away in sur-

prise. Cross punch—Bill's left slammed into the opponent's head. He shifted his stance. Jab to the face—the opponent fell to the ground. Rip pushed him back against the ropes, then he attended to the opponent. There was no problem—the opponent was used to this kind of thing. But *Bill* wasn't. He glanced out into the room and saw Tyler, arms crossed, smiling broadly. He had seen; Bill was ready.

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The following Saturday was the first weekend in October. Tyler and Bill woke in the afternoon, and after Tyler had taken Spike for a long walk, he invited Bill to the diner for a bite. The trainer congratulated Bill on his success in the ring. He told him he'd been doing a great job. He complimented Bill on the development of his body. Bill was much leaner now, although there was still some fat between his muscle and skin. He smiled at his buddy and bathed in the encouragement. His efforts were paying off.

Then Tyler asked him to go out—not come back to the apartment for an hour. Tyler didn't want him to drink or to have sex. Maybe he could take a walk along the river. Bill didn't know what to make of this, but Tyler's advice had not been wrong so far, and he rarely asked Bill to do something inconvenient. So Bill went along.

He wished he could go get a beer, but instead he strolled over to the walkway along the Hudson. The sun still warmed the earth, but he could tell fall was coming. The angle of the light was less direct; the breeze blew cool. He hiked all the way to the Meatpacking District, then moved over to Tenth Avenue and walked back toward the apartment. His body felt good—strong and vigorous. By the time he reached the door to the building, he figured it had to have been an hour or more. He went in and up to his home.

Tyler and Jesus, a Mexican trainer from the gym, were sitting on the couch talking quietly. Bill greeted them, a bit surprised at Jesus' presence. Spike licked his hand. Bill's bedroom area near the front windows was separated slightly from the rest of the main room by an eighteen-inch-wide plaster frame. Bill's bedroom was probably once a dining room. The horizontal part of the frame along the ceiling contained a support beam. Now, hanging from eye hooks screwed into the support several feet apart, there were floor-length link chains. At the floor, they attached to another pair of eye hooks. What was this all about?

"What's going on?" Bill asked. "What's with the chains?"

"Well, Bill. I was hoping you'd play along with me. I want you to be my punching bag," Tyler said casually.

"Punching bag?"

"It's cool, Bill. You might enjoy it," Tyler said.

Bill nodded slightly. "Strip down," Tyler instructed. Bill reluctantly took off his clothes and threw them on his bed. Tyler got up, grabbed some leather cuffs from the kitchen counter, and motioned for Bill to follow to the chains. "Stand here," Tyler said, and he manipulated Bill between the chains. "Arms up." He cuffed Bill's wrists wide, above his head. Then he cuffed his ankles near the floor. Bill was firmly attached to the chains. He could move, but his motion was severely curtailed.

Jesus smiled as he laced Tyler's boxing gloves to his hands. Then he sat back down on the couch, grinning, to watch the action. Bill had a worried look on his face, and Tyler turned toward him and said, "Don't worry, bud. This won't hurt a bit."

"You're gonna punch me," Bill said, resigned.

"You ready?" Tyler said jovially.

"OK."

Tyler began jabbing and punching Bill's torso, stomach, chest, sides. At first he went slow and easy. Nevertheless, Bill

made whining sounds. "I'm *not* hurting you, Bill. Cut it out," Tyler complained firmly. Bill was just anxious about this odd, vaguely SM experience, but he had to confess that it didn't hurt. He shut up, and Tyler continued.

The blows began to come quicker. Bill gave muffled grunts and groans, of which Tyler seemed to approve. Slam—into his gut. Bill let out an "ugh." He couldn't bend over, so the pain grew in his stomach and spread outward. Still, it didn't hurt unbearably, and Tyler moved to his chest and armpits. Quick jabs to both pits, and a rapid trill along his rib cage. This distracted him from the ache in his gut. Tyler would pause, then inflict new jabs to his sides or gut. Then he would soften the blows to Bill's stomach. He flexed his abs, creating a barrier to the boxing gloves. Tyler noticed and struck his gut with increasing force.

This went on for twenty minutes or so. Then Tyler stopped and looked him in the eyes. "You've got a smile on yer face, buddy," he said. Bill was indeed smiling, but he didn't notice until Tyler pointed it out. It's just that the blows felt strangely good. It didn't feel like that in the ring, because in the ring every blow felt like a mistake of his—a failure. Here, he was just enjoying the sensation of Tyler wailing on him. He was used to muscle pain from his extensive workouts. Today, however, he was getting a workout of his muscles without ever lifting a weight.

His grunting became louder and more forceful. He began to feel like an animal in the wild, suffering physical trials and minor bodily damage as it wandered the landscape. He pulled at the chains, trying to break free, to fight back, and he was sweating. That, in turn, made him feel like a captured hero being tortured by a dark villain. Tyler was no villain, though. He regulated his emotion with his mind in an effort to bring Bill pleasure. The curl of his lip and the fierceness of his eyes betrayed a sadistic rage, but his blows struck Bill's body like he was playing a drum. Jesus clapped and cheered. The scene

built to its crescendo. Bill started to holler. Tyler let loose a succession of heavy blows all over Bill's chest. It distracted Bill from clenching his abs. Then, *thud*, the worst blow yet to his gut. If Bill hadn't been attached to the chains, he would have fallen to the ground in a ball. He screamed, "Oh, God." Tyler backed off, breathing exhausted gasps. They were finished.

* * *

Bill felt oddly elated when Jesus released him from the cuffs. He lay down on his bed, breathing heavily, enjoying the warm sensations of pleasure flooding his body. Tyler was exhausted too, and he collapsed into his recliner. They cooled down for ten minutes or so, and then Tyler explained endorphins to Bill. Still, Bill said, he didn't think he wanted to make a habit of this.

"I've got somethin' else planned, don't worry. It's just that . . . well, since you had that little victory in the ring last week, I've wanted to beat you up *so* bad." Tyler had never let his guard down like this before. He seemed almost tender. "You're just so fuckin' hot." Bill stared up at him in shock. *Tyler* was the one who was hot. He didn't think he had ever elicited this kind of attitude from another man. *He* wasn't hot. Was he? He had always felt like he had to trick guys into having sex with him. But they hadn't actually had sex now, had they? In fact, they had *never* had sex. Bill was a little worried, tempered by his elation, that this was all there was to Tyler's sex drive. Then he sank back into his pleasure and Tyler sat back down in the recliner. It wasn't the time to have a deep conversation with Tyler about his sexuality.

Jesus never lost his grin. Once he had taken off Tyler's gloves, he departed, and the pair sat in silence, until it was time to take out Spike. They took him out together, and they talked, but Bill avoided asking Tyler any of the myriad ques-

tions he had. Tyler sensed that he was confused and distracted. He told him to just ride it out and see what happened. He told him he intended to make some of his fantasies come true and, in so doing, make some of Bill's own fantasies come true—fantasies of which Bill himself was as yet unaware. Bill just thought, *Tyler's never been wrong yet. Relax.*

At the gym, Tyler rearranged Bill's routine. He wanted Bill to work out three days a week again, do less weight training and more bag boxing. He would also continue spending time in the ring, honing his skills and learning more advanced tricks. Tyler explained that he didn't need to strengthen his muscles at such a pace. He could relax and see slower development. Finally, Bill shouldn't be sore and worn out all the time.

* * *

Two Saturdays after Bill played punching bag to Tyler's fists, Tyler invited him for a walk down by the river. It was no longer warm, but Bill didn't miss August. They chatted in the early evening breeze until they got to the walkway. "Do you want to look at the water?" Bill asked, as he sat down on a bench.

"No," Tyler said absently. He moved to the railing, leaned against it, and looked out at New Jersey. Bill gazed at Tyler, stretching his now-bulky arms against the back of the bench. Tyler was a peculiar man, but Bill felt an undeniable attraction. He had a casual masculinity that Bill admired keenly, and that also served as a sharp contrast to Marvin. Bill didn't think he qualified for Tyler's attention, but Tyler was spending more and more time with him as the months dragged on. And Tyler had told him he was hot. That had made an impression, except that Bill hadn't been able to confirm that it was more than just a momentary slip of the tongue. Even now, Tyler stood at the railing watching the darkening sky, seemingly oblivious to Bill.

Within twenty minutes, the walkway was dark except for the yellow lights above. Bill was getting cold. "Should we get going, Tyler?" he asked.

Suddenly, Tyler swung around and strode to the middle of the walk. He gestured for Bill to come to him. Bill got up and stood face-to-face, a few feet away. Tyler looked at him intently. "Take a swing," he ordered.

"Take a swing? Hit you?" Bill wasn't sure.

"Yeah."

Bill automatically raised his fists to his face, and swung his arm, carelessly, hitting Tyler in the arm. "That's not how." Tyler's fists went to his face, and his lip curled upward. He danced to his left, and swung at Bill's shoulder. The blow hit hard, and Bill winced. No time to think about what was going on; the dancing and jabbing were ingrained now, and Bill moved to his right to stay in front of Tyler.

The boys moved around each other in a tight circle, trying to stay opposed to one another. Tyler was good. There were very few entrées to hit him, and Bill's attempts were easily avoided or deflected. Tyler thwarted Bill repeatedly, landing blows to his upper arms and his chest, and one perfect slug to the cheek below Bill's left eye. It hurt profoundly, but he didn't notice. He would have to address the pain later on—now he did battle.

A man with a seven-year-old girl approached them warily. The man didn't want to have to go out to the street to avoid them. He hesitated nearby. Tyler got distracted by them. *Slam*—Bill's solid fist struck Tyler beside the eye socket. Tyler grunted and moved back, away from Bill, looking over at the man and girl. Bill took note and backed off, lowering his fists. They waited. The man was astonished, but he understood that it was their turn to pass. The girl didn't look the slightest bit uncomfortable. The man was annoyed.

"We've only got ten minutes or so," Tyler said as he raised his fists and moved in. Bill did likewise. Their foreheads fur-

rowed. During the next five minutes, they both struck blows: Tyler to Bill's stomach. Bill to Tyler's arm. Tyler to Bill's head. Bill to Tyler's chin. There were no more interruptions, and finally, Tyler thrust his fist at Bill's nose. Miraculously, Tyler knew just how much to pull back to cause Bill to crumple in pain but not break the nose. Bill collapsed on the pavement clutching his face.

"Yeah," Tyler yelled. He swung his fists up over his head and danced from foot to foot, hearing the rushing Hudson as a cheering crowd.

"Ow," Bill yelled, looking up at Tyler. "Maybe my nose is broken." Bill needed attention. He noticed a cut on Tyler's chin, and a brown swelling around Tyler's right eye. For a moment, he forgot his nose.

"Let's see." Tyler knelt down and gently touched Bill's nose, moving it from side to side. "Is there sharp pain?"

"A little—actually, it just feels sore now."

"And you have no bleeding . . . and the nose is straight. I don't think it's broken. Headache?"

"Just from where you slammed me. No, I don't really have a headache, in the headache-y sense," Bill confirmed.

"Let's go get a drink," Tyler said, looking around. There were no sirens, but he didn't want to be there if the guy with the girl had called the police.

* * *

They went to a straight dive near their apartment and drank until they were thoroughly buzzed. The bar wasn't crowded, and they were ignored, despite their appearance. Tyler's eye was swollen, blackened on the side near his temple. His chin was scraped. Bill had a massive black eye but less swelling. They both had bruises randomly patterned across their bodies, but they didn't hurt unless someone put pressure on them. Bill felt good, and obviously so did Tyler, since he

was smiling a lot. They were attentive to each other, telling jokes and laughing.

When they walked through the door to their apartment, Spike jumped and barked. They had missed his usual walk. Spike wasn't angry, just very glad to see them. Bill offered to take him out, but Tyler insisted it should be him. He said he was horny and Bill should put on some porn, so they could jerk off. Then Tyler and Spike were off. Bill negotiated the room through his buzz. He chose a cool DVD about mechanics who get arrested and spend the weekend in jail: plenty of cops and inmates to keep the mechanics in line. It seemed to take quite a while, but Tyler and Spike returned, and Tyler sat down next to Bill. "Great. I love this one," Tyler stammered.

They jerked their meat to stiffness, and sat there smiling and grunting. What a great end to a great day, Bill thought. Then, when one scene was changing to another, Tyler grasped Bill's shoulder. Tyler leaned over and gently licked Bill's black eye. Then he moved down to his mouth and kissed him slowly and warmly. They exchanged spit, and Bill put his hand on Tyler's arm. This went on until they were both groaning and couldn't handle it anymore.

Tyler shifted Bill's head down to his crotch. Bill paused. He looked Tyler in the eyes. "Maybe you're just doing this because you're drunk. Are you sure?"

Tyler smiled and said in a kind voice, "No, I'm not that drunk, Bill. And I've been meaning to do this for a while now. Please—suck my dick."

Bill did. He swung his body onto the floor in front of Tyler to get a better view and grasp of what he was doing. Tyler smiled at him, gazing between his legs, as Bill sucked and licked his dick. Bill was still sucking Tyler when the movie ended some twenty minutes later. They ignored the silence. Instead, they infused it with moans and utterances. Bill kept reaching to his own dick and stroking it, but Tyler would kick his hand out of the way.

Eventually, Tyler grabbed Bill's head and fucked his skull furiously. He lifted his hips off the couch ever so slightly, and shouted "Fuck." His cum filled Bill's mouth and dribbled down his chin. It took a full minute and a half (which is a long time) before Tyler calmed down and Bill swallowed and sat back down on the couch. Tyler grinned at him, a strange, affectionate smile. "Thanks, buddy." Then he did something Bill never would have expected. Tyler got down on the floor at Bill's feet and began to blow *him*. The shot that filled Tyler's mouth a while later was the best orgasm Bill had ever had.

* * *

Spike's daddies decided they would fight every other Saturday. That would give them enough time to recuperate from any damage done—swelling would subside, and bruises would fade. Tyler's fellow trainers at the gym understood completely, but Bill wasn't sure how his boss and coworkers at the warehouse would respond to his coming to work with black eyes and swollen cheeks. As it happened, once the initial questioning was over—Bill simply said he'd gotten in a fight—there was little interest. Once it happened a third time, Bill took his supervisor aside and told him he was roughhousing with his buddy. As far as the guys at the warehouse were concerned, that was a surprisingly sufficient explanation.

With that taken care of, Bill didn't owe anyone else an excuse for his appearance. And since it was New York, few people cared. He had started to go out to boothstores for sex, and with his physical improvements, it was getting palpably easier to get some action. Now, on the off Saturdays, with a black eye and swollen lip, he got laid almost immediately. His sex partners were hotter too—more muscle, tighter skin, thugs. But while his partners were objectively hotter, he found himself thinking about Tyler more and more. *None of these*

guys give me what Tyler gives me, he thought. Then he would have a beer or two, and a whiskey, and try to forget.

Bill didn't know what to make of their buddihood. Every two weeks, they fought, drank, and made love. In between, they were just like any two seventeen-year-old buddies. They grinned at each other; they patted one another on the back; they got drunk together; they walked the dog together. Tyler didn't take Bill with him when he went to his parents' house to do his laundry. They didn't start sleeping together. They didn't start sharing money. But when it came time for their Saturday night fight, they were more than ready.

At Thanksgiving, Bill didn't have enough money to travel. His parents were too far away, so he spent it with Spike. Tyler went to see his parents. Bill didn't feel particularly bad about any of this. He was immersed in a world he loved. The apartment was his home now, and a Norman Rockwell environment would have felt disagreeable to him. Friday night, Tyler was back.

They fought on Saturday. It was getting much colder, mostly in the forties, but they wore jeans and tight sweatshirts. Combat made them warm anyway. Tyler won every fight, but Bill's skills were improving apace, and this Saturday, both of them were battered by the end. Tyler was inspecting Bill's face when they heard the ear-splitting screech of a police cruiser's "we're on the scene" siren. They both looked up to the road suddenly and anxiously.

Two tough-looking cops—one white and one black—exited their vehicle and strode aggressively toward them. They said nothing to Tyler and Bill until they got onto the walkway. "Guys, what's going on?" the white cop—Solomon, according to his name plate—asked them assertively. The cops approached them, eyes focused, trying to figure out the situation.

"We're cool. We're not causing any trouble," Bill offered. Tyler glanced at him and then let him do the talking.

“We got a report guys were fighting down here. And it looks like you the guys,” said Solomon, inspecting their faces without getting too close.

“We were fighting recreationally,” Bill told him. He decided to take the honest approach. Maybe the cops would find in their favor. The black cop—Marshall, according to his tag—laughed. Solomon shifted his stance, still on guard.

“You been drinkin’?” Solomon probed.

“Not at all, Sir,” Bill replied. Solomon shined a pen light into their eyes to check their pupils.

“Drugs?” Solomon was easing up. The cops both felt there was no danger.

“No, Sir.”

“What does that mean, ‘fighting recreationally’?” Solomon asked firmly but calmly.

“We’re buddies. We like to fight each other. It’s just roughhousing, really,” Bill told him.

“By the looks of you, it don’t look like roughhousing to me,” Solomon said casually. “You want to take that guy and talk to him?” he asked his partner. Marshall guided Tyler a few yards away, out of earshot. Bill didn’t even glance at Tyler. He was certain of Tyler’s loyalty.

Solomon and Bill stood in the yellow lamplight, talking calmly. “You mad at your buddy tonight?”

“No, not at all, Sir. We both train at a boxing gym in Brooklyn. We come here to fight without the gloves. It’s fun.” Bill thought about this for a moment. “For us, at least.”

“No disagreements with one another.”

“No, Sir. We’re best buds. I don’t think we’ve ever had any particular disagreements.”

“That’s what he’s going to say too?”

“Absolutely.”

“You ever been arrested before?”

“No, Sir.”

“Has he?”

“He told me no.”

“Neither one of you is going to have an outstanding warrant?”

“No, Sir.”

“No problems?”

“No, I don’t think so, Sir.”

Marshall and Tyler came strolling back. “OK. Checks out,” Marshall said to his cop buddy.

Solomon’s tone shifted down. He was getting more casual. “OK.” He went up to the car while Marshall watched the pair. He brought back a metal clipboard and a digital pad. “Let me see some ID.” They both produced their driver’s licenses. He plugged their data into the pad. They were clean. He returned their IDs. “OK, here’s the deal. I get it. I understand what you’re doing here. But you gotta look at it from my point of view. I can’t have a couple of guys beatin’ the crap out of each other in public—on a public walkway. OK? What you’re doing here is against the law. First of all, you’re creating a public nuisance—it’s disorderly conduct. But more importantly, you’re *assaulting* one another.” He paused. “That’s a more serious offense.”

Bill and Tyler looked sheepish. “Can you give us a break, though? We really aren’t a threat to anyone else. I mean, look at this place.” Bill gestured around them. “There aren’t any people around here at this hour.”

“Well, I’m going to give you both tickets. Just pay them and it’ll be done. But in the future, you guys need to find someplace you’re not going to run into *anybody*. If the cops have to deal with you repeatedly, OK, you’re eventually going to get a cop who wants to arrest you—and then the stakes get higher. Do you understand?” They both nodded their heads. “Talk.”

“Yes, Sir. We understand,” Bill said.

“Yes, Sir,” Tyler concurred.

* * *

Their run-in with the law made them both horny as goats, but they went drinking first to take the edge off. Where would they fight? Tyler said he had prepared for this eventuality and suggested they start fighting on Twenty-Seventh Street between Eleventh and Twelfth. The street was lined with warehouses and they could stop to let any stray cars go by. People at night on that block were highly unlikely. They could try it out next time, and perhaps they could start fighting later at night, like 2:00 AM. That would surely minimize the chance they would attract undue attention. Then Tyler grabbed Bill's neck and leaned in and gave him a kiss on the mouth.

Since they were in their usual straight dive, this expression of affection was out of place. A thick, hairy guy was passing by them at the bar, and he let go a disgusted "Fags" at the pair. Bill immediately turned toward him and moved forward, legs in his fighting stance. His lip curled up slightly. The guy uttered a sound of contempt and kept moving. Bill turned back to Tyler, who patted him on the arm, with a big smile.

The pair fought their next bout at the new location, where it went without a hitch. They didn't encounter anyone. It was the holiday season, but neither of them noticed. Tyler and Bill were so engrossed with their obsession that outside influences didn't attract their interest. They also began giving each other head during the week sometimes. The shine from the fighting lasted until the next fight. They always felt high. Bill and Tyler both stopped having sex outside the apartment. Whenever they tried these days, each one thought only about the other. Nevertheless, they never talked about what they were feeling. They were actually quite embarrassed by it, and they sensed that giving it words would damage, maybe destroy, it.

Tyler argued with his parents over family Christmas plans. He wanted to stay home, and so did Bill. Once again, Bill didn't have money to travel, and his mother was sad but resigned.

Somehow, they both felt that time with their mothers was not what they needed just then. The pair agreed to fight on Christmas Eve. It wasn't a Saturday, but it worked.

The weather conspired with them. It only went down to forty-two degrees on the morning of the twenty-fifth. They decided to go later, and had a few beers and watched some TV. At 5:30 AM, they trekked over to Twenty-Seventh Street and stretched. The fight started out quiet. No one got a good swing. Both of their defenses were up and in top performance. Gradually, things heated up. A blow to the cheek here, a swipe at the side of the rib cage there. Tyler loved to go for Bill's stomach, and he lowered and jabbed at just the right moment. Bill doubled over, but stood back up almost immediately.

They didn't notice the temperature. They were warming up, their bodies sweating under their thick shirts. Suddenly, Tyler backed off and suggested they take off the sweatshirts. Now their glistening bodies emitted steam as their sweat hit the cold. The fight heated up still more. Their nude torsos made them feel like fighting animals. Their muscles strained and pulled at the leash. Now they started loosening up, and they both got in some good shots. Tyler hit Bill square in the nose. Bill didn't flinch, but after a moment, Tyler noticed a thin trickle of blood from Bill's nostril. "Buddy," he gestured at his nose. Bill knew what it meant. They hesitated to see if Bill would start bleeding a lot. He didn't, so they proceeded. Bill wiped the blood from below his nose and rubbed it across his chest. Every few minutes, Bill would swipe at the blood under his nose and rub it off on his chest. Soon his pecs were smeared with clotting blood. The fight escalated unabated.

The blood smell excited them. They took chances to score hits. That sometimes meant gratuitous blows to the head.

Tyler swung with his left; Bill ducked and thrust with his right. The punches came quicker. Moving. Moving. Punch. *Thump*. Both their lips curled in antagonism. They felt like they were building to orgasm. *Swipe. Snap*. Bill hit Tyler in the eye socket. Moving. Moving. Tyler slammed Bill's cheekbone. Moving.

All at once, Bill saw an entrée. Uppercut to the chin. Immediate left to the side of the head. Tyler lowered his hands slightly in distress. Wide right to the other side of Tyler's head. Tyler dropped.

Bill waited for Tyler's signal that he was OK. The second it came, Bill jumped up and down for joy, fists in the air. He had conquered. He had destroyed. He had overcome. What bliss. What joy. This had never happened before. Tyler always won. It was not that Bill didn't do any damage in the process, but he had never overwhelmed his opponent and been the clear victor. He spat on the ground, and clenched all his muscles in a sort of body-fist. He danced around Tyler, who was starting to get up. He cheered for himself. He was so glad.

Tyler was indeed OK. When he got up, Bill put his hand behind his head and pulled Tyler into a kiss on his mouth. Bill had tears in his eyes—and so did Tyler. “Come on. Get your stuff. Let's go to the river,” Tyler said somewhat weakly. They put on their shirts and Bill grabbed their gear and they headed to Twelfth Avenue. At that hour, it took only a few minutes to find a way to cross the West Side Highway to the river walkway.

The sun was coming up behind them and behind New York. The western sky in front of them turned purple, then pink. They were on the edge of the city, where only the river separates civilization from the land. They were both overjoyed. They had never experienced—never would

experience—anything like this in their lives. Bill started to cry. Tears streaming down his face, he turned to face Tyler, perpendicular to the railing.

“Thank you, Tyler,” he said. “Thank you for saving my life.”

— PUP

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