



***SOUTH OF
SOUTH BEACH***

By

KEITH G. LAUFENBERG

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FIRST EDITION

Except in certain, actual, historical circumstances, where real names are used, all characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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Miami Rock
Semper-Fi-Do-Or-Die

For *God*, the *Father*, creator of all things and everything eternal, and for those human beings who love the truth, something I search for constantly, every time that I put pen to paper.

And for my family, my wife of thirty-three years, Andrea, and my four children, Amanda, Natalie, Danny and Denise, who have made my life an easier, happier journey, along with my two grandchildren, Michael and Noelle, whose very names always bring a smile to my face.

And, finally, for anyone who knew South Beach in the 1960's and 70's, I hope that this is the way you remember it, because, for me, this is the way it was.

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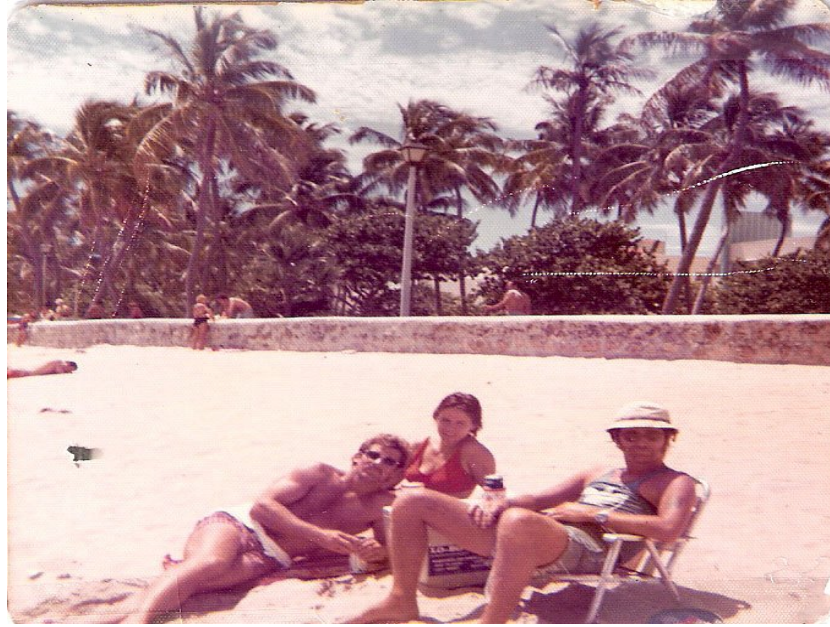
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BOOK ONE

THE BEACH



The dim, dark sea, so like unto **D**eath,
That divides and yet unites mankind.
—Longfellow, *The Building of the Ship*, 1. 166.

FOREWORD

SOUTH OF SOUTH BEACH

And for their birthplace moan, as moans the ocean-shell.
—Felicia **H**mans, *The Forest Sanctuary*.



Every year the State of Florida has innumerable visitors: vacationers, tourists, conventioners and drifters. They come from all over the country indeed, from all over the world, and most of them are more than apt to visit the famed fun-n-sun Capital of the State, Miami Beach. Of the thousands that visit each year, only a very few will stay indefinitely. The majority will return to their homes, their families and their jobs. The few that do stay soon learn that Miami Beach, being primarily a tourist town, offers little in the way of earning a decent living. The construction trades operate in the open-shop atmosphere, ensuring that the pay-scales will be in favor of the companies, who will capitalize on their positions of strength and take the low-bidders. They soon learn that all the good jobs, along with the majority of the menial ones, are taken and any positions that open up are fiercely fought for by the many Cuban refugees, poor minorities, immigrants, both legal and illegal, and the many itinerants like themselves. Unless they are willing to move to a more metropolitan area, such as Miami, they soon find out that they are in for a very rough time. Through all of this, some stay. Those with a little money, soon find it gone. If they own an automobile they find themselves, many times, living in it. Those without wheels find themselves sleeping on the sandy beaches or cramped lifeguard towers. Almost invariably, the majority of those that remain end up in one of the innumerable rooming houses, apartments or hotels that proliferate throughout the southernmost portion of the island known as Miami Beach. This particular section stretches from the ocean, Ocean Drive, and then west, to Alton Road, and then to the northernmost boundary, to Lincoln Road, and then all the way to the southernmost, which ends at Biscayne Street. Some residents claimed that South Beach ran as far north as 23rd Street but most long-time habitués stopped South Beach at Lincoln Road, as anything north of there was considered ‘uptown’, a word that also translated into more expensive. This story then is about some of these people and it begins at a South Beach landmark, the pier that sits just off Biscayne Street and Ocean Drive, just east of the Biscayne Kennel Club, more commonly referred to as the Dog-Track, which is filled this bright, sunny day in 1966 with innumerable young surfer’s and sun bather’s; it is the only stretch of beach that actually is south of what is considered the established boundaries of South Beach and

is, along with the Dog-Track, actually south of South Beach. On this day, a young drifter is staring out at a vast expanse of bikini-clad bodies, as they walk, run or boogie their way across this sandy beach, provocatively in play. The Rock'n'Roll music blares forth resoundingly from numerous transistor radios—the beach looks inviting and the frolicking females look easy to the newcomer, on this short stretch of beach—just south of South Beach.

-1-

THE G-MAN



If you provoke me, I'll make you laugh on the wrong side of your mouth.
—John Ozell, *Moliere*, iv, 36. (1714)

If a thing be spoken in jest, it is not fair to take it seriously.
—Plautus, *Amphitruo*, 1. 920. (Act iii, sc. 2.)

A bitter jest that comes too near the truth leaves a sharp sting behind.
—Tacitus, *Annals*. Bk. xv, sec. 68.

Gary Greb was staring out onto the beach when a flash stung his eyes—momentarily blinding him—as a young woman walked over to him. “Hello, I’m the Enquiring Reporter,” she said, smiling.

“Oh, is that right? You’re the enquiring reporter then—huh?”

“Well—yes—and I just snapped your picture for the newspaper, the Miami Herald you know?”

“Yeah, well—hummm—ummm—what for?”

“Well, I just wanted to ask you a question and your answer will be printed in tomorrow’s edition—with your picture—of course.”

“My pit-chur’s gonna be in ah paper, huh?”

“Yessir, it certainly will be and I can be the one to assure you of that fact because I’m the Enquiring Reporter, as I said sir.”

“Wait, just a minute not sir, anything but sir, I just got outta the Crotch, I can’t take sir anymore.”

“Excuse me sir—the ah-er-um—what did you say?”

“Nothin’—nothin’ baby—jes’ don’t call me sir, okay?”

“Bu’ ... but I don’t know your name?”

The man smiled and stared at a bikini-clad female, sitting just underneath the pier he was standing on. The female reporter looked confused, as he appeared to be contemplating his answer and, just as she was about to give up on him, he said, “Kyrptonite.”

“Cah-rip-tah ... excuse me sir?”

“No—not sir—Crypt-tow-nite,” he replied, smiling.

“Crept-tow-nite ...? Ah, um, what is ah ...?”

“Crypt-tow-nite, you know like in ah Superman comic’s, what he’s immune to, the only thing stronger’n the man ah steel is Cryptonite.”

The newspaperwoman frowned. “Excuse me, but your name is Crept-tow-nite?”

“Crypt-tow-nite J. Kidding,” Greb said.

“Crept-tow-nite Jay Kid-dee?” she replied, arching her eyebrows.

“Kidding, Kidding. That’s right and the Jay stands for Justin but we shortened it to Just when I-us just a kid and I been Just Kiddin’ ever since, heh-heh.”

The journalist smiled benignly and shook her head. “Oh, I see—you’re a comedian then?”

“Well, er—that is to say—ah you-ah, you like comedians then huh?”

“No—I turned down the entertainment beat—I have no interest in them, they’re all phonies. My brother’s an actor—he lives in L.A.—and *thinks* he’s gonna *be famous*.”

“Maybe he will be famous?”

“Yes, but ... oh well, if you’re not going to answer my question then I have work to do.”

“I wanna answer *it* *but* you ain’t ast it yet?”

“Well—then what would you wish to be if you could be anything, Mister Kidding—if that’s your real name?”

“Of course it’s my real monicker, why would I lie? Oh, you maybe think I’m wanted, huh? Yeah—well—I guess I better come clean then—I am—dead or alive, although I doubt if they’d accept me alive.”

“Wha’ ... what?” she said.

“That’s right, I’m a wanted man—ten grand ree-ward. That’s right, think ah it, ten grand. So, be nice to me and I’ll let you capture me, heh-heh.”

“What? You’re wanted—by who? For what?” she hissed.

“They all want me. FBI, CIA, NSA, ABC, CBS, NBC, ASPCA, NAACP, ACLU, Uncle Sam too, heh-heh, for associatin’,” Greb said, nodding at her.

“Associating with who?”

“Whom, whom—double-you, h-cha, oh, mm-mah—you should know that, I mean, bein’ a ree-portah and all.”

“You’re crazy.”

“My muddah used to say that.”

“Your mother?” the reporter replied.

“Yeah, before they committed ‘er.”

“They committed your mother?”

“Yeah—poor thing—they institutionalized her. Put her in a mall. Yup, she shuffles through that mall day in and day out, heh-heh. She loves it, even though she only gets out once a month

to take a shower.”

“I don’t believe this.”

“It’s true. They almost got her for associatin’ too.”

“Please.”

“Really—wid dah ginny’s,” Greb whispered, looking around hesitantly.

“The gah-in—”

“Eye-tal-yuns, if you know wha’ I mean?”

“What? But ... I’m Italian.”

“Yeah, but are you a member? You know, those guys from upstate New York that live by that golden rule—if you can’t beat ‘em have ‘em killed.”

“The mafia—you mean the maf ...”

“Sshhhhhh—I’m a cap-po’.”

“A cap-pah?”

“Capo-do-do-too-tee-fruitee, to be exact,” he said, smiling and holding in a laugh.

The female reporter sighed and smiled thinly. “I don’t need this.” She turned to leave when he grabbed her forearm, causing her to glare at her arm—then at him. “If you don’t mind,” she said and was removing her forearm from his grasp when he shrugged.

“No—it’s just that I wanna answer yah question—see, cause I wanna be King.”

“King ... did you say you wanted to be King?”

“Yeah, ‘at’s right—King!”

“There are no *Kings* in America?”

“Yeah but see I’m a foreigner—originally—I’m from Bow-gah-tah.”

“Bogota? Colombia?”

“Chile, actually—or Chil-lay, as we Chil-lay-uns say.”

The reporter smiled slightly.

“See, you can laugh.”

“I wasn’t laughing Mister Kidding or whatever your name is. So you don’t want to answer my question?”

“I do—I do want to—if you’d just answer mine?”

“I’m busy tonight and every night this week.”

“No-no, I just wanted to know your name and what *YOU* want to be?”

“My name is a matter of record, it’s in the paper.”

“Yeah, well—I’m new in town—just been here a couple ah days; really, what’s your name.”

“Priscilla, Priscilla Pensure.”

“Prah-cil-luh Pen-sure,” he croaked. I mean, no kiddin’? Zat jah, like, pro-fesh-nul name—I mean Pen-sure, cool man. Hey, c’mon don’t leave. No, really. What do you wanna be, you know, really?”

“Well, my managing editor is, well I could do a better job, as a matter of fact, I ...”

“I know you *could* do a better ... what ...?”

“You’re smiling because you’re the one who’s supposed to answer *my* question. Don’t you, I mean what do *you* do for ... for a living?”

“What do I do for a living? You mean money, or mow-nay as we, hey wait a minute—I’m a prizefighter—that’s right, I fight for prizes.”

“You’re a boxer? Really—I mean a professional?”

“Yeah, that’s right, sumpin’ wrong wid dat?”

“What’s your ring name?”

“Kayo MacSnurd—I mean, hey wait, Gary Greb’s my name man. Ring name, same name—really—Miz Petshow.”

“Do you insult everyone?”

“Only if I like ‘em,” Greb replied, smiling.

“Oh? Are you really a boxer?”

“Yeah, I am, sumpin’ wrong wid dat?”

“No—do you know Cassius Clay?”

“Muhammad Al-lee, you mean.”

“Yes-yes—of course—I forgot.”

“Yeah—ah-er sure—*sure* I know ‘im,” he said.

“Did you ever box him?”

“I’m a middleweight and he’s a heavy but see the thing is he won’t box me.”

“He won’t?”

“No, whenever he sees I’m in town he quickly departs.”

“Oh? Why is that?”

“I’m liable to hurt him. You know, the two baddest men on the planet in the same town, hey, where yah goin’? Miz Petshow, c’mon, talk to the G-Man.”

Priscilla Pensure turned from about ten feet away. “The Gee-man?” she said, smiling slightly.

“Yeah, Gary Greb, that’s me, the G-Man—get it?”

“Of course Mister G-Man, my, how amusing.”

“Hey, **WAIT!** Wait, Pre-sil-lah, how about me and you, tonight, come on, I’ll ...”

Priscilla Pensure cocked her head slightly as she sashayed off the pier. “You’re too immature.”

Gary Greb stood with his hands on his hips and, in an incredulous whisper, mouthed, “Too immature ... too, man, forget about that ... what the hell’s that?” The G-Man noticed a group of people pointing towards where a large ship was sailing into the Atlantic Ocean, just adjacent and to the rear of the large Biscayne Kennel Club—the Dog Track—a jetty where the ships regularly headed out from the dockside in Biscayne Bay, just a couple of miles west, alongside of the 5th Street Causeway. He saw little groups of people running that way and then heard a siren and looked over to see an ambulance and a police car pulling into the parking lot that was usually loaded with cars from beachgoers and habituates of the Dog Track, just next to it. He shrugged his shoulders and glanced at his watch, seeing it was just a little past eleven a.m., which was plenty of time to get to the gym—just a couple of blocks away—and so he strolled onto the sand and walked towards the jetty, where a large crowd was now gathering. Greb saw that the jetty was a long rocky crag that drifted towards Miami and would be a dangerous area to walk on but was sure that people walked on the rocks to get a better view of the incoming and outgoing ships or maybe to get absolute privacy, as with a pair of teenagers or a pair of lovers without access to a room and you could see that it was somewhere where few people would look for you—if you needed to hide out somewhere. He watched as a body was being pulled out of the ocean and walked closer only to see two policemen telling the crowd to back away from the rocks, as they could be hurt trying to get a foothold. Greb walked over to where one of the cops was standing and nodded at him. He frowned at Greb but then nodded slightly when he saw the tee-shirt Greb had on that had U.S.M.C. emblazoned across the front of it. “Hey man, what’s up?” the G-Man barked.

The cop eyed Greb warily but then shrugged and said, “Ah-eh, nothin’ man, a wino drowned, that’s all.”

“Yeah, how the hell ...?”

“... I’ll tell yah how sport. You’re new in town huh?”

“Ah ... yeah-yeah I am man, wha’ ... why?”

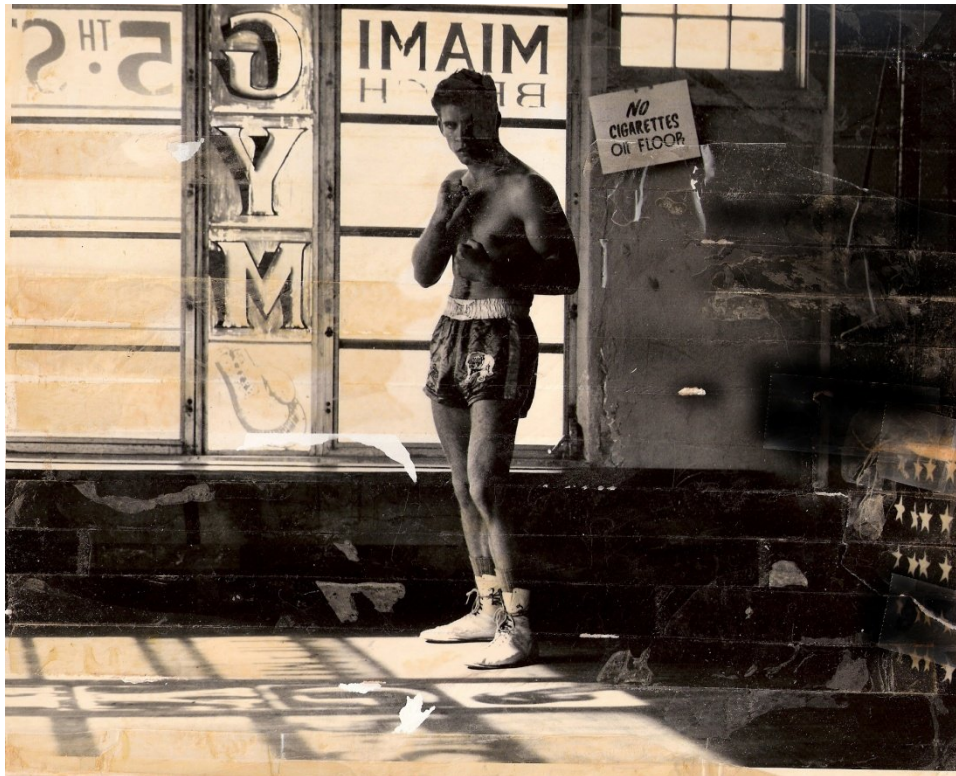
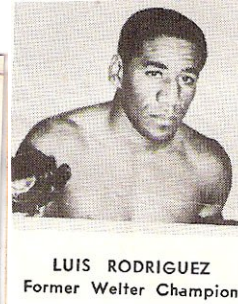
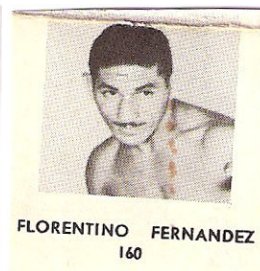
“See those rocks pal, huh? Freakin’ nasty man, get slippery too when the wind blows at night and the waves wash up here, see what I mean?”

“Yeah but why would this guy ...”

“Ace Melona—that was his name—and he was a degenerate gambler pal. See that,” the cop said, nodding towards the huge Biscayne Kennel Club, “the Dog Track pal, that’s where Ace lived and y’know what that’s where he just died too—yup—south of South Beach.”

Greb nodded, as the cop rambled on but then stopped him in mid-sentence. “excuse me,” he said, “south ah South Beach? I mean wha’ ...?”

“See that jetty pal, that’s south ah South Beach, actually everything south ah Biscayne Street is south ah South Beach but that’s just this little stretch ah beach next to the Dog Track and this jetty and people that end up there,” the cop nodded towards the bloated body of Ace Melona, “south ah South Beach man. Yeah you lose all yah green and jump inside a bottle to drown yah sorrows or get so broke you gotta sleep out here that’s where you end up, yup and I seen more than one over the years too kid, been a Beach cop almost twenty years. Yeah, you’re new in town well kid, take a look, take a good look and just hope you don’t end up where Ace ended up, yup the last place you ever wanna end up is south ah South Beach pal, south ah South Beach ‘cause it means you either livin’ on the street, runnin’ from the law or ...” the cop nodded towards the dead body now being loaded into an ambulance and drily said, “or you’re a stiff.”



‘Twas blow for blow, disputing inch by inch,
For one would not retreat, nor t’other flinch.
—Byron, *Don Juan*. Canto viii, st. 77.

The 5th Street Gym is located on the corner of Washington Avenue and 5th Street—just a few blocks west of South Beach—where it sits on the top of a drugstore. A couple of well-worn shoe-shine chair’s, sitting on top of a crumbling plywood stand about two feet high, are shoved against a rear wall that is just adjacent to a steel gate, which is pulled across the entranceway to the gymnasium. There is a blackboard riveted to a cement wall with ‘TRAINING HERE DAILY’ stamped in white, block letters on the top and there are about a dozen names, written in chalk, underneath, with three of these standing out more boldly than the others, **GOMEO BRENNAN, FLORENTINO FERNANDEZ,** and **LUIS RODRIGUEZ** as these were the only names to be stamped into the blackboard, painted on—as it were—in large white letters and there was another name chalked in, in letters dwarfing the others, which read: **‘MUHAMMAD ALI-1:00 P.M.-3:00 P.M.- \$1.00 ENTRANCE FEE.’**

Gary Greb strolled up to the steel gate and glanced at the large padlock. He nodded at another fighter, who was sitting in one of a pair of shoeshine chairs and glanced at his watch and saw it was twenty minutes until noon. He threw his gym-bag next to the other fighters' and sat on the stand, in front of the other dilapidated chair.

"Think this guy's gonna show up man?"

"Gil? Sure man. Chris lets him keep anything he can finagle out of the spectator's man. Like that dollar to watch Ali—he keeps all of that—but he's gotta open and close the gym too, he's retired man, extra green for him man. Say I'm Larry Adkins, man." Adkins, a slightly balding welterweight from Cleveland, proffered his hand.

"Gary Greb man—but you can jus' call me the G-Man."

"G-Man, right—hey man, I seen you sparrin' wid Davison G-Man, you should ah took it easy on 'im man—that's for sure."

"Oh yeah—why's that?"

"Man you couldah got a fight with him man. Dude's a local boy man. Shee-it, they feedin' 'im set-ups too—hell, you couldah got jah' se'f an easy fight."

"Yeah? Well, hell wid it man, shee-it, I need a fight pretty soon and that's for sure man, my backbone's starting to touch my bellybutton."

"Heh-heh—yeah, I know what you mean there G-Man. How many fights you had?"

"Aw, six man. Had about twenty-five amateur too, mostly in ah Corps."

"You mean the Marines Corps?" Adkins said.

"Yeah and I had about a half-dozen more when I got out—most of those in Vay-gus. I turned pro there."

"Yeah—in Las Vegas—how is it man? How about the pay, what'd you get?"

"Well, I only fought five's and sixes Larry but I got a cee-note for a five, and a buck and a quarter for a six."

"A hundred for five rounds—man—that's double what Chris pays man. Ten bucks a round man, 'cept for the main go that is."

"Wha' ... what—ten bucks a round, shee-it, you kiddin'?"

"Nope—course the main go's are the only three-minute rounds."

"What?"

"Yeah—all the pre-lims are two minute rounds."

"What? Two-zzz. I never fought a two in my life man."

"Yeah, well, you better fight in the main-go's then."

"Man—two-zz—that ain't real boxin'—how you pace yourself man?"

"Shee-it, if you outta shape—hell—it's a lifesaver."

Greb noticed a pack of cigarettes in Adkins' shirt-pocket and smiled a thin, sardonic smile.

"Yeah, I see what you mean man."

"Yeah, well, where you gonna go man? Except for Vegas and L-lay, this is the only city where you kin fight regular. Chris promotes fights every week man."

"Yeah—well maybe I'll go back to Vay-gus?"

"Yeah—well, I'll tell you there's some tough dudes around here man. They got some tough ghettoes down here man, Liberty City, Overtown, some tough dudes, y'know?"

"Larry, I'm from Dee-Cee man, y'know they got some tough ghettoes there too."

"Yeah—yeah, I guess they do man. Anyway Chris Dundee got himself a gym-full ah hungry fighter's man and they all lookin' for a title shot, get Angelo to sign 'em up and make some money."

“Yeah—Angelo can get you a title shot, huh?”

“Shee-it, he got Ali, don’t he?”

“Yeah—yeah, right—hey man you know Pastrano?”

“Shee-it, Willie P? I hear he’s on the horse.”

“Really—dude’s on heroin, huh?”

“That’s what I hear man. Why?”

“Ah nothin’, just thought I’d ah-er, you know, say hello to the dude.”

“Oh yeah—you know ‘im?”

“Naw but Ralph told me to look ‘im up.”

“Ralph?”

“Ralph Dupas man. Said he and Pastrano went to Miami Beach together and Dundee’s managing ‘em both.”

“Ralph Doo-puz, you know Doo-puz man?”

“Yeah, I boxed wid ‘im in Vay-gus.”

“Yeah—he’s in Las Vegas, huh?”

“Yeah, they’re from New Orleans, him and Pastrano. I boxed wid another dude from that area too, dude named Freddie Little man and diz dude’s got a left hook like a bomb.”

“Freddie Little huh? Never heard ah him man,” Adkins said.

“Yeah—you will man, dude can fight—just beat Eddie Pace.”

“Eddie Pace—you mean the contender from L-lay?” Adkins said.

“Yeah man.”

“Yeah, this Little must be pretty good then, huh?”

“He is man. Hey, why they got Ali’s name up there? He ain’t trainin’ here anymore, is he?”

“Naw, not now but he was here a few months or so, ago. Shee-it, he’ll be back man—ol’ Gil just keeps the sign up hopin’ he kin get some suckers to come up and charge ‘em a buck to watch us rummies work-out.”

“Gets a buck a head when Ali’s here?”

“Yup—shee-it, he cleans up man, people pack this place to see Ali.”

“Yeah,” Greb said, looking up to see an elderly man with a shock of white hair unlocking the gate to the gym, as he and Adkins both grabbed their gym-bag’s and headed towards the stairway.

“Hey Gary, I got somebody I want yah tah work wid, aw-rye?”

Greb nodded at the old man. “Sure Gil, I need a fight man, you know?”

Gil Strong, who managed the gym, opening and closing it for Chris Dundee, had been watching Greb for the three days he had been in town. The boy appeared to be in good shape and Strong was always on the lookout for fighters, especially Anglo’s like Greb and Adkins. He slid the gate open and the two fighters walked up the stairs and into the gymnasium. Greb and Adkins walked into the dressing rooms in the back of the gym and were getting dressed when Chris Dundee appeared. He showed Greb and Adkins that his teeth were capped, with his usual wide smile. “G-Man—get dressed—I got somebody I wan’ chew tah work wid, okay Sonny?”

Greb smiled at Adkins and nodded at Dundee. “Sure thing Chris,” he said, as Dundee disappeared through a pair of filthy red curtains.

Gary Greb boxed ten rounds, that afternoon, two with a lightweight, three with a middleweight and five with a heavyweight. He was taking his gloves off when Chris Dundee walked over.

“You look to be in good shape, Sonnyboy.”

Grebb smiled at Dundee. Besides your given name, Chris Dundee called everybody Sonny or Sonnyboy.

“Yeah? I’m ready for a fight too Chris.”

“Can you go ten rounds, Sonny?”

Grebb, remembering what Adkins had told him about the preliminary fighter’s getting ten dollars a round and fighting, to him, unaccustomed two-minute rounds, smiled deceptively. “I jes’ went ten with three guys din’ I?”

“Did you? I was on ah phone. Look, I got a guy I want you to work wid tomorrow, be here at noon.”

“Yeah sure Chris, ain’t I everyday?”

Chris Dundee opened his mouth to say something but was called back to the telephone.

The next day Gary Grebb was shadowboxing in front of a large mirror when Chris Dundee accosted him, slipping an arm over his shoulder. “Sonny—get ready—I got somebody for you to work wid.”

Grebb followed Dundee’s glance to inside the ring, where another fighter was having gloves tied on his hands. Grebb nodded and Gil Strong came over with a pair of 16-ounce boxing gloves, used for sparring in the gym. Grebb glanced at the other fighter and sized him up. He was bigger than Grebb, appearing to be taller and heavier. Grebb took his mouthpiece out of his gym-bag, rinsed it off and slipped it into his mouth. Gil Strong put the 16-ounce gloves on Grebb’s hands and rubbed Vaseline onto his eyebrows. Grebb disdained headgear, and refused to wear any, and so Strong felt he needed to use excessive Vaseline, no sense taking a chance on having one of his meal ticket’s cut up. He dabbed the Vaseline onto Grebb’s eyebrows and then onto a scar underneath his lower lip. Nodding towards the other fighter, Strong rasped, “This guy hits hard G-Man—so watch out.”

Grebb frowned, even though it was nothing unusual for him to hear, the majority of the people in boxing, other than the fighter’s themselves, knew little if anything about the sport, only a very few having ever boxed themselves. He lowered his left hand and cocked his right, as he walked to the center of the ring, and noticed the other boxer’s stance was identical to his, as both men were counter-punchers, neither one wishing to lead, waiting for the other to throw a punch first. If there was one thing Grebb had learned in his four years in the ring it was the undeniable fact that every time you threw a punch you were open for a counterpunch. The two men boxed three rounds and Chris Dundee approached Grebb, as he was taking his gloves off. “How did you like boxing Jimmy, Sonnyboy?”

Grebb nodded at Dundee. “Jimmy?”

“Ralston—Jimmy Ralston—you just boxed him, how would you like to fight him, I mean I—that is—would you box him?”

Grebb shrugged. “I dunno, I’ll fight anybody man. I’m a middleweight though—you know Chris?”

“Yeah, yeah sure, Jimmy can make one sixty-five though, you know? Yeah, maybe I’ll make that match.”

As Dundee walked towards a jangling telephone in the corner of the gym, Grebb frowned at Gil Strong, as he pulled off his gloves, and growled, “Might make *what* match?”

THE BROTHERS & THE COWBOY



I think, am sure, a brother's love exceeds
All the world's loves in its unwordliness.
—Robert Browning, *A Blot in the `Scutcheon*. Act ii, sc.1.

Of a truth, men are mystically united: a mysterious bond of brotherhood makes all men one.
—Carlyle. *Essays: Goethe's Works*.

The Cowboy spied his intended target and slowed his pace, as she appeared to be shapely from a distance but you could never tell, sometimes until you were almost upon them. At eighteen, the Cowboy's libido was at a high-point and life—to him—seemed to be a constant search for a willing female, of the species human. He quickly came abreast of the girl, who was sitting just adjacent to the lifeguard tower on 3rd Street Beach and stopped for an instant, feigning an interest in the ocean-view. He glanced at her and saw she was smiling at him, normally a good sign. Returning her smile, he nodded. “Lotta boats out today, huh?”

“Yes, there are—it's certainly a nice day for it.”

“Ah-um, so you're down here on vacation then, huh?”

“Well yes—yes I am—is it that obvious?”

The Cowboy smiled sardonically and glanced around the sandy dunes; except for him and the lifeguard, and now this fine specimen, there was no one under the age of spinsterhood on the beach. He slipped down onto one knee and then, when she smiled again, sat down on her large beach-towel. Returning her smile, he said, “Hi, I'm Bob.”

The two men walked to a rock-and-cement wall that cordoned off a section of the beach between 2nd and 3rd Street, on Ocean Drive; a large, chalk-white condominium sitting to the north, on 3rd Street, and another, almost identical condo, to the south, on 2nd Street, with the ocean being straight ahead, to the east, and directly in front of where they stood. The bulkier of the two men lit a cigarette and exhaled a spiraling-stream of noxious smoke, causing the other man to move his head, as the smoke filtered past him and up towards an otherwise, crystal-clear blue sky. The man with the cigarette frowned and spit on the sand. He glanced at a brick building a dozen feet from where they stood. “Getty still in ah bad-room ah what?”

“Yeah, here he comes now.”

The two men smiled as their younger brother came out of the beach bathroom. He nodded at both his brothers and rasped, “Gimme a cigarette will youse David.”

Twenty-eight-year-old David ‘Duke’ McGuire, the oldest of four brothers, sneered but slipped one out of a crumpled pack he had stuffed in the waistband of his size forty bathing suit, his forty-six inch waist pressing the package against the drawstring of the bathing suit. Jerry ‘Getty’ McGuire took the cigarette and frowned. He struck a match and tried to light the cigarette, puffing furiously on it. He finally got it lit and, putting spit on his fingers, massaged a slice in the middle of it where tobacco appeared to be spilling out. “Damn man, why youse gotta keep the friggin’ cigs stuck in youse bathin’ suit?”

“Man, hell wid youse Getty—buy youse own damn smokes then man.”

Dennis ‘Shamrock’ McGuire, five years younger than his older brother and two years older than his two twin brothers, Jerry and John, shook his head and said, “Let’s hit the wall man, there’s a lil’ chill in ah air this mawnin’.” The trio headed towards the northernmost condominium, about fifty yards to the left of the bathrooms, and Shamrock smiled. “Hey look man the Cowboy,” he barked, nodding towards the Cowboy, who was talking to a girl on the beach.

The Duke smiled and shrugged. “Yeah, I see he’s wid annudah hef-fah again, too.”

“Yeah, the Cowboy’s maybe interferin’ wid our territory here—what ah youse t’ink, Duke?”

“Heh-heh—he is gettin’ close man.”

Jerry McGuire, who had come down to Miami Beach the previous day, joining his two older brothers, both of whom had been there a month from their hometown of Howard Beach, in Queens, smiled and stared towards the Cowboy, who was about fifty feet from where the trio now stood against the side of the fifteen-story condominium, just off 3rd Street. McGuire noticed that the Cowboy was wearing a black, straw cowboy hat, a pair of black jeans cut down to shorts and black cowboy boots.

“Who is diz guy, Sham’?”

Dennis ‘Shamrock’ McGuire nodded at his younger brother. He had a tattoo of a shamrock on his left forearm, with ‘Fighting Irish’ tattooed underneath and a bulldog with ‘U.S.M.C.’ tattooed underneath, on his right forearm. His older brother, the Duke, had an identical bulldog tattooed on his shoulder and Jerry had a bulldog on his shoulder also, but with the words ‘Devil Dogs’ tattooed underneath. Both he and his twin brother John had just returned from Vietnam and Shamrock had been back from Vietnam for less than six months.

“Ah-eh, he’s a local dude—grew up here man. Knows dah lay ah the land, youse know? He spends a lotta time on ah beach man, he’s here everyday, always see ‘im talkin’ to differen’ hef-

fahs,” Shamrock said, nodding, as he walked towards them. “Yeah, hey here he comes man.” Shamrock nodded at him and smiled. “Yo’ Cowboy wuz up man?”

“Hey Shamrock, what’s up?”

“Seen youse talkin’ tah dah hef-fah, wuz up wid-ah?”

“Heifer ... ah ...? Oh yeah, heh, well she’s here on vacation from New York, visitin’ her grandmother. Strictly worshipping the lifeguards though, she even kept lookin’ towards the stand while I was talkin’ to her.”

“Yeah, she looks like a typical L-guard eye-dough-lizah.”

“Yeah, she’s idolizing the lifeguards alright.”

“Hey Cowboy, meet my other brother Getty.”

“Getty—hey I’m Bob.”

“Hey Bob.” Jerry McGuire shook the Cowboy’s outstretched palm.

“Yeah-rum-ah, well I guess you can just call me Cowboy if you want to, you know the Duke and Shamrock here they call me that so I guess it’s alright.”

Jerry McGuire smiled then nodded towards the teenage girl the Cowboy had just struck out with. Somebody else was trying his luck. “Hey Sham’ ain’t dat dah guy from dah Fifth Stree’?”

“Yeah, that’s him.”

“The G-Man—right?”

“Yeah, that’s what some ah the other fighter’s call ‘im.”

“He was chasing a heavyweight around dah ring yesterday.”

“Yeah, that was Levi man. He busted up a couple other lighter fighters too—dude’s bad man—says he can’t get a fight.”

“Really—man, we need to know diz guy—huh Duke?”

The Duke chain-lit another unfiltered cigarette and smiled towards Gary Greb, who was walking away from the girl now.

“Yeah, looks like he din’ do any bettah ‘en the Cowboy, huh?” The Duke lowered his voice as Greb walked past them and nodded towards him but the G-Man just scowled and kept walking.

“Man, did youse see that scowl, like Sonny Liston, huh?”

“Yeah, but he’s only a middleweight.”

Shamrock laughed at the Duke’s statement and glanced at his brother’s forty-six inch waist. “Man, he hits youse in youse gut youse’ll be a deadweight.” Everybody laughed but the Duke, who scowled and lit another cigarette, trying to think of a fast comeback.

Gary Greb scowled and threw a wild left hook, almost turning his body completely around when he missed. The bell ending the round clanged and Gil Strong began removing his gloves, as the other fighter stepped out of the ring. He patted Greb on the butt as he passed. “Goo’ work, goo’ work ah G-Man, we boox ag’in to-maw-raw.”

“Yeah sure man,” Greb replied.

Gil Strong threw the gloves on a table nearby. “That was good work G-Man, Lou-wee likes workin’ with you, he’s got a big fight comin’ up soon.”

Greb nodded and Chris Dundee walked over to him. He showed Greb his entire dental work and, wrapping an arm over his shoulders, steered him to a corner of the gym. “That was good work G-Man—how you like sparrin’ wid Lou-wee Rodriguez?”

“He moves like a rubber ball on concrete man but I’ll catch ‘im next time.”

“Right—look G-Man—I want you to fight Jimmy Ralston in the main go Tuesday, what ah you say?”

“I guess man—what weight?”

“Jimmy’ll make a hundred sixty-five, okay?”

“I guess.”

“I usually pay a percentage of the gate but, well how much of a guarantee would you need?”

The most money Greb had earned in the ring in his six months as a pro was a hundred and twenty-five bucks for a six-rounder in Las Vegas, and so he doubled that. “Bout two-fifty, I guess.”

Chris Dundee’s eyebrows arose in astonishment but then his eyes narrowed in thought and he glanced around the gymnasium then tightened his arm around Greb’s neck. He flashed Greb another Dick Nixon and quickly hissed, “Deal Sonnyboy—you got yourself a deal.”

As Chris Dundee walked towards a jangling telephone, the G-Man’s face showed confusion as he hissed “*Deal? What deal?*”

Dave McGuire frowned and lit a cigarette. He was standing in the lobby of the Atlas Hotel, a crumbling, decrepit three-story building that was badly in need of renovation. The Duke and Shamrock had rented rooms there for twenty dollars a week and Getty had checked in the previous night and had snagged a room with a sink in the corner for the same double sawbuck. The Duke was impatient and hated waiting on anybody, especially when that somebody was his younger brother. He was the first born and felt it was his right—indeed his duty—to guide his younger siblings in the ways of the world and to be listened to with respect, much as he had listened to his father with respect. His father was an ironworker and had passed that trade down to his sons, much as was the custom in the almost exclusively Irish section of Howard Beach, in the 1950’s and 60’s. The Duke had graduated from high school in 1956 and had immediately enlisted in the Marine Corps, his father having been in the Marines during the Second World War. He was stationed, after boot camp, at Cherry Point, the Marine Corps air station in North Carolina for the remainder of his enlistment and it was there that his character, already of a highly pessimistic nature, degenerated into one of loathing his bad luck in life. Being almost nowhere to go on liberty, the Duke spent many evenings in the enlisted men’s club, drowning his sorrows over as many beers as he could drink before the bar closed. He had begun smoking in high school, his father had smoked ever since he was a young boy, and his drinking became addictive at Cherry Point. His paycheck—he never got beyond the rank of PFC, E-2—prevented him from drinking every night, which he would have if he had had the money. His drinking habits in 1966 were such that he drank only when he knew that he had enough money to stay drunk for at least a week and otherwise to abstain entirely, knowing that once he started drinking he would not stop until all the money he could beg, borrow or steal ran out. He was never truly happy unless he was sad and he was at his saddest when inebriated which made him think he was happy which of course made him very sad. When he sobered up he returned to his normal state of melancholia, which made him inwardly happy and in turn made him a very forlorn, sad individual. He knew his three brothers had all been in Vietnam but that didn’t mean that they should refuse to recognize his position as the oldest, after all, he had been the first to enlist in the Corps and had he been called to a war why—of course—he would have gone. He hated to think

that his brothers had anything on him when it had always been him that had had the knowledge and experience that they didn't have. He exhaled a stream of noxious smoke when Shamrock and Getty walked into the lobby. "Man, it's 'bout time man, shee-it."

Shamrock, the only one who owned a car smiled at his older brother. "Where we goin' Duke, the S-un-S?" he said.

The Duke shrugged, the S & S Cafeteria was a well-known restaurant on Biscayne Boulevard that Shamrock had found, much as he found other eateries, he had put in for veteran's benefits, having seen combat in Vietnam, and he drove almost daily to the VA hospital in Miami to be examined and hang out with other veterans. He had quickly discovered others on the bennies were getting as much as he could earn working full-time as an ironworker and made every effort to get what he considered his rightful dues. Driving through the city so much he stopped to eat and tried numerous restaurants before finding anything like the home cooking he was always in search of and, having the only car, he well-knew that his brothers would go along to any place he took them to.

"The S-sun-S is good wid me Jake."

The three brothers walked out of the hotel just as a 1964, Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme pulled up to the curb. They all smiled and the Duke guffawed, when Shamrock barked, "Man, Biggie we missed youse, baby."

John 'Biggie' Biggins grinned. He had driven all the way from the Bronx—straight through—and had made it in just under a day, twenty hours. Biggins' father was a policeman in New York City and a friend of Dave McGuire Sr., who had gotten Biggins a job as an apprentice ironworker. Biggins had always been a shy, introverted boy and had shown a high aptitude for art but his father would have none of it and had badgered him into enlisting in the Army Air Corps, his old division, the 101st Airborne Division, just after his high school graduation. Biggins had suffered greatly in only a week at Fort Benning and, after a nervous breakdown, had been medically discharged. His father had been disgusted with him but had pulled some strings to get him a work permit in a New York local of the ironworkers union, where he had met the Duke and Shamrock and was soon following them everywhere, looking for the guidance and understanding that he couldn't seem to get from his father. "Where youse guys headed anyway, dinner?" Biggins said. "I gotta check in fois' okay? Hope they got a room?"

"Biggie—the Atlas is always got a vacancy, especially in October man, it ain't the season yet."

"Yeah, well what floor youse guys on?"

"Biggie, why'nt youse just stay wid Getty? He'll let youse sleep wid 'im, if youse treat him right, ah-heh-heh."

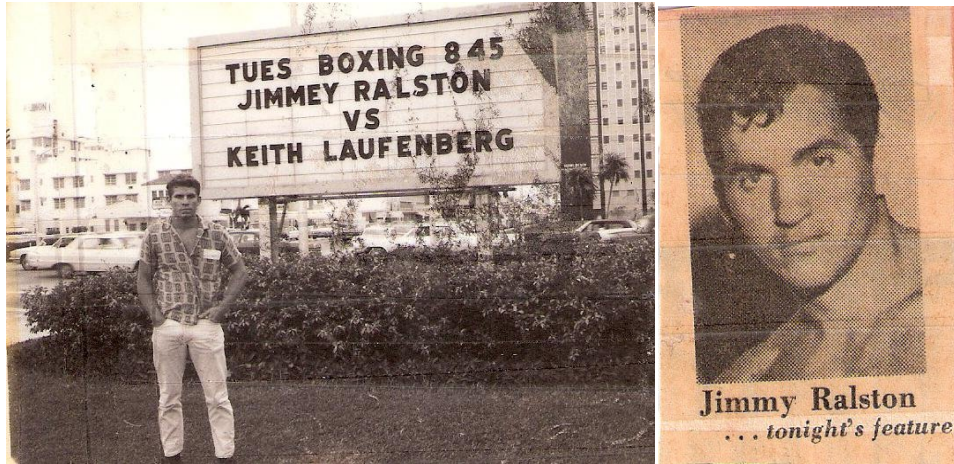
"Man—youse gotta start right in givin' me dah biz-nuz huh Dave? I gotta check in."

Biggins got out of his car, as the three men walked towards Shamrock's '64 Buick. Shamrock honked his horn, as he got behind the wheel, and nodded at Biggins. "We'll be at the S-sun-S Johnny."

Biggins nodded at the disappearing car and hurried into the hotel lobby, hoping that he could get there before they ordered.

The Cowboy lathered his face and glanced in the mirror, at his waistline, where a layer of fat pushed against his pants, and he wondered if maybe he hadn't gotten a date that day because of

it. He picked up his razor and glanced at his arms. Raising them upwards, he flexed them and saw that they needed improvement. Maybe he'd start an exercise regimen, he pondered silently, as he stroked the razor across his cheek. He finished shaving and walked out into his cluttered room. His mother was the manager of the Meridian Apartments, a two story walk-up that was located between 6th and 7th Street on Meridian Avenue, and less than a mile from the beach, where the Cowboy shared a small two-bedroom, one-bath apartment with her. His parents had divorced when he was but a toddler and his father had made for Los Angeles, where he would attempt but fail, like thousands of others, to break into the movie business. The Cowboy rarely worked and kept late-night hours and if he didn't snare a date from the beach than his routine was to walk up to Lincoln Road or down to the South Beach pier, just off First Street, always searching for the ever-elusive, willing female. He grabbed a pair of dark-black blue-jeans and slipped them on, then reached for a black, western style shirt. Johnny Cash, his man—the man in black—that's who was influencing his dressing style but the Cowboy didn't care if anyone picked up on it or not because he was soon going to travel to Nashville and take along some of the many songs he had written and maybe he'd even meet his idol, you never knew, stranger things had happened. As he grabbed his straw cowboy hat and slipped on his black cowboy boots, he stared at a picture hanging over his dresser, of an almost bare Raquel Welsh, and felt a quiver in his groin. Glancing at his watch, he jumped up and ran out of the room. You only had so much time in which to hunt before your quarry retired for the evening and it was already almost eight p.m., the prime hunting hours, the shank of the evening, was fast disappearing



Without were fightings, within were fears.
— *New Testament; II Corinthians*, vii, 5.

Gary Greb walked out of the dressing room at the 5th Street Gym and headed for the door. He wore a pair of cut-off blue-jeans and an undershirt; it was a stifling hot day and the G-Man meant to hit the beach for a few hours. He smiled, as Chris Dundee approached him and wrapped an arm around his neck. He steered Greb to a corner of the gym where there was a small table with a telephone and two chairs. Dundee motioned for Greb to sit down, which he did, noticing that the telephone had a little silver lock stuck in the dial which prevented anyone from using the phone, unless you had the key. Greb saw there was a contract on the table and his name was on it. It stated that he was to fight Jimmy Ralston in three days, that coming Tuesday—in the ten-round main event—and that he would be paid two hundred and fifty dollars. He saw that he was obliged to fight Ralston in a rematch—if he won—or Florentino Fernandez, Luis Rodriguez or Gomeo Brennan, all fighters under contract to Angelo Dundee. “Man you don’t leave nothin’ to chance huh Chris?”

“Wha’ ... what’s that Sonnyboy? I want you to fight Ralston in the main-go Tuesday alright—I mean what Ah yah mean?”

“Naw—nothin’—hey man, Gil Strong says I gotta sign a contract with him as my manager before I can fight, izatrye?”

Dundee did a quick Dick Nixon impersonation, showing Greb his capped bicuspid, then handed him a pen. “That’s up to you Sonnyboy, I personally think you should sign wid my bruddah, Angelo?”

Greb smiled laconically and scribbled his John Hancock at the bottom of the contract and Dundee’s bicuspid were quickly joined by a show of his molars. He grabbed the contract. “Okay Sonny. Look, a reporter from the Herald wants to interview you and there’s some tee-vee

people here too, okay Sonnyboy?"

Grebb nodded and smiled, little realizing that it was all publicity that would ensure more profits for everyone but him, as he had already agreed to box for two-hundred-fifty bucks. He watched Dundee scurry towards a jangling telephone and ambled over to the waiting sportswriter. He finished the interview in ten minutes and the television crew moved in, making a request for him to remove his shirt and throw a few punches on the heavy-bag. Grebb shrugged, slipped his shirt off, and grabbed the bag gloves from his gym-bag, as a photographer clicked his camera on and informed the G-Man that he could see himself on television that evening and an ironic smile slipped onto Grebb's lips, as he realized that his hotel room didn't have a television set.

The morning of the fight, Grebb awakened around ten in the morning, early for him as he normally slept until just before noon, the official weigh-in time. He got up and glanced in the bathroom mirror; no fat showed anywhere on his body, his slender waist accentuated his muscular shoulders and arms, and a smile slipped onto his face, as he got dressed and headed outside. He walked several blocks, to Wolfie's restaurant where a large scale resided just inside the restaurant's entrance. Grebb stepped up and grimaced when the large red pointer stopped on one hundred sixty-five pounds, feeling five of those pounds could be attributed to his clothes and shoes. He ordered orange juice with a raw egg beat in, scrambled eggs and toast, as he wanted to weigh as close to the 165-pound limit as possible, at the noon weigh-in. No sense in giving up any kind of psychological edge—which he felt it would be—if he weighed in under one-sixty. This way, knowing that Ralston had probably had to dry-off for twenty-four hours, having no food or liquids, he would have the psychological advantage, that of being physically stronger, not having been weakened by the process of making weight. He had no idea how much weight Ralston had had to lose but however much it was, he well-knew from past experience, that making weight was never easy. Grebb finished his breakfast and saw that it was a little past eleven a.m. He weighed himself again and saw that he had gained two pounds; of course all scales differed but he would surely be well-over one-sixty. Walking down Lincoln Road, the G-Man pulled an orange from his pocket and was finishing it up when he crossed Washington Avenue and glanced at the marquee for that night's main event, where his name was in bold black letters, just under Jimmy Ralston's. He walked inside the building and saw that the ring was already set up in the middle of the auditorium and pulled a package of juicy-fruit gum from his pocket. Wadding all five sticks together, Grebb quickly stuck them in his mouth, a practice he had adopted, just after reading that Jack Dempsey had chewed pine-tar to strengthen his jaws. As he walked down the aisle, Grebb saw Chris Dundee walking towards him and nodded and Dundee quickly slipped a Dick Nixon onto his face, as he wrapped an arm over Grebb's shoulders and steered him towards the stage. Glancing at his watch, Dundee frowned. "Almost noon Sonny and Ralston and his handlers ain't here yet but they'll be here soon. How you feel, Sonnyboy?"

Grebb frowned. It was a seemingly traditional stock question that everybody always seemed to ask a fighter, and if he had heard it once, the G-Man had heard it a hundred times but that didn't change his, seemingly traditional, stock answer. "Aw-rye man," he replied, shrugging.

"Good-good Sonny," Dundee said. "Hey, gimme some gum." Grebb looked confused for a second and thought maybe he wasn't supposed to weigh-in with gum in his mouth. He took the wad out of his mouth and handed it to Dundee, whose expression told Grebb that it had been but a

stick of gum he had asked for but before he could say anything, Dundee waved it off. “C’mon, you can weigh in now.”

Grebb walked into a vacant room and saw that Ralston was nowhere in sight. Dundee, well-knowing that Grebb weighed less than he wished, showed everyone his dental work. “Just weigh in wid yah clothes on.”

Grebb shrugged and stepped on the scale. A member of the boxing commission levelled the bar. “A hundred sixty-six,” he barked out.

Grebb smiled and kicked off his shoes and the commissioner frowned but steadied the bar and then intoned, “One sixty-three an a quarter.”

Grebb smiled benignly and Chris Dundee patted him on the back and spied Ralston and his management team heading for the weigh-in room. “Go-win get yah se’f a good meal Sonnyboy.” He showed Ralston’s trainer his best Dick Nixon impression and slipped an arm over Jimmy Ralston’s shoulders.

“How you feel Sonny?” Dundee barked, steering him towards the scale.

Gary Grebb walked into the Flame Steak House on Lincoln Road and ordered a sirloin steak, medium rare, which came with a baked potato and a large salad for a buck ninety-nine. He pushed his tray down the counter and grabbed a large glass of iced tea and a piece of key lime pie. Most fighters ate lightly on the day of the fight but not Gary Grebb—especially considering he was fighting a much bigger man. He loved sweets and would, as many fighters did, consume a chocolate bar just before his fight, the sugar giving a sudden burst of energy that most fighter’s burned up even before the fight began. Grebb sat in the back of the restaurant, putting his salad and iced tea, along with the key-lime pie, on the table—the steak was being cooked and he would get it and the baked potato usually within five or ten minutes. A young fighter Grebb had seen at the 5th Street Gym and at that morning’s weigh-in approached his table and sat his tray down. As he unloaded it, he said, “Hey G-Man, how you feel?”

“Aw-rye man, you fightin’ tonight too?” he said, shrugging.

“Naw, next Tuesday—a three rounder,” he replied.

“You never fought before, huh?”

“Naw, just—well, you know street-fights.”

Grebb, who had had more than his share of street-fights, smiled laconically, this guy was anything but a street-fighter.

“You still goin’ to college Jay?”

“Yeah man, Miami Dade, you know.”

“Oh yeah—lotta broads out there man?”

“Oh shit, yeah man. Shit you gotta come out there with me once.”

“Sure man—who is it you fightin’ next week?”

“Aw, some black dude from Liberty City, probably.”

“Oh yeah,” Grebb said smiling as a man in a splattered apron approached his table with their steak and potatoes.

“Thanks man,” he muttered and the man smiled.

“Enjoy G-Man, and good luck tonight man.”

“Yeah, thanks Tony.”

The two men ate their meals and the amateur boxer smiled at Grebb. “Well, I guess you’re gonna go back and rest up, huh G-Man?”

“Yeah, probably, why—what you doin’?” he spat, smiling.

“I was gonna hit the beach, wanna come?” He said it as more of a challenge than anything else, as fighter’s always rested on the day of the fight, but the G-Man, at age twenty-one, had never turned down a challenge yet, as it wasn’t in his nature. The inflection in the other man’s voice was obvious and it brought a smile to both their countenances.

“Let’s go to my hotel first and I’ll get my bathing suit.”

Greb smiled at a lone female, sitting not far from a lifeguard stand, on the beach, just off 5th Street. “Hey, how yah doin’?” he said and when she made no reply he nodded at his gym buddy and said, “Aw, let’s go Jay, girl’s obviously a deaf-mute.”

As they walked away from the girl, she barked, “Wait ‘till I tell my boyfriend, you’ll be sorry.”

“G-Man, you don’t wanna get in trouble now man, shit that’ll mess up your fight tonight, won’t it? Hey, look a lone girl, man lemme try, I got a good line, I tell ‘em Hugh Hefner’s my uncle—they all wanna be models.”

“What ‘cause your last name’s Heffner?”

“Yeah man.” Greb watched as Heffner approached the lone female and then spied one himself, walking next to the ocean.

Jay Heffner struck out and watched as Greb swam with the girl he had met and approached them cautiously, about fifteen minutes later. Greb stood up as he approached and said, “Aw-rye Gloria, see yah tonight.”

As they walked off the beach, Heffner smiled. “What, you got a date for tonight?”

“Yeah man—hey how ‘bout a favor—I know you got a car, how ‘bout pickin’ this chick up tonight? She’s stayin’ just across the street at the DeLido Hotel. I’ll leave two tickets at the gate for you, good seats man you’ll get in free tonight?”

Jay Heffner smiled, as Gary Greb was speaking *his* language.

Gil Strong pulled the gauze bandage across Greb’s knuckles and then folded it back and forth several times before wrapping a tight single strand around it. He smiled at Greb and said, “How you feel champ?”

Greb, who had been asked how he felt by at least a dozen trainers, corner-men and hanger’s-on, didn’t miss a beat. “Aw-rye man—how much you think he weighs by now, Gil?”

“Don’t worry about it Gary, you’re gonna kill diz guy, yule kill ‘im, I’m tellin’ yah.”

Gary Greb smiled laconically as a trainer on the other side of the dressing room smiled at a preliminary fighter, as he escorted him out of the dressing room and towards the prize-ring.

“Yule kill Roscoe Johnny, yule kill ‘im, I’m tellin’ youse.”

In the dressing room on the other side of the auditorium, Jimmy Ralston listened as his manager told him how much of a weight advantage he had over Greb and how he would kill him. He was sitting on a cane-back chair that he had turned backwards, resting his hands on the top of

the back-rest. In a corner of the room another manager was rubbing a preliminary fighter's back, as he escorted him out of the dressing room and was talking the usual talk. "Yule kill diz guy Roscoe—Totuska ain't in yah league yet—you'll kill 'im. He ain't in no shape, not like you, you gone jes' kill 'im now Roscoe, you gone kill 'im, man."

Jimmy Ralston got up to go to the bathroom and another preliminary fighter smiled at his manager and rasped, "Shee-it, Ralston ain't shee-it no mo', ever since Scatterhawk kayoed 'im in one round, shee-it.

Greb flexed his right hand and then his left and stood up. Gil Strong held his hands up, palms out, and Greb threw a couple of punches at them. "How they feel champ?"

Greb began shadowboxing and grunted. "Aw-rye man," he said.

A boxing commissioner came into the room and examined Greb's handwraps. He frowned at Gil Strong and barked, "Too much tape Gil."

"C'mon, we put the same as Ralston's man did." The door to the dressing room opened and, as if on cue, one of Ralston's corner-men walked into the room. He walked to where the commissioner stood and looked down at Greb's wrapped hands. The commissioner glared at Gil Strong but took a pen out of his pocket and put his initials on Greb's taped hands. Ralston's trainer left the room and Gil Strong winked at Greb, as if they had just pulled off a bank heist together. "I'll go see if they got the gloves yet."

Greb nodded and continued shadowboxing. A preliminary fighter came into the dressing room when Gil Strong exited it and collapsed onto a folding chair where he spat a globule of spit, blood and part of a tooth on the floor. He was a huge, Cuban heavyweight and one of his trainers directed a staccato of Spanish at him, all the while rubbing the back of his neck. Another corner-man nodded at Greb. "How you feel G-Man?"

"Aw-rye man," he said, then stopped shadowboxing and slipped a yellow robe on. It had a red hood sewn on it and he slipped it over his head. On the back, in large red letters G-Man was sewn in between his name. He sat down and put his feet up on a battered, aluminum folding chair and smiled when the corner-man nodded towards the Cuban heavyweight and barked, "Got kayoed in one."

Gary Greb pushed his hand into the glove and made a fist, as Gil Strong pulled the laces tight and began lacing the eight ounce glove up. He pulled the top lace through and wound it around the glove, then tied it in a knot and cut the laces close to the tie, then wrapped tape several times around the laces. Greb made a fist and banged the glove into his other hand then proffered his other hand and slipped the other glove on. He went through the same process, while one of Ralston's corner-men stood by and watched. As Strong taped the laces on the last glove, a member of the boxing commission stepped forward and inspected the gloves. He initialed both gloves, on the tape, and left the room. Strong held his hands up, shoulder-high, palms out, and Greb banged them a half-dozen times. He nodded and barked, "The intermission over yet?"

"Naw, it's ah-rah-um, but it's almost ten though—pretty soon."

Greb nodded and began shadowboxing, in an attempt to get warmed up. A few minutes passed and a boxing commissioner stuck his head in the door and barked, "Greb, you're on, let's go."

Greb nodded at Gil Strong who nodded at another corner-man. "Grab the bucket, Mott-zoo." The man, who spoke very little English, obeyed and nodded at Greb. "You gonna do good keed, you knock heem out keed."

Greb smiled and walked out into the hallway of the auditorium. He stared at an empty ring from the hallway. "Where's Ralston Gil? I ain't going in until Ralston does man."

"I don't see 'im G-Man, just stay warm."

Grebb shadowboxed then turned his head when he heard a loud noise. It was several youngsters pounding on a door, just to his rear. It had a red sign that was lit up and identified it as an exit. Glass doors with a push-bar that would open the door with very little pressure being applied were familiar to Grebb and he smiled and remembered the days of his youth, in Washington, D.C., where he had sneaked in so many times to so many movies and other events that he had, long ago, lost count. Just as a boxing commissioner came running into the hallway, Grebb walked to the door and kicked the aluminum bar hard enough to fling the door open. A dozen kids ran in and one said, “Gee thanks Mister, hope you win.”

“Hey, hey you, what ayah think yah doin’?” A white-haired commissioner glared at Grebb. If he had thought he had any leverage or authority where Gary Grebb was concerned he quickly found out how mistaken he was, when Grebb returned his glare ten-fold and barked, “Wha’ zit look like man? I let ‘em all in.”

“Wha’ ... what—why, you, I’ll, I’ll get Chris Dundee over here.” He turned towards Gil Strong. “Git yah boy in ah ring Strong, **NOW!**”

Gil Strong blanched and pleaded with Grebb to go into the ring. Grebb, as most boxers did, felt it was bad luck to go into the ring first. “Not ‘till Ralston gets in.”

Two more commissioners charged towards Grebb and both yelled at Strong to get him in the ring, while across the auditorium, a commissioner ran up to Chris Dundee. “Chris,” he barked, “we’re having trouble with one of the fighter’s.”

“Oh yeah—who ...?” Dundee replied.

“Ralston,” the commissioner replied, shrugging.

“What’s the problem?”

“He won’t come out of his dressing room.”

Chris Dundee made a face and hurried towards the dressing room on the north side of the auditorium. He opened the door to the large bathroom that doubled as a dressing room, for many events, and confronted Ralston’s manager. “Where’s Jimmy?”

“He’s in the bathroom Chris, he won’t, we can’t get ‘im to come out.”

“Oh shit!” Dundee walked into the bathroom and didn’t see anybody; then he saw a pair of boxing shoes in a toilet stall. He walked to the stall door and knocked on it, lightly. “Jimmy, Jimmy, what’s mattah?”

“Ah, ah, I dunno Chris I just don’t feel too good.”

“Oh shit Jimmy—we gotta full-house.”

“I dunno Chris, I jus’ dunno.”

Chris Dundee scowled. He was paying Ralston a percentage of the gate, it would probably be ten times or more than he was paying Grebb and *he* was the problem.

On the other side of the auditorium, a cagey commissioner, who had been apprised of the situation, coaxed Grebb into the ring. “C’mon G-Man, Ralston’s on his way up now, I’ll make sure he gets in first. C’mon, G-Man, Hugh O’Brian’s in the audience.”

Grebb nodded at the commissioner and then at Gil Strong and began his march towards the ring. As they were trotting up the aisle, Grebb turned his head towards Gil Strong. “Hey Gil, who the hell’s Hugh O’Brian?” he said.

Chris Dundee stared at Jimmy Ralston, who he had coaxed out of the bathroom and into the hallway. “C’mon and look Jimmy, the place is full, full, plenty of celebrities here too, and all to see you. C’mon Sonnyboy we gotta start the show. Dundee scurried towards the ring and

Ralston's trainer began rubbing his boy behind the neck. "C'mon Jimmy, yule kill diz guy, yule kill diz guy I'm tellin' yah," he said, smiling.

The G-Man dangled his left hand on his hip inviting Ralston to throw a punch but Ralston wasn't biting, as his left dangled likewise at his side. Greb bit down on his mouthpiece and feigned a right but Ralston merely turned his body slightly, a counter-move Greb was familiar with because he used it effectively himself. Ralston was waiting, waiting to block or slip, and then counter-punch himself. Greb frowned openly, as Ralston was a counter-puncher and wouldn't throw a punch either. Greb scowled at the bell and returned to his corner where Gil Strong removed his mouthpiece and rasped, "You gotta get goin' G-Man, the crowd's startin' to boo."

The G-Man glared at Gil Strong and then at an overweight spectator who was sitting just to the left of Greb's corner. He was sitting in the third row and a large metal column sat just to the side of him but he was so humongous it partially blocked his view but not his mouth, as he screamed invectives, all directed at the G-Man. "Go back to Dee-Gee Greb, youse don't wanna fight, youse ah scared, g'wan youse punk youse. Gee-Man, hah! Youse oughtah change it tah Yellow-Man."

Greb stood up at the buzzer, meaning the round would begin in ten seconds. He stared down at the fat man. "Can't see too good fat-man? Here, c'mon up here and take my seat." The few spectators close-by that had heard Greb's sally, guffawed and giggled but then quickly joined the fat-man in his tirade of heckling when Greb and Ralston feinted each other off balance but continued to throw few, actual damaging punches, slipping the punches almost before they were delivered. Finally, Greb began dancing on his toes and jabbing as he did so but Ralston merely blocked or slipped the jabs and looked for an opening. The bell rang, ending the fourth round, and the booing intensified. The G-Man rinsed his mouth and smiled at the referee, as he stuck his face within inches of Greb's.

"You better mix it up Greb or I'm gonna stop the fight." Greb glared at the referee and growled, then nodded across the ring. "Go tell that to Ralston too man," he growled back.

The referee scowled back at Greb but walked to Ralston's corner and Greb saw him lean towards Ralston and say something. He walked out at the bell and tried to get Ralston to throw a punch by bouncing and boxing again but it didn't work and he stopped boxing in the middle of the round and went back to his normal defensive posture. The crowd continued its booing unabated, as they were a typical fight crowd they had come to see blood and the fighter's weren't appeasing their blood-lust at all. The referee visited both corners in an attempt to get both fighter's to speed the tempo up after each of the next two rounds but neither man did much to obey him. He repeated his warning before the start of the seventh round and added that he would declare the fight a no contest if they didn't fight more. Greb smiled and walked out at the bell, his left hand dangling at his side, much the same as Ralston's and it was a toss-up as to which man hated to lead more. The G-Man feinted a left then fired a right underneath and Ralston blocked it with his elbow. Greb fired a left hook underneath and Ralston grunted and fired one of his own which the G-Man blocked with his elbow, then shot a right hand over the left that missed by inches. Ralston jabbed and Greb fired a right over the jab and heard Ralston grunt, as he turned his head. Greb missed with another right and Ralston hit him with a left hook to the ribcage. Greb smiled and jabbed but Ralston refused to take the bait and Greb threw a right and

layed against the ropes in his corner. Ralston jabbed and Greb fired a right that made contact, just as Ralston fired a left hook underneath that hit Greb in the ribcage. Greb feinted a left and laid against the ropes feigning that he was hurt but before Ralston could react the referee stepped in front of Greb and barked, "You alright? That's it."

"Hey man what the hell you doin'? Hey ..."

Gil Strong jumped into the ring and Greb barked, "Hey Gil, what the hell's goin' on man?"

Strong shook his head and rasped, "You guys didn't fight enough."

"Man, so that means he stops it and gives it to Ralston, c'mon Gil?"

But it was too late, as the announcer was already barking into the microphone that Ralston was the winner by a T.K.O., the referee deciding to stop the contest. The booing erupted voluminously and people began throwing garbage into the ring. Greb frowned but jumped out of the ring when Gil Strong rasped, "C'mon Gary, let's get outta here."

The G-Man stepped out of the shower and wrapped a towel around his waist. He walked out into the dressing room and saw Jay Heffner waiting for him.

"Hey G-Man, tough luck man—how come he stopped it? Shee-it, you was beatin' him."

"Who the hell knows man."

"Hey man, I got Gloria Garcia outside, man she's lookin' good man. Ssssh, some piece ah tail man."

"Yeah—hey man, I gotta go get paid first, aw-rye? Tell 'er I'll see 'er in about ten minutes."

"Will do G-Man," he replied.

Greb dressed and walked out into the hallway. He was met by Gil Strong. "Let's go get paid G-Man. You had a rough break man, they should ah never stopped it."

Greb exhaled audibly. "Yeah—so why you didn't say nothin' then Gil?" he growled.

Gil Strong shook his head and Greb glared at him. He had tried to get Greb to sign a contract making him the G-Man's manager by lying to him and nobody forced the G-Man to do anything, especially by lying. Greb walked into Chris Dundee's auditorium office just as Ralston was leaving, pocketing what looked to Greb to be a bundle of hundred dollar bills, and the G-Man groaned audibly at the thought of his meager pay for the night's work. He stepped towards the counter and Chris Dundee quickly showed him his entire dental work. The other fighters had been paid and the only ones present now were Chris and Angelo Dundee and Greb. Gil Strong and the Cuban who had carried the bucket, rinsing Greb's mouth and giving him water between rounds stood to the rear of the G-Man, like two vultures waiting to be fed. Angelo Dundee nodded at Greb and rasped, "Tough break kid."

"Yeah, you're tellin' me. Why they'd stop it? I was tryin' tah get the dude to lead all night."

"Yeah, well, you had a tough break kid but you show promise. See me in ah gym tomorrow."

Greb grunted and wondered if Angelo Dundee had been in his corner if the fight would have been stopped so easily. He nodded at Chris Dundee who counted out a dozen twenty-dollar bills and four ones and handed them to Greb.

"Thought it was two-fifty, Chris?"

"Gym dues Sonnyboy," Dundee replied, showing Greb his bicuspid.

"How 'bout us Gary," Gil Strong whined.

Greb turned towards the voice and confronted Gil Strong and the Cuban cornerman.

"I gotta pay these guys Chris?"

Dundee shrugged. "Give 'em a couple bucks Sonny, it's up to you."

The G-Man turned and Gil Strong cornered him. "G-Man, we gotta be paid."

"Shee-it, how much Gil ...?" Greb replied.

"Fifty bucks," Strong hissed, nodding at the money in Greb's hand.

"What? Man, I got two-fifty and Chris took six for gym dues." Greb scowled and handed Strong two twenties.

"Oh yeah, sure this is good G-Man, thanks."

The G-Man watched as Gil Strong and the Cuban walked out of the small office arguing over who should get how much, as the Dundee's brushed past Greb and Chris said, "C'mon Sonnyboy, closin' up."

They walked out of the auditorium together and Greb stood in front of the large building and watched as the two Dundee's got into Chris Dundee's 1965 Lincoln. Angelo leaned out of his window and barked, "Remember, come see me tomorrow at the 5th Street Gym. You got a tough break tonight but that don't mean you can't make it back."

Greb watched the big Lincoln roar away and stared down at his palm where ten twenties and four ones resided and frowned. "Yeah, I gotta tough break aw-rye." He began shuffling towards his '59 Chevy when a high-pitched voice wailed out his name and he turned to see Gloria Garcia, the fox he had met on the beach. Jay Heffner stood next to her.

"G-Mane-ah I'm so sorry you lost but does that mean you forget me?"

"No, well, how about me and you take a ride now, huh?"

"Sure honey."

The G-Man smiled genuinely for the first time that night and slipped his arm around the young girl's waist. He winked at Heffner and said, "See yah tomorrow Jay. Thanks for watchin' my lil' sweetheart here, okay—" Heffner nodded and Greb squeezed Gloria Garcia's waist and she squeezed him back. Things were finally looking up for the G-Man.

Gary Greb plugged his transistor radio into the wall outlet and turned up the volume. He reached in his gymbag and removed a pair of handwraps and began wrapping his hands, then nodded at Gil Strong, who walked over and asked the obligatory fight question, "How you feel champ?"

"Aw-rye man," he said, nodding.

"Good—hey G-Man, you know Angelo don't like loud music in the gym."

Greb looked surprised. "Well, maybe Angelo wants to skip rope for me Gil. I like music man—every gym I ever trained in had music—got it? Screw Angelo, I can leave this town tomorrow. Go back to Vay-gus man."

"Las Vegas? I thought you was from Washington D.C., G-Man?"

"Man, there ain't no steady fights in Dee-Cee man. Only guy fightin' steady is Holly Mims and he fights mostly outta town, the Garden and shit. And I'll tell yah somethin' else, man, Holly takes fights on a couple hours notice too. That's right man. Dude fought Hurricane Carter a couple years back with about five, six hours notice."

"Yeah, he fought Jimmy Ellis, didn't he?"

"Yeah, Holly beat Jimmy Ellis. That was before he was a heavyweight man but Holly'd still take 'im. Heavyweight's are easy to fight man."

"Yeah, I seen you chasin' Levi around the ring."

“Heavyweight’s are too slow man, although Levi’s faster than most. They hit hard though, if they can hit you.”

“G-Man, get ready Lou-wee wants to work with you,” Gil Strong barked.

Greb nodded and began shadowboxing in front of a large mirror. He saw Angelo and Chris Dundee come into the gym, and saw Gil Strong talking to them. Greb smiled inwardly when he saw Strong motioning towards him, figuring it was about his radio, and he turned it up, smiling. He wasn’t adverse to leaving town over the music, either, a fight gym just wasn’t a fight gym without music. The G-Man caught the reflection in the mirror, of Strong standing at the doorway still talking to the Dundee’s, and wondered silently how Angelo could disdain music and train Ali, after all wasn’t Ali the dancing master and how the hell do you dance anyway, without music?

“G-Man, what’s up man?”

“Hey Jay, what’s happenin’?”

“Hey man, ‘id jew get dat Cuban broad the other night?”

“I got her man. What you think? She ain’t Cuban either.”

“No?”

“Naw, she’s a Pee-R man.”

“Really ... I mean she’s ...?”

“Yeah—really—what’s the difference—a broad’s a broad.”

“Yeah, she looked hot man.”

“She was man. Works at a bank in Miami too man.”

“Yeah—a bank huh ... really ...?”

“Yeah man, maybe I’ll get the combo to the big vault from her man? Me and you get some real green, huh?”

Jay Heffner opened his mouth to say something but was cut off when Gil Strong boomed, “C’mon G-Man, Lou-wee’s already in ah ring.”

Greb looked up and saw Luis Rodriguez was inside the roped square shadowboxing with his gloves already laced on. He scowled, as Strong pulled the sixteen-ounce gloves onto his tightly wrapped and taped hands. Rodriguez wore what looked like twelve ounce gloves. He wasn’t heavy-handed but his hands were lightening fast and his punches stung you sharply, usually before you could react. He was a former world welterweight champion, and top contender and the G-Man felt he had no business wearing twelve-ounce gloves when everyone else wore sixteen’s at least they were supposed to, it being an unwritten rule in the fight game. “Shee-it, Gil, he’s wearing ten, twelve-ounce gloves man, that ain’t right.”

“They’re fourteen’s G-Man.”

“Shee-it, look like twelve to me man. Anyway, you supposed tah wear sixteen, you know that. Damn guy’s a contender.”

“I know G-Man, what ayah gonna do?”

“Shee-it, gonna lay some heat on his jibs, that’s what?”

Strong smiled and pulled Greb’s laces tight. “Now you talkin’ G-Man.”

After sparring three rounds with Rodriguez, Greb hit the heavy bag and speed bag, skipped rope and was on the sit-up table doing push-ups when Angelo Dundee walked over to the sit-up table—as he finished pumping out a hundred push-ups—and mouthed the words he knew Dundee was about to say, then He smiled when Dundee said, “How you feel Sonny?”

Greb felt a strong urge to say he felt like shit but gave the fighter’s pat answer. Aw-rye man, sup?”

Dundee stuck a pipe with a large white bowl in his mouth and said, “You’re looking pre’ good G-Man. You wanna fight Tuesday?”

“Toos-dee, huh—sure man—how many rounds?”

“Six or eight,” Dundee replied.

“How about ten and how about Ralston again ...?” Greb spat back.

“Well, maybe later, I’ll talk to Chris.”

Greb grunted and changed position on the table. He slipped his feet into a rope at the end of the board and began grunting, as he did a couple hundred sit-ups. He saw Angelo walk over and start a conversation with his brother, Chris, who appeared to be talking to both Angelo and someone on the other end of a phone he held to his ear.

It was the first of December and the G-Man was, once again, standing in the hallway of the Miami Beach Auditorium, shadowboxing in preparation for an eight-round fight. He nodded at another fighter who had just fought. “How’d you do Burnell?”

“Oh shee-it, I won man. Shee-it evah since I started wearin’ my red gear, you know, I been winnin’, yup. Hey, good luck tonight G-Man, I seen you kayo Lou Howard a couple weeks ago, good fight.”

“Thanks man. You know anything about this guy I’m fightin’?”

“Charlie Jordan? Yeah, well he’s got a good right hand, knocked out Hey-Zoos Hernandez last time he fought.”

“Yeah, Hernandez any good,” Greb said.

“Oh yeah, well Angelo really liked him.”

“Ummmm,” Greb grunted and continued shadowboxing, as Gil Strong waved towards him and nodded. “Let’s go G-Man, show-time.”

Greb smiled at Burnell Scott, the fighter who spray-painted his boxing shoes red, to match his trunks and socks and hadn’t lost a fight since. “Catch yah later man.”

“Yeah, good luck G-Man.”

The G-Man climbed up the steps to the ring amidst a smattering of applause and a few boos. He had knocked out his last opponent, something all fight fans appreciated, it was what they came to see, and so the boos from the Ralston fiasco were more than covered by the applause. The bell rang for the start of the fight and Greb walked out and fainted Jordan with a left jab, then shifted his weight to the left and moved his left foot to his left side and fired a left hook underneath. Jordan grunted his displeasure and Greb followed with a right to the jaw. Jordan countered with a right to the jaw and Greb went down. He stared up at the referee but he wasn’t counting he was waving his arms and Greb jumped up, thinking that another one of his fights had been stopped needlessly. He was about to voice a protest when he saw the referee was waving him on signaling that it hadn’t been a knockdown but a slip. Greb smiled and charged Jordan, who caught him again with a right hand. Greb saw stars for an instant and clinched at the bell. He went back to his corner with his jaw aching. The Cuban cornerman tipped the bottle of cold water into Greb’s mouth and rinsed his mouthpiece out and Greb couldn’t miss the blood rinsing into the bucket. Greb scowled and mumbled, “I think he broke my jaw Gil.”

But Gil Strong would have none of it. “Naw-naw, go get ‘im G-Man, you got ‘im on the run.”

Greb accepted the mouthpiece and bit down. His jaw burned and he grimaced but went out to meet Jordan in the center of the ring. He was a defensive master and now was the time to employ

his every skill in that department, which he did over the next six rounds. “One more round G-Man and you won, put some heat behind yah punches now.” Greb inhaled deeply at the bell beginning the eighth round and walked out and hooked a left to Jordan’s ribcage. It hit pay-dirt and Jordan fell to the canvas. He immediately put his hands to his groin and complained to the referee that it had been a low blow, but the referee began counting and Jordan jumped up at the count of three. He gave as good as he got the rest of the round and the bell finally clanged. Greb was awarded a decision and he accepted the cheers of the crowd, as he made his way back to the dressing room. In the dressing room, Angelo Dundee came over and congratulated him. “I think my jaw’s broken Angelo?”

“Naw—Ferdie—Ferdie c’mere, the G-Man thinks his jaw’s broken.”

Ferdie Pacheco, a physician who worked for the Dundee’s, walked over and nodded at Greb. “Open your mouth G-Man.” Greb complied and Pacheco barely glanced inside. “It’s broken.”

“Shee-it,” he said.

“Shit G-Man, when did it happen?”

Greb looked at Gil Strong. “In the first round man,” he spat.

“Oh shit. Well—tough break kid—tough break,” Dundee replied.

“Hey man, I need to get paid Gil?”

“Yeah, they wanna pay you last G-Man, I dunno why.”

Greb was finally called into Chris Dundee’s auditorium office and paid. Eight ten dollar bills but Angelo handed him what looked to Greb to be another contract. At first, Greb thought it was another fight contract and thought he was being set-up, after all how could he fight anybody with a broken jaw. They wanted a sure win for one of their boys. Then he saw it was a contract agreement that was to be between him and Angelo Dundee. It made Dundee his manager for three years with a three-year option. It had a dozen or more clauses but the only thing that went through Greb’s mind was that Dundee had connections; after all he managed Ali, didn’t he? He nodded. “You want me to sign it Angelo?”

“G-Man, you’ll be champ someday if you stick with me, whaddayah say? You don’t bullshit me—I won’t bullshit you, huh—Deal?”

Greb’s jaw throbbed, as he picked up the ballpoint pen and signed the contract, thinking: ‘Maybe now his luck would—at long last—change.