

The Abysmal Brute

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It was 11 o'clock when he dismounted before a log cabin and was greeted by the baying of two huge deerhounds. Then Pat Glendon opened the door, fell on his neck and took him in.

"I knew ye'd come, Sam, me boy," said Pat, the while he limped about, building a fire, boiling coffee and frying a bear steak. "The young un ain't home the night. We was gettin' short of meat, and he went out about sundown to pick up a deer. But I'll say no more. Wait till ye see him. He'll be home in the morn, and then you can try him out. There's the gloves. But wait till ye see him.

"As for me, I'm finished. Eighty-one come next January an' pretty good for an ex-bruiser. But I never wasted myself, Sam, nor kept late hours an' burned the candle at all ends. I had a dashed good nundle an' made the most of it, as you'll grant at lookin' at me. And I've taught the same to the young un. What do you think of a lad of twenty-two that's never had a drink in his life nor tasted tobacco? That's him.

"He's a giant, and he's lived natural all his days. Wait till he takes you out after deer. He'll break your heart travelin' light him a-carryin' the outfit and a big buck deer belike. He's a child of the open air an' winter nor summer has he slept under a roof. The open for him, as I taught him.

"The one thing that worries me is how he'll take to sleepin' in houses an' how he'll stand the tobacco smoke in the ring. 'Tis a terrible thing, that smoke, when you're fighting hard an' gaspin' for air. But no more, Sam, me boy. You're tired an' sure should be sleepin'. Wait till you see him, that's all. Wait till you see him."

But the garrulousness of age was on old Pat, and it was long before he permitted Stubener's eyes to close.

"He can run a deer down with his own legs, that young un," he broke out again. "'Tis the dandy trainin' for the lungs, the hunter's life. He don't know much of else, though he's read a few books at times an' poetry stuff. He's just plain pure natural, as you'll see when you clap eyes on him. He's got the old Irish strong in him."

"Somethin' the way he moons about, it's thinkin' strong I an' that he believe in the fairies and such like. He's a nature lover if ever there was one, an' he's afraid of cities. He's read about them, but the biggest he was ever in was Deer Lick. He mistook the many people, and his report was that they'd stand weedin' out. That was two years ago—the first and the last time he's seen a locomotive and a train of cars.

"Sometimes it's wrong I'm thinkin' I am, bringin' him up a natural. It's given him wind and stamina and the strength of wild bulls. No city grown man can have a look-in against him. I'm willin' to grant that Jeffries at his best could 'a' worried the young un a bit, but only a bit. The young un could 'a' broke him like a straw. An' he don't look it. That's the everlasting wonder of it. He's only a fine seemin' young husky; but it's the quality of his muscle that differs. But wait till ye see him, that's all.

"A strange likin' the boy has for posties, an' little meadows, a bit of pine with the moon beyond, windy sunsets or the sun o' morns from the top of old Baldy. An' he has a hankerin' for the drawin' o' pitchers of things, an' of spouting about 'Lucifer or night' from the poetry books he get from the red headed school teacher.

"But 'tis only his youngness. He'll settle down to the game once we get him started, but watch out for gouches when it first comes to livin' in a city for him."

CHAPTER

A GOOD thing; he's woman shy. They'll not bother him for years," continued Old Pat. "He can't bring himself to understand the creatures, an' few of them has he seen at that. 'Twas the schoolteacher over at Samson's Flat that put the poetry stuff in his head. She was clean daffy over the young 'un, an' he never a-knowin'.

"A warm haired girl she was—not a mountain girl, but from down in the flat lands—an' as time went by she was fair desperate, an' the way she went after him was shameless. An' what d'ye think the boy did when he tumbled to it? He was scared as a jackrabbit. He took blanket's an' ammunition an' hiked for tall timber.

"Not for a month did I lay eyes on him, an' then he sneaked in after dark and was gone in the morn. Nor would he as much as peep at her letters. 'Burn 'em,' he said. An' burn 'em I did. Twice she rode over on a cayuse all the way from Samson's Flat, an' I was sorry for the young creature. She was fair hungry for the boy, and she looked it in her face. An' at the end of three months she gave up school an' went back to her own country, an' then it was that the boy came home to the shack to live again.

"Women ha' been the ruination of many a good fighter, but they won't be of him. He blushes like a girl if anything young in skirts looks at him a second time or too long on the first one. An' they all look at him. But when he fights, when he fightin' it's the old savage Irish that flares in him, an' drives the fists of him.

"Not that he goes off his base. Don't walk away with that. At my best I was never as cool as he. I misdoubt 'twas the wrath of me that brought the accidents. But he's an iceberg.

He's hot an' cold at the one time, a live wire in an ice chest."

Stubener was dozing when the old man's mumble aroused him. He listened drowsily.

"I made a man o' him! I made a man o' him, with the two fists of him, an' the upstanding legs of him, an' the straight seemin' eyes. And I know the game in my head, an' I've kept up with the times and the modern changes. The crouch?

"Sure, he knows all the styles an' economies. He never moves two inches when an inch and a half will do the turn. And when he wants he can spring like a buck kangaroo. In fightin'? Wait till you see. Better than his outfightin', and he could sure 'a' sparred with Peter Jackson an' outfooted Corbett in his best. I tell you, I've taught 'm it all, to the last trick, and he's improved on the teachin'. He's a fair genius at the game.

"An' he's had plenty of husky mountain men to try out on. I gave him the fancy work and they gave him the sluggin'. Nothin' shy or delicate about them. Rounin' bulls an' big grizzly bears, that's what they are, when it comes to huggin' in a clinch or swingin' in roughlike in the rushes. An' he plays with 'em. Man, d'ye hear me? He plays with them, like you an' me would play with little puppy dogs."

Another time Stubener awoke, to hear the old man mumble:

"'Tis the funny think he don't take fightin' seriously. It's that easy to him he thinks it play. But wait till he's tapped a swift one. That's all—wait. An' you'll see 'm throw on the juice in that cold storage plant of his an' turn loose the prettiest scientific wallopin' that ever you laid eyes on."

In the shivery gray of mountain dawn Stubener was routed from his blankets by old Pat.

"He's comin' up the trail now," was the hoarse whisper. "Out with ye an' take your first peep at the biggest fightin' man the ring has ever seen, or will ever see in a thousand years again."

The manager peered through the open door, rubbing the sleep from his heavy eyes, and saw a young giant walk into the clearing. In one hand was a rifle, across his shoulders a heavy deer, under which he moved as if it were weightless.

He was dressed roughly in blue overalls and woolen shirt, open at the throat. Coat he had none, and on his feet instead of brogans were moccasins. Stubener noted that his walk was smooth and catlike, without suggestion of his 220 pounds of weight to which that of the deer was added.

The fight manager was impressed from the first glimpse. Formidable the young fellow certainly was, but the manager sensed the strangeness and unusualness of him. He was a new type, something different from the run of fighters.

He seemed a creature of the wild, more a night roaming figure from some old fairy story or folk tale than a twentieth century youth.

A thing Stubener quickly discovered was that young Pat was not much of a talker. He acknowledged old Pat's introduction with a grip of the hand, but without speech, and silently set to work at building the fire and getting breakfast.

To his father's direct questions he answered in monosyllables, as, for instance, when asked where he had picked up the deer.

"South fork," was all he vouchsafed.

"Eleven miles across the mountains," the old man exposted proudly to Stubener, "an' a trail that'd break your heart."

Breakfast consisted of black coffee, sour dough bread and an immense quantity of bear meat broiled over the coals. Of this the young fellow ate ravenously, and Stubener divined that both the Glendons were accustomed to an almost straight meat diet.

Old Pat did all the talking, though it was not till the meal was ended that he broached the subject he had at heart.

"Pat, boy," he began, "you know who the gentleman is?"

Young Pat nodded and cast a quick, comprehensive glance at the manager.

"Well, he'll be takin' you away with him and down to San Francisco."

"I'd sooner stay here, dad," was the answer.

Stubener felt a prick of disappointment. It was a wild goose chase after all. This was no fighter, eager and fretting to be at it. His huge brawn counted for nothing. It was nothing new. It was the big fellows that usually had the streak of fat.

But old Pat's Celtic wrath flared up and his voice was harsh with command.

"You'll go down to the cities an' fight, me boy. That's what I've trained you for an' you'll do it."

"All right," was the unexpected response, rumbled apathetically from the deep chest.

"And fight like —," the old man added.

Again Stubener felt disappointment at the absence of flash and fire in the young man's eyes as he answered:

"All right. When do we start?"

"Oh, Sam, here, he'll be wantin' a little huntin' and to fish a bit as well as to try you out with the gloves."

He looked at Sam, who nodded.

"Suppose you strip and give 'm a taste of your quality."

An hour later Sam Stubener had his eyes opened. An ex-fighter himself, a heavyweight at that, he was even a better judge of fighters, and never had he seen one strip to-like advantage.

"See the softness of him," old Pat chanted. "'Tis the true stuff. Look at the slope of the shoulders an' the lungs of him. Clean, all clean, to the last drop an' ounce of him. You're lookin' at a man, Sam, the like of which was never seen before. Not a muscle of him bound."

"No weight lifter or Sandow exercise artist there. See the fat snakes of muscles a-crawlin' soft an' lazylike. Wait till you see them flashin' like a strikin' rattler. He's good for forty rounds this blessed instant, or a hundred. Go to it! 'Time!"

They went to it, for three minute rounds with a minute rest, and Sam Stubener was immediately undeceived.

Here was no streak of fat, no apathy, only a lazy, good natured play of gloves and tricks, with a brusque stiffness and harsh sharpness in the contacts that he knew belonged only to the trained and instinctive fighting man.

"Easy, now, easy," old Pat warned. "Sam's not the man he used to be."

This nettled Sam, as it was intended to do, and he played his most famous trick and favorite punch—a feint for a clinch and a right rip to the stomach. But, quickly as it was delivered young Pat saw it and, though it landed, his body was going away.

The next time his body did not go away. As the rip started he moved forward and twisted his left hip to meet it. It was only a matter of several inches, yet it blocked the blow.

And thereafter, try as he would, Stubener's gloves got no farther than that hip.

Stubener had roughed it with big men in his time, and, in exhibition bouts, had creditably held his own. But there was no holding his own here.

Young Pat played with him, and in the clinches made him feel as powerless as a baby, landing on him seemingly at will, locking and blocking with masterful accuracy and scarcely noticing or acknowledging his existence.

Half the time young Pat seemed to spend in gazing off and out at the landscape in a dreamy sort of way. And right here Stubener made another mistake. He took it for a trick of old Pat's training, tried to sneak in a short arm jolt, found his arm in a lightning lock and had both his ears cuffed for his pains.

"The instinct for a blow," the old man chortled. "'Tis not put on, I'm tellin' you. He is a wiz. He knows a blow without the lookin', when it starts an' where, the speed an' space an' iveness of it. An' 'tis nothing I ever showed him. 'Tis inspiration. He was so born."

[Continued next week.]

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