

## **BOXING LESSONS**

### **Round One - Foot Work**

"I still can't believe those pictures your Aunt Mabel had hanging on her living room wall." Jay stretches out and picks up the TV remote control from the bedside table. "I mean, the photo enlargement of dead Uncle Abner, lying in his casket was bad enough. But to surround it with glamour shots of herself from the K-Mart photo studio... That's sort of weird, isn't it?"

"She told me those photos were done by Sears." Donna leans over and kisses Jay on the neck.

"Ah yes... Pardon me. Nothing but the best for m'lord Abner and m'lady Mabel." Jay rolls his eyes. "Did those two get along, when he was alive?"

Donna gives Jay her 'Are-you-on-bad-drugs?' stare. "Honey-pie, would you hang a picture of a dead person you didn't like over your chesterfield? You've got to love my great Aunt Mabel. Everybody does. Who else would cook Christmas dinner for my whole family every year?"

"I'm glad Christmas is finally over," says Jay. "I always look forward to Boxing Day to get caught up on some R & R. Chill out. Maybe watch a movie." He props himself up against a pillow and clicks on the television, without the sound.

"Aunt Mabel liked you, you know." Donna goes over to the fridge and pulls out a turkey drumstick.

"I kind of got that impression. She kept turning me toward your cousin Bert with his new lovey-dovey wife all evening. What was her name? Melody? Melanie? Then she'd nudge me in the ribs and say, 'You're next!'."

"She gave us her best turkey leftovers." Donna smiles.

"When she jabbed me in the gut for the third time, we were standing right beside Uncle Abner's funeral scene. I wanted to point to his corpse, and give her a punch in the paunch and say, 'You're next!' The urge was so strong I could taste it." Jay slams his fist into his palm. "Lucky for her it was Christmas."

"Aunt Mabel noticed you had big feet." Donna offers Jay a bite of her drumstick. Then she lifts the covers and peers under the sheets.

"What are you doing?"

"Just checking out your proportions. Aunt Mabel wanted to know if your big feet were an indication of anything else. I confirmed that what she suspected was true. You wear big shoes." Donna pats a ba-dum ba-dum on Jay's stomach and emerges from under the bed-clothes.

"Tell your great Aunt Mabel that no one needs a big nose to be nosy." Jay begins surfing through the channels on TV. "Hey, 'It's a Wonderful Life' is on. That's my all-time favourite Christmas movie. I haven't seen it since Dr. Queensbury mentioned it in one of his classes last fall. Want to watch the ending?"

"Why not?" Donna replies. "Though I seldom understood anything Dr. Queensbury said. I only took his course so I could sit beside you. And while you may accuse my Aunt Mabel of being borderline weird, she'll never come close on the weirdo scale to someone as off-the-wall as Dr. Queensbury. Not in her wildest dreams."

"I never comprehended much of what Dr. Queensbury said either," admits Jay. "But he had such great philosophical ideas. He made me want to understand what he was trying to get across. I was constantly amazed by the way he could take a seemingly simple topic, and make it into something of monumental importance." He gestures toward the clock. "Like the concept of time. He explained it in terms I'd never considered before. How it can be measured over a period, but never actually grasped in the present. How it has an infinite span, but no tangible attributes. And how it would be totally irrelevant if nothing ever changed. Which means that even God must need the measurement of time, if only to track his own reality. Do you remember when Dr. Queensbury told us, that if we could achieve a greater comprehension of time, we might gain a glimpse of God's shadow? Wow. That was so awesome. It just blew me away. Even if I didn't know exactly what he meant."

Donna yawns and tosses away her turkey bone. "It seemed to me that he always managed to bring every subject back to God, or time or art. Then he'd turn around and say something like, 'I don't necessarily believe in God or art, but I'm glad they were created to allow me to appreciate their non-existence.' When he got that obscure, he always lost me." She shrugs and licks her fingers. "I mean, sometimes a God is just a God."

"Oh-oh," says Jay. "Jimmy Stewart's on the bridge, and Henry Travers is in trouble in the river. I love this scene, where poor Jimmy has to save Clarence, his guardian angel, in order to save himself." Jay reaches his arm around Donna's shoulder. "Whether or not we got anything out of Dr. Queensbury's lectures, at least there was never a dull moment. I was always surprised by the demonstrations he set up to introduce his theories. Like the time he brought in the finger paint set. When he started drawing out a rainbow, I didn't know where he was going with it. Then when he took his fists, and smeared the colours into a brown smudge, it was a perfect illustration of how life, art and the world could be wiped out, if we weren't careful. I thought it was a great metaphor. And at the end, when he held up his messy hands and said, 'Anyone who believes in Hell deserves to go there. And anyone who believes in Heaven deserves to go there too, if they can find it'. That was classic Dr. Queensbury."

"Yeh," says Donna. "He was quite a showman. Even I understood that lecture. Although it was rather ecclesiastical, wouldn't you say? As homework he recommended that we watch 'It's a Wonderful Life'. So here we are."

"Hey look! Jimmy Stewart's bleeding again!" Jay's eyes brighten. "I always get a cold shiver down my spine when he regains consciousness in his smashed-up car and starts to bleed. That's when I know that Bedford Falls is saved, and Dr. Queensbury's rainbow won't turn into a brown smudge after all."

Donna puts her hand behind Jay's neck, and begins working it down his back. "Tell me where you're shivering, Bigfoot, and I'll warm you up," she whispers.

Jay kisses Donna's cheek, and tightens his grip on her shoulder. "If I get any hotter, I'll lose my sense of ... proportion," he answers.

"That's the way I like you best." Donna nibbles his ear.

"I love you Donna. Marry me, and we'll paint Heavenly pictures together."

Donna stops nibbling. "Are you serious?"

"Of course I'm serious, even if I am out of proportion. I want you to bear my children."

"And ruin my girlish figure?" Donna frowns. "I have my proportions too, you know."

"OK. Let's take things one step at a time," agrees Jay.

"First, I have to consider my... options," says Donna.

"Your Aunt Mabel would be proud of us," counters Jay.

"I could always marry..."

"Brad? From your political science class?"

Donna smiles and tickles the sole of Jay's foot with her toes.

"Have you ever subjected anyone like Brad to Aunt Mabel's Christmas dinner?"

"Hell no. You're the only one who..."

"I rest my case. Look - on the TV. The bell on the Christmas tree branch is swaying! Jimmy Stewart's winking! Hey - and our telephone's started to ring at the same time. Gees! What a coincidence! Another angel is getting its wings!" Jay locks Donna in a passionate embrace. "This is our special moment, Donna. Make the right choice - tell me yes. The phone can wait."

Donna's flailing arm gropes for the receiver. "It might be..."

"Brad be damned." Jay holds her tight.

"I love you Jay... Yes."

"I love you too, Donna."

Seven Years Later  
Round Two - Below the Belt

"Your Aunt Mabel was at it again last night." Jay sits up in bed and gently strokes Donna's thigh, as if to rub in what he's saying. "Every time her eye caught yours or mine, she'd point at Bert and Melanie's kid, and silently mouth the words, 'You're next!' You must have noticed. She just doesn't give up."

"I know," says Donna, snacking on a turkey wing. "I've told her a hundred times I never want to have

children. She was getting to be quite a nuisance. And so was the kid. I hope he's just going through one of those stages."

"Not like Aunt Mabel," replies Jay. "Her condition's chronic. But at least she finally moved those faded photos of herself and Uncle Abner down to the recreation room. Although the pictures she replaced them with aren't exactly an improvement. Whew! Jesus on the cross, and the Virgin Mary. Two super-heavyweights. I wanted to tell her that she still had a dead guy and an almost-divine glamour-puss hanging above her sofa. But I didn't think those remarks were in keeping with the Christmas spirit."

"And that ridiculous nativity scene starter-set she gave us for a Christmas present!" Donna grimaces. "I've already put it in the pile for our next garage sale."

"Her obsession with sacred trinkets must mean she's either found religion, or discovered seniors' special Tuesdays at Walmart," says Jay. "But I guess it doesn't really matter what's causing her burst of holy bargain-hunting."

"I wonder how much longer she can continue her Christmas dinner tradition." Donna cuddles up against Jay. "It's so much work. There were over twenty people altogether yesterday. And great Aunt Mabel's getting awfully rickety."

"I was thinking the same thing during our meal last night," says Jay. "One of the drumsticks from the turkey carcass was aimed directly at my face. Every time I looked up from my plate, I seemed to hear it calling, 'You're next!'"

"So that's why you proposed a toast to Aunt Mabel's good health!" laughs Donna.

"You got that right. And may she reign forever as Christmas Queen!" Jay picks up a pile of papers from the night table and waves them in Donna's direction. "Did you see what I found in a box under the bed the other day? My notes from Dr. Queensbury's lectures. You know how I loved his classes. I've been looking forward to Boxing Day morning. This is my first chance to go through them."

"Oh good," says Donna. "Just what I've been waiting for. A refresher course on the meaning of life. I think it's time for a beauty-nap."

Jay flips through the pages. "Look! These are his hand-outs from the lecture when he came in wearing the Korean flag. That was one of his all-time best." Jay pulls out a few sheets, and begins scanning their contents. "First he explained that the blue and red symbols on the flag signify yin and yang - the opposing but complimentary mystical forces central to Eastern philosophy. Light and Dark. Birth and Death. Summer and Winter. Masculine and Feminine. All that cool stuff. He also pointed out how the teardrop-shaped yin and yang symbols interlock symmetrically to form a perfect circle, representing cosmic unity and the fullness of life." Jay scratches his forehead. "Interesting insights, though no lightning-bolt revelations so far... Ah, but here's what I was looking for!" Jay's excitement builds. "Dr. Queensbury's piece de resistance was the way he summed up his metaphysical theory using a mathematical formula." He turns his head. "Donna, are you awake?"

When Donna makes no response, Jay continues to read silently.

*Honorable students, let us briefly contemplate the properties of negative numbers, and their square*

roots. And in particular, we'll ponder the square root of negative one, also written as  $\sqrt{-1}$ . This peculiar quantity is known in higher mathematics as an imaginary number, because all real numbers, whether positive or negative, when multiplied by themselves, produce only positive results, never negative ones. This means that from a practical, every-day perspective,  $\sqrt{-1}$  is completely indefinable, and definitely imaginary. So it's quite impossible to enter a number into a calculator with the value of  $\sqrt{-1}$ . Nevertheless, despite its incalculable nature,  $\sqrt{-1}$  still expresses something specific and significant.

Now, in what better way could we possibly represent the positive but intangible yang forces of the universe, than by the imaginary number  $\sqrt{-1}$ ? And by using the same reasoning, the negative but equally intangible yin forces must be represented by  $-\sqrt{-1}$ .

The beauty of this numerical representation of yin and yang, is that, when multiplied together,  $\sqrt{-1} \times -\sqrt{-1} = 1$ , which demonstrates with mathematical precision, how yin & yang = one. Or in broader terms, how the incomprehensible forces of light and darkness in the universe, combine to form a unified whole. Just by doing the math.

Suggested follow-up reading: 'The Gift of the Magi' by O. Henry.

"Brilliant!" exclaims Jay. "The man's a genius!" Then he leaves the bed and begins searching through the bookcase on the other side of the room.

Donna opens her eyes, and props her head on the palm of her hand. "What are you looking for?" she asks.

"Here it is," says Jay, holding up a book of short stories. "Dr. Queensbury suggested 'The Gift of the Magi' as an illustration of his yin-yang lesson."

"That's the quirky Christmas story," says Donna, "Where she cuts off her hair and sells it to buy him the watch chain. And he sells his watch to buy the combs for her hair. N'est-ce pas?"

"Right," says Jay, flipping through the book, as he returns to the bed. "Della and Jim, two young romantics, whose love for one another exceeds their means." Jay lies down beside Donna, and takes her hand in his. "Donna, there's something I have to tell you. And ... I suppose now is as good a time as any. I... I... know you don't want to have children. And even though I do ... did...I... I... had a vasectomy. It was a few months ago, while you were away at that conference. I... waited to let you know, sort of as a Christmas surprise. I thought the timing would be better after Aunt Mabel's Christmas ordeal was over, and we could be alone together. So... here we are. Donna, I love you so much... I did it for you. And for us. Just say you're happy." He tries to pull her close.

Resisting his caress, Donna tilts her head back and stares at the ceiling. Then she shuts her eyes, and takes a long, sighing breath. Finally, she turns on her side and faces Jay, biting her bottom lip. "I'm pregnant, Jay." It's all she can say, before her emotions take over.

Jay lies in silence for several minutes. When he speaks, his voice is calm. "How long... ago?"

"Two months," Donna answers, between sobs.

"While you were away then," says Jay.

Donna nods.

"It was Brad, wasn't it?"

"It was never Brad," Donna confesses. "It was always Dr. Queensbury. This time we met by accident." Donna wipes her tears, and tries to look at Jay. "He was at the conference... He has a family... It's not what you think..."

"I don't know what I think. When were you going to tell me?"

"I had to decide... if I was going to have the baby." Donna searches Jay's face with her eyes. "Now I know ... I want it to be our baby, Jay."

"That's easy for you to say." Jay snorts. He gets out of bed, and begins putting on his shirt. As he finishes dressing, the telephone rings. Instinctively he reaches to pick it up. Then he pulls back. "You answer it," he says contemptuously. "It might be Dr. Queensbury."

"Where are you going?" Donna cries, as Jay exits the bedroom.

"Somewhere. Anywhere," Jay calls, without looking back. From the hall, she hears him shout. "If it's a girl, call her Della. If it's a boy, call him Jim." Then the front door slams shut, leaving Donna alone with the ringing telephone.

Seven Years Later  
Round Three - Upper Cut

Jay finds himself at the front of the class in Dr. Queensbury's lecture hall, engaged in a tournament of rock-paper-scissors with Dr. Queensbury. So far he hasn't won a game. Every time he loses, Jay is instructed to write out one of Dr. Queensbury's 'Rules of the Universe' on the blackboard. Each one ten times.

*Paper covers Rock.* God is not defined by a Religion ... God is not defined by.....

*Rock blunts Scissors.* Time is not defined by a Watch ... Time is not defined by.....

*Scissors cut Paper.* Art is not defined by a Picture Frame... Art is not defined by.....

At last, Dr. Queensbury sends Jay back to his seat. Then he steps up to the podium. "This children's game we've been playing," Dr. Queensbury begins, "Requires only rudimentary hand-gestures to form the symbols for rock, paper and scissors. However, through its simplicity, it provides a very useful analogy for studying the Christian religion. For example, let's take rock. Hard and enduring." Dr. Queensbury holds up his fist. "Rock could easily represent the power of God, the Almighty Father. Then there's scissors. A precision tool of man. Sharp but delicate." The professor points his first two fingers, spread apart. "Scissors could portray the earthly Son of God. And finally, paper. Weightless and all-encompassing. Shrouding things in mystery." He opens his hand with the palm facing down, and then slowly curls up his fingers. "Just like the Holy Spirit. All very straightforward. Don't you agree?"

Suddenly, Dr. Queensbury starts juggling, using a rock, a ball of paper, and a pair of scissors. Jay wonders where these articles have come from. And where Dr. Queensbury learned how to juggle.

"And so we have two parallel Blessed Trinities. Rock, paper, scissors. And Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But on further examination, we find their congruencies are even more remarkable." Dr. Queensbury's juggling picks up speed, while Jay sits spellbound.

"Just as rock overcomes scissors, God the Father is master of his earthly Son. But like paper covers rock, the Holy Spirit can cloak God the Father's might in supernatural mystery. Is it not so? And like scissors cutting paper, the reality of God the Son predominates over the ethereal Holy Spirit. So what goes around comes around, all in a perfect, sacred circle."

Dr. Queensbury's juggling has become a whirling blur. Sparks start flashing from his fingers to the objects in the air. Jay can not believe his eyes.

"And so, through the trivial game of rock-paper-scissors, we gain profound insight into the delicate balance of the Holy Christian Trinity." Dr. Queensbury looks squarely at Jay. "Did you understand everything I said, Jay?" he asks.

Jay stands up, mesmerized, and calls back. "Oh yes, Dr. Queensbury, yes!"

"Excellent! Then I'll give you a follow-up assignment," says Dr. Queensbury, with flames now shooting from his hands. "Discover for yourself, how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be manifested in Joseph, Jesus and the Virgin Mary, or in any other trio of your choosing. And for my grande finale, I'll leave you with one last memento of the tools I've provided! Ho Ho Ho!"

Without warning, Dr. Queensbury vanishes in a wisp of smoke. Meanwhile, the objects swirling around him expand to a hundred times their original size. The rock becomes a boulder. The ball of paper ignites into a huge cloud of flames. And the scissors grow into a deadly weapon, with gnashing blades of gleaming steel. Jay watches in terror, as each item suddenly rises into the air and begins to descend toward him. He tries to shield himself and get out of the way, but it's too late. He feels their jarring impact as they all crash together on his head.

"Daddy, Daddy! Wake up! You're bleeding!"

Jay opens his eyes and gingerly runs his hand through his hair. It feels wet and sticky. "Hey, Jimmy. I must have hit myself on the headboard. I was having this strange dream."

"Honey, hold still. I've got a sponge and some water." Donna bends over him. "Wow, you gave yourself quite a whack. Jimmy, go and have breakfast, while I fix Daddy up. I made you a turkey sandwich."

"So much for trying to sleep in on Boxing Day," says Jay. "And I really deserved some extra rest too, after entertaining those charming relatives of yours. All those smiles and compliments yesterday completely tired me out."

"It wasn't the same without Aunt Mabel though," sighs Donna.

"I never thought I'd say it, but that old broad really knew how to throw a party," admits Jay. "Oh well, we did the best we could without her. And everyone seemed to agree that her picture hanging over the nativity scene was a nice touch."

"There. All done," says Donna, putting down her sponge. "And a kiss for luck, to make it better." She climbs onto the bed. "So tell me about this killer dream of yours."

"It started out almost normal," says Jay. "Although I was in one of Dr. Queensbury's classes, of all places. Anyway, he was demonstrating the game of rock, paper and scissors. I don't exactly remember where things went from there. Except it got pretty crazy. And by the very end, I was ducking to avoid being attacked by a monster rock, a burning wad of paper, and a giant pair of scissors. That must have been when I bashed my head and woke up." Jay pensively squints his eye. "Come to think of it, I don't recall Dr. Queensbury ever giving a lecture about rock-paper-scissors. Do you?"

"I can't remember anything he said back then, specifically," says Donna, gently massaging Jay's shoulders. "But if Dr. Queensbury was in your dream, he must have drawn a symbolic comparison between, rock-paper-scissors and Jesus, Mary and Joseph, at the very least. With possibly the scarecrow, the tin-man and the cowardly lion thrown in, for the sake of confusion."

"I finished my sandwich, Mom!" Jimmy dashes into the room, carrying a nativity scene figure. "Which one of the Jesus people is this?"

"Jimmy, be careful," warns Donna. "That's Joseph, and he's only made of plastic. He was a gift from your Aunt Mabel, and if you break him, she can't give us another one. You remember Aunt Mabel. She's in Heaven now."

"Aunt Mabel's with God," says Jimmy. "And God is Jesus's Daddy. Why is Joseph in the Jesus story?"

"Because he's just a handy guy to have around," says Jay, giving Donna a squeeze.

"That's for sure," agrees Donna, squeezing back. "It's so nice to have a man about the stable. And a good carpenter's particularly hard to find. Now Jimmy, put Joseph down and come and help me clean up the kitchen."

"I want to watch a movie with my Dad," says Jimmy. "Let's play rock-paper-scissors to see who picks." Jimmy lifts his fist, and Jay follows his move.

"One-Two-Three! Rock beats scissors! You win, son," says Jay. Jimmy runs and grabs a video disc from the shelf and slips it in the playing slot. Then he jumps onto the bed.

Jay clicks the remote control. "It's a Wonderful Life," he laughs. "That's my boy."

"Let's start where the man is bleeding," says Jimmy. "I like that part best."

Just then the telephone rings. "Hello..." Jay answers. "No, there's no doctor here." He puts down the receiver.

"Who is it?" calls Donna.

"Just a wrong number."



"Dad, every time a bell rings, does an angel really get its wings?"

"That's what I believe, Jimmy."

"Even when it's a wrong number?"

Jay gives Jimmy a hug. "Especially when it's a wrong number, son."

"Do you think Aunt Mabel has her wings yet?" asks Jimmy.

"That might have been her turn, just now. But if not, I'll bet she'll be next." Jay picks up the plastic model of Joseph, which was lying beside the telephone. "Tell you what, Kiddo," he says, tossing the figure playfully into the air. "When the movie's over, if you bring me the toy statues of Mary and the little baby from Jesus' birthday scene, I'll show you how to juggle."

"I don't know what juggle means, Daddy," says Jimmy.

"You'll learn, my boy," Jay smiles. "You'll learn real quick."

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