Scrap Iron

Charles E. Van Loan

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I

WHAT'S IN A NAME?"

It was a woman who asked that question, and if Romeo had been more of a fighting man he could have answered it. Enrico Mustolini was never heard of outside the Eighth Ward, but as Iron Mush Murphy he took the whole town by storm. Let us examine into this matter of names.

It is well known that followers of'three professions, operating mostly after dark, often forsake their baptismal appellations. From time immemorial actors, safe blowers and boxers, moved by varying impulses, have sought the shelter of the alias. Thus Michael Donohoe becomes "Richard Montclair"; Bill Jones blossoms, not too openly, as "Frisco Red"; and Isidore Finkelstein chooses the nom de guerre of "Battling Clancy."

To tell the truth about the matter, Enrico Mustolini had never given any thought to the question of an assumed name. In the barns and back alleys where most of his unremunerated fighting had been done the preliminaries had not included an introduction of the principals. If it had been necessary to address Enrico at all, "Wop" had sufficed. The mothers of defeated gladiators frequently mentioned him to the police as "the tough one of them dago kids."

Beyond argument Enrico Mustolini was tough. He was a product of the toughest school. in town, the streets and alleys of the Eighth Ward. Giacomo Mustolini, head of the family, owned a junk shop and left his wife in charge of it while he scoured the outlying portions of the city for rags, bottles and sacks. The two sons, Enrico and Antonio, ran wild as razorbacks from the time they could walk.

Enrico, or Henry, as he preferred to call himself, was a swarthy youth, set solidly on a pair of stocky legs, and in his sturdy body there lived again the soul of some swashbuckling ancestor. Henry loved a quarrel, and fought for the fun of the thing. Tony, eighteen months his junior, was slender of build, dreamy of eye, and had never shown any liking for street brawls. He was a better runner than fighter, but when cornered he gave battle with the savage fury of a frightened cat.

If Henry regretted this softness in his brother's character he said nothing about it. Since his tenth year he had done most of the fighting for the Mustolini family, and the general average was nothing to blush for, even in the Eighth Ward, where fighting averages ran high.

Because it is human nature to admire in others the qualities that we lack, Tony boasted that nobody could make his brother's nose bleed, and Henry gloried in Tony's cleverness and the fact that he could "read newspapers, and everything, in wop and American." Henry was not even clever at his specialty. Head down and arms working like brown pistons he went joyfully into action. The science of attack was a closed book to Henry; and as for defense, such a thing had never entered into his calculations. He offered an open and seemingly indestructible countenance to his enemies, and while they tried to break his nose or close his beady eyes he wore them down with a terrific rib bombardment which none but the extremely fit could endure for long.

"No use, hittin' that wop in the face," said the Eighth Ward warriors. "Might just as well pound a fire hydrant. What's he made of, anyway?"

Such notable talent for trouble cannot be concealed. Henry Mustolini learned, no matter how, that preliminary boxers made a great deal of money — sometimes as much as twenty dollars a night, just for a little fighting — and he set about to prove if these things were true.

With the faithful Tony at his heels he haunted the pavilion where the weekly boxing matches took place, and his great chance came when a pork−and−beaner defaulted at the last minute, leaving a gap m the program.

"Want to go on, kid? All right, hop into these trunks and I'll hustle you a pair of shoes."

"Well, what does he get?" demanded Tony, even then showing faint glimmerings of the managerial instinct.

"Ten if he wins, five if he loses. Hurry up, now!"

A few moments later the terror of the Eighth Ward found himself inside the ropes and blinking down at a sea of curious and expectant faces.

Henry was not exactly frightened, but Tony, who had followed him into the ring, seemed to be having a nervous chill.

"Fi−five dollars ain't so m−much~" murmured Tony through chattering teeth; "and that other guy is b−big as a house."

"Forget it!" ordered Henry crisply. "I'll tear the belly outa him. And how can he hurt me — with them pillows on his hands?"

At this juncture a lordly individual bent over Henry and in a hoarse and highly flavored whisper demanded to know his name. That was the time for the alias, but no such thought entered Henry's head. He answered truly; and Foghorn Finnegan was very much surprised.

"Henry — what? Come again wit' that, kid!"

"Mustolini — Henry Mustolini."

Now, as a general thing professional announcers are long on noise, short on memory, and witless as a megaphone. Foghorn Finnegan was no exception to the rule. He offered himself a muttered rehearsal, gave up in disgust, seized Henry firmly by the elbow, dragged him to the middle of the ring and held up one hand. When silence came Foghorn shattered it with his heavy roar:

"Kid Musty, gen'elmen! Kid Musty! One hunnerd and thirty. three pounds!"

That night as the Mustolini brothers walked home, keeping time to the clinking of ten silver dollars in Henry's pocket, they spoke of Finnegan's error.

"That big bum got your name wrong," complained Tony.

"I don't care," said the fighting man. "I got the dough — and one name is as good as another."

In this Henry was wrong. Kid Musty fought three times, but roused no great enthusiasm on the part of the public. It was T−Bone Riley, patron of the arts and friend of all the pork−and−beaners, who suggested an alias more in keeping with Henry's peculiar gift for assimilating punishment.

"Kid Musty! That's no name for a fighter. What you want is something that'll hit 'em right in the eye when they see it in the papers; something that tells what kind of a bird you are. Now you'll never be clever, but you've got 'em all cheated at one thing: You can let a man wear himself out hitting you in the mush. Must be made of iron. . . . By golly! I've got it! Iron Mush! How's that for a name?"

"Iron Mush Mustolini?" suggested Henry, hopefully.

"Naw! Iron Mush Murphy! Take a regular fighting name while you're taking one!"

Iron! There seems to be something enduring in the very sound of the word. Linked with a name or a title, the effect is irresistible. The Iron Duke, the Iron Chancellor, Iron Man McGinnity — these are names which are remembered, names which have stood the test of time. T−Bone Riley builded better than he knew.

Kid Musty had been nobody; Iron Mush Murphy rapidly became a local celebrity. The name caught and held public fancy; it had in it the element of distinctive novelty. More than all else it was descriptive. As T−Bone Riley said, it meant something. Perhaps it should be explained that, in the patois of the profession, to mention a man's mush is to mention his face. Similarly, the nose becomes a beezer, and the eye a lamp. Americanisms, yes; but it was Dickens who called a fist "a bunch of fives."

Assuredly the name Iron Mush meant something, and Henry added to that meaning every time he entered the ring. His opponents, finding his countenance absolutely unprotected, addressed themselves to it with more of vigor than intelligence, and when they wearied by reason of their exertions Henry rocked them to sleep with a tremendous tattoo aimed at the point where the ribs leave off and the stomach takes on. Henry became'a drawing card. Nobody wanted to see him box, but everybody wanted to see him stop uppercuts and swings with his face. On a jaw of chilled steel and features tough as teak Henry Mustolini built up his fortunes.

After his seventh engagement Henry purchased a Turkey−red bathrobe, a pair of apple−green trunks and a badger haircut. He had taken thought and decided that his future was to be one of violence. When a pork−and−beaner buys a bathrobe he confesses himself the victim of ambition. The fighter who enters the ring wrapped in an overcoat has never aspired to a main event.

Henry began to show himself on the local Rialto, posing in front of cigar stands or loafing about the entrances to pool parlors. He learned to talk out of the comer of his mouth and to smoke cabbage−leaf perfectos. If he had dared he would have carried a springy bamboo cane.

About this time Henry was approached by several gentlemen of elegant but precarious leisure who were desirous of attaching themselves to his fortunes in a managerial capacity. They painted the future in glowing colors and laid great stress on the money they could get for Henry, while thinking only of the money Henry could get for them.

On one of these occasions Tony was a listener. "And all you'll have to do is fight," urged the applicant. "I'll 'tend to everything else; and if I don't grab you more dough'n you ever saw before, you can call me a liar. What do you say?"

Henry wavered, for he was tempted, but Tony saved him.

"He says nothing doing," remarked Tony. "Henry's got a manager already. I'm looking out for him."

"'The hell you are!" snarled the disappointed one. "Mush never said nothing to me about it."

"He's just made up his mind. Ain't you, Henry?"

"Yeh," nodded the gladiator, dazed by this exhibition of quick thinking on Tony's part.

"Yeh, Tony's me manager. He can read and write, and everything. Yeh, nothing doing."

II

Tony Mustolini had just turned seventeen when he assumed the responsible position of manager and business dictator for Iron Mush Murphy, and never was fighter more faithfully served. No manager ever worked harder to thrust his charge into the public eye and keep him there; none ever showed a keener scent for an unattached dollar. It was Tony who decided that Henry was underpaid and successfully bluffed the promoters by threatening to take their drawing card elsewhere; Tony who dictated weights and terms; Tony who haunted the sanctums of the sporting editors with fearful and wonderful photographs of the Iron Mush in action; Tony who discovered that the four−round route was a bit short for a battler of Henry's type and eased him onward and upward into the ten−round class; Tony who issued bold challenges to champions and near champions; Tony who worked like a Turk while Henry decorated the Rialto; and it was Tony who insisted that a certain amount of training must be done.

"Ten rounds is a long ways," said Tony. "You got to train for these babies now."

"I can go out to Doyle's," said Henry.

"Nix!" said his manager. "You'll train at home. We can rig up some kind of a ring out in the barn."

"But I got to have somebody to spar with," objected Henry; "and out at Doyle's there's always a gang ——"

"Too much gang," interrupted Tony with firmness. "And we won't pay no sparring partner, either. I'll box with you myself."

"You!" ejaculated Henry. "Think you can kid me?"

"I'm not kidding," said Tony. "If these boneheaded boys can learn to box, so can I."

He was as good as his word. In order to save the upkeep of a sparring partner the thrifty Tony became one himself. Being intelligent and adaptable he soon mastered the rudiments of attack and defense, but he was not content to remain a mediocre boxer. Tony studied the methods of the cleverest performers of the day. From a featherweight champion he learned something of the use of the straight left, which is in itself attack and defense; from a middleweight he got the knack of whipping in a right uppercut; from an English lightweight he studied the defensive value of elbows and forearms as applied to infighting; and from the Old Master himself he borrowed the trick of "letting his head roll with the punch."

Naturally an agile youth, exercise gave Tony the speed and spring of a panther; constant practice taught him accuracy. His shoulders broadened, his chest deepened, he took on weight where weight was needed; and Henry Mustolini, watching this miracle develop before his eyes, expressed surprise and admiration.

"Tony," said he, "I never would have thought it, but you're getting to be a regular fighting guy. You are, on the square. I can hit most of these birds, but I can't hit you; and you got that straight left up me nose all the time. . . . Why don't you step out and trim some of these dubs?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Tony. "One fighter in the family is plenty."

Henry argued the point, citing ring history to prove that one family had produced two champions, but Tony shook his head. He would box, but he would not fight.

"When you was a little kid," said Henry, "they used to say you was yellow, and I licked 'em for it. You could always put up a good fight when they got you in a corner. What ails you, Tony? You ain't scared of getting hurt are you?"

"I don't know as it's that, Henry, but I never liked to get my face messed up."

"It would take a mighty good man to mess your face up now," admitted Henry with critical approval. "A mighty good man. I don't know as I could do it meself. You got as neat a left hand as anybody, and there's a kick in it when you let it fly. Your right cross is a darb. . . . No, don't laugh! I'm telling you straight. You dont need to be scared of any of these preliminary tramps. Why don't you be game and take a chance? You might like it same as I do."

"You always did like it," said Tony. "That's the difference."

Henry was not satisfied to let the question drop, and often revived it, but no amount of persuasion could induce Tony to consider a real battle, though the ramshackle barn behind the junk shop witnessed many an encounter that might easily have been mistaken for the genuine article. It was after one of these spirited sessions

with the gloves that Henry renewed the argument.

"I don' get you at all, Tony. I'm supposed to be a dead tough mug, and hard game, but you rip into me like a champion going after a dub. You gimme all the battle I want, kid, fight me all over the place, but you won't even take on a soft one. . . . That last round — whew!"

"Aw," grinned Tony, "you just stall when you box with me. You never really cut loose."

"You think not?" demanded Henry. "You stung me with that uppercut — made me good and sore. I forgot all about having any brother, see? The rest of the round I was after you, and I'd 'a' hurt you if I could, I got plenty close enough to cave in your slats, but I never hit: nothing but elbows and forearms and gloves; and all the time, wham! wham! I'm getting them short, jolty ones in the belly. . . . Tony, that's the kind of fighting that licks guys. If you'd tear into these other fellows the way you tear into me there'd be nothing to it."

"You might just as well quit talking about it," said the younger brother. "There's nothing doing."

"You won't fight?" asked Henry.

Tony shook his head, and there was a long silence. The iron−faced gladiator was slow in his mental processes, but reasonably thorough. Ever since he could remember he had taken violent issue with those who had called Tony a coward. He had silenced those youthful accusers, but he had never been able to silence a whisper in his own heart. It spoke to him clearly in that uncomfortable silence.

"I'd murder anybody else for saying it, Tony," said Henry at last, "but I think you've got a streak after all."

"Well," said the other, trying to laugh it off, "you'll admit I'm a good manager, won't you?"

"All the same" — and Henry wagged his head sorrowfully — "I think you're yellow. A bird that can fight and won't fight — why, what else is he but yellow?"

"If there was anything to fight for ——" began Tony.

"There's always something to fight for!" cried Henry in a sudden rage. "There's the dough, for one thing; and there's showing the gang that you've got the guts! . . . But what's the use? If you're born with a streak you'll have it all your life, and maybe it ain't your fault. I'll never bother you about it again, Tony. I won't ask you to get into the game no more−not as long as I live."

It is worth recording that he kept his word.

III

The Iron Man, as they finally came to call him, never became a top−notcher — there were a dozen clever men between him and the title — but for four years he served as a stumbling block in ambition's path, and many a hopeful lightweight, his eyes fixed on the first division, stubbed his toes and fell. Some of course did not fall. Perhaps the thing which kept the Iron Man in the second division was his lack of speed. He was not fast enough on his feet to corner the "dancing masters." These outpointed him and sparred their way to bloodless victories, but woe to the wallowing battleship type of gladiator who elected to stand toe to toe with Henry and exchange body blows!

"Anybody can jab him in the face and run away," said T−Bone Riley, "but whenever they wade in and mix it with this dago their name is pants!"

Thus, in his leisurely, flat−footed fashion, Henry came to the end of his fourth professional year, the possessor of at least one great distinction: He had fought one hundred and forty−six battles and never once had he been knocked off his feet. Clever men had cut him to ribbons time after time; celebrated knockout artists had bounced their pet blows off that chilled−steel jaw; awkward, shuffling maulers of his own type had battered him from belt line to eyebrows — but nobody could say that he had dropped the Iron Man to the floor. Some had staggered him; some had dazed him for a few seconds, but no referee had ever lifted his hand to count over Henry. This was his pride and the thing that he never failed to mention soon after being introduced to a stranger. It was Henry's one legitimate claim to greatness, and he realized it.

"They can hit me as hard as they want to," he used to say, "but they can't hurt me. I guess I'm some tough bird!"

Tony capitalized this unique record, even going to the length of compiling statistics for publication in the newspapers. He continued to act as Henry's sparring partner at home and abroad — the Mustolini brothers once got as far East as Denver — and built up quite a reputation as a shrewd matchmaker and a careful business manager. Those who watched Tony's work with the gloves were impressed with his skill. Some predicted a bright future for him inside the ropes.

"Well," Henry would say, "you know how it is; some likes the game and some don't. Tony, he's as game a kid as ever lived, don't make no mistake about that, but — he ain't like me. No; we're kinda different; been that way ever since we was kids. I was always the fighting one of the family. They all had their cracks at me, but nobody ever knocked me down. What do you think of that, hey? Some tough baby, me!"

But constant dropping wears away stone; the pitcher that continues to go wellward will one day meet disaster; and no iron man ever carried all his rivets with him to the grave. It is only a matter of time.

Out of the East came young Martin O'Day, adventuring on the gold coast in search of a reputation and Western money. He was red−headed, low−browed, dish−fished, slant−jawed, flat−nosed and built like a baby−grand piano. Nothing was known of him save that he could make one hundred and thirty−three pounds, and was "open to meet the world" at that weight. He looked like a fighter, he claimed to be a fighter, and he demonstrated that he was a fighter by stopping Butch Brown in three whirlwind rounds. During those three rounds he never took a backward step.

The Mustolini brothers were spectators that evening.

"What do you think of him?" asked Tony after the victor had left the ring.

"Go git him for me," growled Henry. "He's made to order."

There was no trouble about getting O'Day. His date book was full of blanks and his pockets were full of air. The match was made for ten rounds and advertised as an added attraction.

"Another set−up for Iron Mush," said the ring fans. "He eats these rough sluggers."

Henry received his customary ovation as he climbed slowly into the ring, covered from head to heel by his old red bathrobe, now stained and worn. The Iron Man could safely count on the cheers of half the spectators. The others usually sat in silence, hoping against hope to see him whipped. They had nothing against Henry, as the saying goes, but he had been entertaining them for a long time and perhaps they were a bit tired of him. Some

people like variety.

When the fighters went to the middle of the ring for their instructions the redhead grinned cheerfully at Henry, who gave him smile for smile.

"Hello, wop!"

"Hello, Irish!"

"They tell me you're an iron man," said O'Day tauntingly, "and got your start in a junk shop. Think you'll ever go back?"

"Not tonight," answered Henry.

"Me," said O'Day — "I got my start licking Eyetalians."

"Is that so?" Henry was never clever at repartee.

"Yeh, it's s−s−so." O'Day prolonged the sibilant aggravatingly. "You're going back to that junk shop when I'm through with you, too. . . . What's scrap iron bringing these days?"

"Here!" growled the referee. "Cut that out! Save it till the bell rings!"

Back in his corner Henry expressed his opinion of O'Day.

"Fresh mick, ain't he?"

"Don't let him talk to you," cautioned Tony. "He's trying to get your goat."

"Fat chance!" sneered Henry, and then the gong clanged. Once more the men met in the middle of the ring.

"Scrap iron!" laughed O'Day, and went to work at his trade, head down and both gloves flying. Henry met him halfway, for this was exactly the sort of battle he loved. He had small respect for the sort of opponent who pecked at him with a long left jab and then ran away. The Iron Man planted himself solidly on his large flat feet and replied to the hurricane of short−arm jolts with a succession of rib−tearing punches, some of which might have been heard in the top row of the gallery.

The redhead did not yield an inch under fire, but leaned forward valiantly to his guns. Head to head, shoulder to shoulder, fist to rib the issue was joined, and the house came up with a mighty roar of encouragement and approval. This was no pink−tea dancing contest; this was a real fight — the matching of punch with punch — stamina with stamina — the supreme test of courage. In such a battle there can be but one ending.

Five hundred men tell their wives that they attend boxing contests solely because they enjoy a scientific exposition of the art of self−defense. Of the five hundred, one man may be telling the truth; he may enthuse over a clever bloodless encounter for points. But the four hundred and ninety−nine leap to their feet to cheer a savage exchange of blows meant to hurt. After all, the fight's the thing!

And of the four hundred and ninety−nine paid admissions there may be twenty men sufficiently keen of eye to separate the damaging blows from the ones that are blocked or missed, and to analyze the trend of battle. The whole story of the fight between the Iron Man and the redhead was plainly written across the first three minutes of the engagement, but few were cool enough to read the message.

Henry had but one style of infighting, and in the past it had served him well. He preferred to spread his elbows rather wide and rip his body punches home with a swinging motion, his gloves traveling in an arc. The man who does this must leave his flanks unprotected at least part of the time.

O'Day, bending slightly from the waist, held his elbows close to his sides and shot both fists straight forward to the mark. Henry displayed more motion than his opponent, but half his short, clubbing swings were blocked by elbows and forearms, while O'Day, inside the attack, was making every punch tell. Henry was receiving exactly twice as much punishment as he inflicted. The gong found the men still in the middle of the ring, battering away at each other with all the strength in their bodies.

"I'll get him!" grunted Henry as Tony bent over him with an icecL towel.

"I got him!" said O'Day to his chief second. "I'll lick him at his own game — infighting!"

"This'll never go ten rounds!" chuckled the gallery. "It cant!"

"Don't swing so wide," advised Tony. "He's inside you all the time. Cover up more and shoot 'em straight!"

"I'll 'inside' him if he stays with me long enough," said Henry.

The second round was a repetition of the first. Toe to toe, shoulder to shoulder, hammer and tongs they went at it again, to a sound as of carpets being beaten. For another three minutes they pivoted in mid−ring, and this time the round seemed a long one to Henry. The steady exchange of one blow for two was beginning to take effect.

"Step round more!" urged Tony. "Open him up!"

"Not on your life!" said Henry. "One of us is going to back up first, and then there'll be plenty of stepping round!"

A portion of this prophecy was fulfilled toward the end of the fourth rib−rending session. The thunder from the gallery suddenly took on a new note. It could hardly have grown louder, but it jumped to a higher pitch and became a shrill clamor, which seemed to have in it an expression of triumph long deferred. Slowly but surely the Iron Man was giving ground. Henry did not step away from his task, he did not stop fighting for an instant, but inch by grudging inch he was retreating toward the ropes.

It was the beginning of the end. O'Day knew it, and put a few extra pounds behind the short straight jolts that he was driving into Henry's unarmored section. Tony Mustolini knew it and twisted a damp towel in his fingers as he crouched outside the ring, his eyes on a level with the canvas. The reporters knew it and made hasty notes. Everybody knew it but Henry.

"I'll get him yet!" he gasped when he came to his corner

"What did I tell you?" panted O'Day as he dropped into his chair. "He's licked now — and I haven't hit him above the shoulders once! He's gone!"

Henry was not gone, but Henry was going. For the first time in his life he had found an opponent who ignored his chilled−steel jaw and was whipping him at his own game. In vain Tony begged him to cover up and play for a single finishing blow. Henry shook his head. He was in the condition so aptly described as "punch drunk."

"The best he'll ever get is a draw," said he three minutes later, which was the same as admitting defeat.

"He's weakening fast," was O'Day's report, "but I'll say this for him — he's a game dago!"

The sixth was a cruel period for Henry, but he managed to weather it somehow. His gloves seemed to weigh a ton apiece; his shoes seemed made of lead; every swing of his tired arms cost him an effort; every blow that found his battered stomach cost him excruciating pain; but he continued the unequal struggle with all that remained of the famous Iron Man — his blind fighting instinct and his brute courage. He was barely able to gasp when he rocked back to his corner.

"Draw — sure. One tough — bird!"

"He can't stop you," said Tony, and knew that he lied.

The seventh round saw the end of the contest and the making of an interesting bit of ring history. Henry fought till the last ounce of strength was gone and then he began to stagger. Quick as a flash O'Day switched the point of attack and whipped a savage uppercut home to the unprotected jaw.

Henry reeled against the ropes, his legs bent under him and his hands dropped to his sides.

It was then that the redhead proved himself a ring general. Nothing so plainly stamps the real class of a fighting man as the manner in which he goes about the delivery of the master stroke. The bungler, dazzled by the prospect of early victory, loses his head and rushing in tries to beat his victim to the floor with a flurry of wild swings, none of which finds a vital spot. The craftsman takes his time.

O'Day stepped back, measured the distance with a cool and practiced squint, located the target, and stepped in again swiftly. The blow that ended the fight came all the way from his knee, and the padded fist crashed home just below and in front of the left ear. The Old Master himself could not have done it better, though the chances are that he might have been a bit more merciful. The Iron Man collapsed in a huddle of arms and legs, rolled over on his side, quivered a few times and was still. O'Day took one look at his work and started for his corner, tearing at the glove lacing with his teeth. The referee was already counting the ten seconds that marked the passing of championships, the ending of dreams, and the beginning of stern realities.

Five minutes later Henry was able to leave the ring. Those nearest the aisle leading to the dressing room saw the tears streaming down his cheeks and laughed at him.

"He seems to take it to heart," said one reserved−seat patron to another.

"Oh, well, he gets paid for it," said the other.

Hoarse and breathless the gallery gave Henry hail and farewell.

"It was a long time coming to him," said the dollar customers, "but when he got it he got it good! . . . Some fight!"

Tony bolted the door of the dressing room behind him. Then kneeling beside the rubbing table he put his arms

about Henry's heaving shoulders and tried to comfort him.

"Don't take it so hard, old kid," whispered Tony. "It's tough — it's awful tough, I know, but the best of 'em get it some day. It's part of the game. I'll make another match with this fellow ——"

Henry shook his head.

"No," he mumbled; "no more matches. I'm through. I knocked out; licked first, and then knocked out. I can't beat that guy. This is my finish — good−by, ole Iron Man!"

"Don't talk like that," begged Tony. "You didn't train much, but the next time ——?"

Once more the broken gladiator shook his head.

"There won't be no next time. You don't understand, Tony. I been stopped, put out. They won't call me the Iron Man no more. It's me for the junk shop, like he said before the fight."

"He said it after the fight, too, Henry. It was when I got you back to the corner. He came over to shake hands, but you — you didn't know it. And he stood there and laughed. 'There's your brother!' he says — loud, so the newspaper men could hear. 'Put him in a sack and lug him back to the junk shop. Scrap iron is worth a few cents a pound, anyway!' That's what he said, Henry. You ain't going to let him get away with stuff like that, are you?"

"How can I stop him?" wailed Henry. "He told the truth, at that. I feel all busted up in little pieces. Scrap iron, that's what I am now — scrap iron!"

IV

Very few modern gladiators retire to private life without first receiving the silent hint of empty chairs in the reserved−seat section. They pull off their gloves only when assured that the public will no longer pay to watch the last flickering of the flame of youth.

Henry Mustolini exchanged one distinction for another; he quit the ring while still a drawing card. There were other matches in prospect; the first knockout registered against him had revived interest in his remarkable career; and there was a general demand for a second meeting with O'Day. It came from the ring patrons who had missed the first encounter and therefore felt themselves defrauded.

"Nothing doing," said the pieces of the Iron Man.

Tony argued and expostulated, but could make no headway against the stubbornness that was one of Henry's characteristics.

"They'll say you're a quitter."

"Let 'em."

"They'll say you're afraid of O'Day.

"Well, that's all right."

Tony thought that it was all wrong, but in time he accepted the situation with as much grace as he could muster, and made a round of the newspaper offices bearing the news that the Iron Man had fought his last fight.

"You see," he explained, "we always figured to quit when somebody came along and stopped us. We don't have to fight if we don't want to; we got ours and we're going to hang onto it. Our record is good enough to quit on — one hundred and forty−seven fights, and only one knockdown. Where can you beat that?"

In the meantime the red−headed thunderbolt who scrap−heaped the Iron Man reaped the reward of the victor and had the Rialto all to himself. O'Day purchased a ready−made suit of an eye−aching plaid, some startling neckwear, a cheap cameo ring, a cane with a handle of imitation ivory, fashioned to represent the head of an alligator, and patent−leather shoes with uppers of mustard−colored cloth. After winning two more battles in whirlwind style he took himself out of town in search of further conquests.

After O'Day's departure it was thought that Henry would emerge from his retreat and adorn the cigar stands and pool−parlor entrances as of yore; but this was an error. Literally, as well as figuratively, the Iron Man had gone back to the junk shop, and there buried himself among the bottles and the sacks. No amount of coaxing could make him show himself on the street; he would not even attend the weekly boxing contests.

"If I went," said he to Tony, "they'd call me 'Scrap Iron.' Yeh, him and the newspapers hung that name on me — hung it on so it'll stick. I'll never get rid of it. I guess I'll help the old man wit' the business. It's all I'm good for now."

A fair amount of pride is a blessing, and too much of it is a curse, but the man who suddenly finds himself stripped of the last shred of self−respect is indeed to be pitied. In his simple, elemental fashiort Henry had taken great pride in the title of Iron Man; losing it he felt that he had lost everything that made life worth living.

Tony, watching his brother closely, became alarmed. He knew the mental collapse that often follows years of solid punching about the head, and he tried hard to rouse Henry from his lethargy. Tony found him one day sitting among the empty bottles and spelling out the press notices of his past.

"You got to quit this, Henry," said he. "It ain't doing you any good. You're letting yourself get all out of shape."

"What do I want to stay in shape for?" asked Henry dully.

"So's to be healthy, for one thing. Come out to the barn and put the gloves on with me. It'll stir you up."

Henry protested, but Tony finally gained his point, and from that time on the brothers boxed daily, though nothing was ever said about a return to the ring. When properly stung Henry would lower his head and show flashes of his old form. He seldom mentioned O'Day by name, but the redhead was often in his thoughts.

"If somebody would only lick that guy," he would say, apropos of nothing, "I'd feel better about it. But he's winning right along. They're touting him to be champion some day. It was in the paper."

"If he gets to be champion," suggested Tony, "so much the better for you. We can say it took a champion to

stop you."

"But I want him licked!" cried Henry. "Licked! it's about the only thing I do want!"

"Well," said Tony, "he'll get it one of these days. They all do."

"And that's the truth," said Henry mournfully, and would have continued the conversation along those lines, but Tony wisely changed the subject.

Six months later O'Day returned to town wearing two diamonds of the sort that looks best by electric light, and the haughty manner of a conquering hero. He brought with him a brisk, weasel−faced little man who answered to the name of Spider Foley, and who lost no time in informing the newspaper men that he was O'Day's manager and would soon make the redhead a world's champion. He also stated that O'Day was ready to box any lightweight at any time and under auy conditions, but the real truth he told to Michael Callahan, the local promoter of glove contests.

"No," said the Spider, "we ain't here hunting a real fight. Of course, if we can pick up something soft that's different. I'd let my boy go on and spar an exhibition or kick over a set−up, but nothing tougher than that. He's as good as matched with Young Daly now, and if we lick Daly the old champ will have to take notice of us. So we ain't taking chances. If your folks here want to see O'Day, show us money enough, find something soft and we'll talk business. Your Iron Man is barred."

"Our Iron Man has quit," said Callahan. "I'm hearing that he's gone just a little bit daffy."

"O'Day thought he might want a return match," said Foley, "and he barred him because we don't want to have to train for anybody until we take on Young Daly. . . . Well, who can you get for us? And it better be ten rounds. O'Day ain't enough of a boxer to show up well in less."

Callahan inquired among the local pork−and−beaners, but found them lacking in enthusiasm. The wrecker of the Iron Man was greatly respected, and none of the local lightweight wanted his game. With one accord they began to make excuses. Soapy Brodie mentioned a wounded thumb and blamed a medicine ball. Waterbury Holmes thought the short end of the purse was too short. Dangerous Doyle needed a month in which to train. Callahan had nearly abandoned hope, when a human sacrifice walked into his office.

"Hello, Tony," said the promoter. "Haven't seen much of you lately, but I can give you the answer now. O'Day won't fight your brother again."

"I don't want him to," said Tony, "but — how about me?"

"You!"

"Me," was the calm reply. "Why not? It's a set−up you're after, ain't it? O'Day is the card, no matter who he meets. And then there's a lot of people round this town who have always wanted to see me in the ring. I'll give 'em a run for their money — while I last. . . . Speaking of money, how much is the loser's end?"

An hour later Spider Foley heard the good news, and O'Day, who had accompanied his manager to Callahan's office, grinned as he listened.

"It's bound to draw like a mustard plaster," said Callahan, "because it's the Iron Man's brother, and he's a natural−born set−up — never had a fight in his life. We can talk it up in the newspapers and make it look like a case of Italian revenge ——"

"And there might be something in it, too," said O'Day. "That manager dago ain't stuck on me — much. I saw it in his eye the night I stopped his brother. . . . Oh, well, all I ask is that you have him searched for a knife before he gets into the ring!"

"Bunk!" exclaimed Callahan. "Tony ain't after revenge; he's after the short end. He always was a wolf for the coin. He told me so him− self. Said he knew I wanted a set−up and he didn't mind taking one on the jaw for a piece of money. Tony's a business man."

"Well," said O'Day, "his brother was some fighter, at that."

V

When the familiar red bathrobe bobbed down the aisle with Tony Mustolini inside it there was a cheer from the gallery. It came from those who had loyally supported the Iron Man during his long campaign. They would have cheered Henry, too, but he was not among the shirt−sleeved attendants.

"If I should show up," he had explained to Tony, "they'd 'Scrap Iron' me to death. I got to see this battle, kid, but it'll be from 'way up under the roof. And I never was no good as a second anyway. . . . Whatever you do, Tony, don't let that guy get at your belly. He'll tear you in two!"

So when Tony's curly head ducked under the ropes the Iron Man was in the very top row of the gallery, his sweater rolled up to his ears and his cap pulled low over his eyes. He dared not cheer for fear of inviting recognition, and he did not know how to pray. He was very uncomfortable.

When the time came for introductions Tony whispered something in Finnegan's ear, and that worthy gentleman listened carefully and did his best to look intelligent. Foghorn's voice was as clear as ever, and his ideas as clouded. He muttered a rehearsal as he led Tony to the middle of the ring. "Scrap Iron Murphy, gen'elmen!" he bellowed. "Scrap Iron Murphy!"

Now O'Day's remark at the close of the battle with the Iron Man had been given wide publicity by the newspapers, and a roar of laughter came from the packed house. The redhead, in his corner, looked up suddenly, and a grin split his homely countenance. Henry, safe under the roof, dodged as if a blow had been aimed at him. Foghorn Finnegan began to smile, for he perceived that he had said something clever.

"What did Tony do that for?" Henry asked himself. "Is he trying to kid me — or what?"

O'Day was wondering along the same lines, and following his usual custom he exchanged words with his opponent under cover of listening to the referee.

"Say, wop, where do you get that scrap−iron stuff?"

"Say, Irish," countered Tony, "that's advertising. I'm in the junk business. After the fight come down and climb on the scales. I'll make a price on what's left of you — bum diamonds and all. They're junk if ever I saw any."

And then, without waiting to hear O'Day's retort, Tony turned to his comer. The referee gririned as he signaled the timekeeper. Before the gong rang Tony took a comprehensive survey of the gallery, but he could not locate Henry. "Pretty cool for the first time out," said the experts. "Look at him counting the house!"

Whang!

O'Day left his corner at a shuffling trot. He had not thought it necessary to do much training for a set−up, and was therefore anxious to win in a hurry. Infighting was his specialty, and he planned to get close to his man and stay there. To his intense disgust he discovered that Tony had no inclination to play an opponent's game, but seemed to prefer long−range sparring.

O'Day hesitated an instant and then charged, but ran plump into an extremely workmanlike left jab, which threw him off his balance and spoiled the direction of his opening shot. O'Day struggled to close quarters, but suddenly found both arms scientifically pinned by a clinch. When he ripped out of that embrace a short right hook came from nowhere and rocked his bullet head on his shoulders. A cheer dropped from the gallery.

"Aw, come on and fight!" growled O'Day.

"Come on yourself!" replied Tony through set teeth. "I'm right here."

He was not there when O'Day rushed in with a full−arm swing, and before the redhead could recover his balance his nose, mouth, and eyes were full of stinging left jabs. O'Day's first round was a succession of short savage rushes; of blows that were blocked; of swings that went wild; of baffling clinches and wasted effort. Tony, bright−eyed and alert, and having the twin advantages of faster footwork and longer reach, found much use for his straight left jab, and when the round ended there was a thin streak of crimson on O'Day's chin. The cheering was all for Tony. Expecting nothing of the Iron Man's brother, the spectators were agreeably surprised and told themselves that the battle would be a good one — as long as it lasted.

"Yeh, he's clever," admitted O'Day to Foley; "but one good poke'll take all the speed outa him."

"You got a nice lead," said Tony's chief adviser. "Play him careful, Box him, that's the stuff!"

For the next five rounds Tony boxed, while the spectators marveled aloud at the value of the talent that had been hidden in managerial soil. O'Day did everything in his power to make the elusive Italian stand up and fight, but Tony jabbed and sidestepped and clinched and jabbed again, and never once did he risk an even exchange of solid blows. The redhead's face offered mute evidence that Tony's left hand had a sting in it, and somewhere in the sixth round it occurred to O'Day that training was a very good thing, though he blamed the flattened condition of his nose for the shortness of his breath.

"He's beginning to grunt," said Tony in his corner. "I'll trade him a few next round."

"Don't be a sucker!" warned his advisers. "Box him. Take a decision."

The seventh opened up much as the other rounds had done, but Tony seemed to be gradually increasing the pace. For more than two minutes he boxed with O'Day, and then suddenly stepped close to his man and opened a vicious short−arm assault on his stomach. The first blow that landed was a jolty right−hander with all Tony's weight behind it, and it hurt O'Day; but he rallied instantly and replied in kind.

Now it had been no trick to pump both fists into Henry's stomach, but O'Day soon proved to his own satisfaction that landing solidly on Tony's midsection was quite another matter. Tony was not swinging his blows, but shooting them straight as arrows; what was more, he was timing them accurately and blocking shrewdly with his elbows. The redhead was a stubborn fighter, but no fool. There was a very serious expression on his battered countenance as he went to his corner at the end of the round.

The pavilion was in such a tremendous uproar during the minutes cessation of hostilities that a small riot in the gallery attracted little attention — such a riot as might be caused by a sudden descent of a strong man from the top row, via the heads and shoulders of the populace. It was Henry Mustolini, battling his way to the ringside, and as he advanced he gave tongue:

"Clean him, Tony! Clean him, kid!"

The redhead cast a sullen eye over the excited audience. It was his left eye. The other was closed to a purple slit. He drew breath in short, sobbing gasps, and even in that moment of stress he found something unpleasant to say:

"A set−up — hey? . . . You're a — hell of a — manager!"

Somebody bounded through the ropes in the other angle of the ring. It was the long−lost Iron Man, and he hurled himself upon his brother and would have kissed him but for the interference of the handlers. These wisely decided that it was no time for consanguineous affection. Henry's yell followed Tony as he answered the summons of the gong:

"Clean him, kid! Clean him, kid! Clean him for me!"

O'Day, breathing like a leaky accordion, but game as any wind−broken badger, met Tony somewhere near the middle of the ring; and this time no tantalizing left hand plumped into his face. For seven rounds Tony had been fighting cautiously, assuring himself of every possible advantage. He opened the eighth with a reckless two−handed assault of O'Day's red and laboring stomach. It might have been the sight of Henry, wild−eyed and eager; it might have been the knowledge that his man was weakening fast; at any rate Tony tossed science outside the ropes and offered O'Day the one thing he had been praying for — an even exchange of the sort that had whipped the Iron Man.

O'Day flinched under the first blow, but lowered his tousled thatch, set his teeth and called up his heaviest guns for a counter attack. It was do or die quickly with him now, and he knew it. Had he gone into that toe−to−toe encounter fresh and strong, the outcome would have been problematical, but O'Day was bringing to that open market a very sick stomach and a fatal shortness of breath. There was nothing wrong with his heart, however, and as he stood forward to his bitter task the house rose with a yell. Above the mighty chorus one voice soared like the blast of a cracked bugle:

"For me, kid! For me!"

Tony made no pretense of blocking O'Day's blows or timing his own; he simply fought as fast as his fists could fly. The first solid thump that landed under Tony's heart shook him to the knees; the second one did not hurt so much; the third he scarcely felt. In point of blows delivered it was nearly an even thing; in point of punishment inflicted it was anything but a fair exchange.

One man had trained on electric lights and rich food; the other had been through a long and careful preparation for just such an encounter as this. One man was floundering on his feet; the other was putting the

strength of his unshaken legs into his punches, and lifting them home with murderous effect.

At the end of a long, long minute O'Day began making futile attempts to block those tearing short−arm jolts. A little later he folded both arms across his tortured stomach, bent forward from the waist, and threw up his bullet head with a sudden jerk, butting Tony squarely upon the bridge of the nose. It was a deliberate foul — the last resort of a fighter made desperate by punishment. It was the first time Tony had ever been fouled; pain and rage made him a maniac.

A blind unreasoning instinct told Tony to continue the attack on O'Day's body, and savagely he obeyed. Head down, stomach covered, O'Day retreated before the doubled fury of that assault.

It was no part of his plan to unfold his arms and reply to it. Toward the end of the round, when Tony had worn himself out, he would ——

"Tony, the jaw! The jaw!"

The words seemed to come from a great distance. Over and over and over again he heard them, until at last they began to convey a message to Tony's dazed brain. It was then that he saw, none too clearly, the trap into which he had fallen — the foul that had tricked him into, losing his head and wasting his strength.

He sensed in the crouching retreating figure before him something more than defense; O'Day, badly hurt and nearly at the end of his string, seemed to be waiting, waiting. And then, even as he flailed away at his staggering foe, Tony felt elbows through his gloves and became aware of the lowered guard and the unprotected downturned face.

"Tony, the jaw!" This time the message came clear as a bell.

O'Day, head bent and watching warily with his one good eye, saw Tony's black shoes shift suddenly upon the canvas, the left foot advanced, the right one drawn back; he caught the flash of a wet glove dropped to a level with the right knee. He realized what was coming and tried to lift his tired arms to protect his face, but even as they started to move, something flicked his left wrist ever so lightly, something traveling swiftly from below — and that flick of the wrist was Martin O'Day's last definite impression of the one battle that he will never forget.

The full−arm uppercut that smashed his jaw and ended his career picked him clear off the floor and then dropped him miles deep in oblivion.

When O'Day recovered consciousness the first thing he saw was an extended hand; the first thing he heard was the even pleasant voice of Tony Mustolini. He refused the hand, but Tony's jocular remarks lingered with him for many a day.

"Don't forget the number, Irish. Highest price for junk of all kinds. Bring your diamonds along and weigh in."

Here a sneering face thrust itself over Tony's shoulder.

"Going to be a champion, hey?" taunted the Iron Man. "Scrap Iron, hey? Scrap Iron yourself, and see how you like it!"

"Gittuhell away from here!" screamed Spider Foley. "Ain't you done enough to him? Can't you see his jaw is busted smack in two?"

Later the Spider was more diplomatic. Hat in hand he sought Tony in the dressing room.

"Listen," said Foley, "I am a man of few words, but them words I mean. I thought I had a champion of the world on my staff, but you licked him — licked him good. Chances are, the doc says, you ruined him for life. 'S all right. No hard feelings. Now I got no use for a loser, but if you'll put yourself under my pers'nal management I'll ab−so−lutely guarantee to make you the lightweight champion of the world inside a year. Yes, sir, champion of the world! What do you say?"

"Nothing doing," said Tony. "Henry and me, we bought the old man out last week. We're in the junk business ——"

"The junk business!" cried Foley. "But you could be the champion! You licked O'Day ——"

"Sure I did," said Tony; "but I licked him as a favor to Henry, here. Didn't I, old boy?"

"Ain't it the truth!" grunted the Iron Man. "You did something else too, kid. You showed 'em that all the Mustolini boys are game guys! Come on, let's go home!"