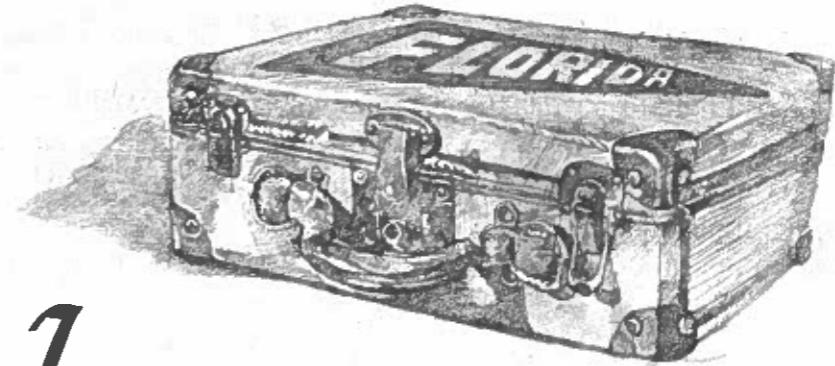


Pop's Boy

by Irvin Ashkenazy



Jt was long after midnight when I hopped off the truck in Lake City, Florida. I dragged my suitcase into an all-night diner. Then I ordered a hamburger.

The only other customer was a thin, elderly man. He was eating a bowl of soup. He stared at me a moment. Then he smiled as he noticed the University of Florida labels on my suitcase.

"Didn't I see you fight in St. Augustine one night last spring?" he asked. "You won the state **amateur** heavyweight title."

I nodded. I was surprised that he recognized me.

"What's your name?" asked the man.

"Jeff Turner," I said.

"You didn't have those scars over your eyes then."

"I turned professional later," I told him. "I needed the money."

"Did you quit school?" the man asked.

"No, I turned pro to stay in school," I said. "To pay my way."

After a while, the old man swung off his stool. "If you're going to the university," he said, "I can take you. I'm going through Gainesville."

As his old car rattled down the road, Pop told stories about the great

fighters of the past. He'd been in the business since 1940. He'd been training and managing fighters since then.

"I'm mostly retired now," he said. "But I am looking for someone to fight Kayo Billy Terry tonight. The boxer he was supposed to fight broke his hand yesterday."

By now the sun was coming up. I told Pop that I wasn't actually going to Gainesville. I said I would hitch a ride from there to Miami.

"I thought you were going back to school," he said.

"I was. But first I have to get \$500 from a man named Willie. Willie paid the bills for a manager who took me on a tour with some other fighters. When we got finished, Willie disappeared. But I know where he lives in Miami."

"Forget it," Pop said gruffly. "You'll never find him."

I said I had to have the money. I needed \$300 to pay off my debts and start school.

Another silence. Then, "Who'd you fight this summer?"

I mumbled a few names.

"You didn't fight *them*? Those are all very tough fighters."

I explained that my manager had put me in pretty good ten-round main fights from the start.

"The rat!" Pop said. "Putting a green kid like you in the ring with guys like those. Did you last ten rounds with any of them?"

I pulled some newspaper clippings from my wallet. Pop nearly wrecked the car, trying to drive and read at the same time.

"Well, I'll be," he said. "You beat 'em all!" After a few moments, he turned to me. "Stay over with me. I'll put you in against Terry tonight. You'll get your \$300!"

Pop's landlady glanced at us with an odd, anxious sadness. "Is *he* the one to fight Billy?" she asked Pop.

"He's my boy," Pop said roughly. She gave me something to eat. Then I went to Pop's room to get some sleep.

When I woke up, the windows were filled with night. A stocky, baggy-eyed little man was standing over me. He started rubbing down the muscles in my legs.

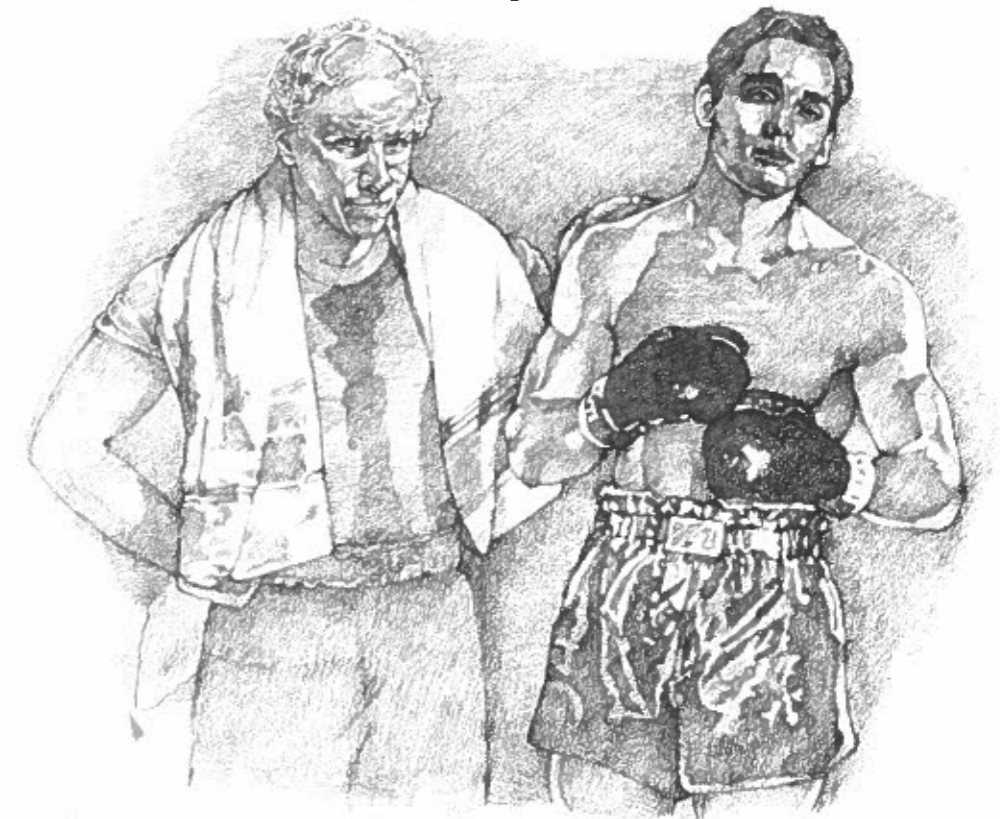
"This is J. D., my trainer," Pop explained. "J. D., this is Jeff." We shook hands, and then we headed to the arena where the fight was going to be held.

While I was dressing, I told Pop that I'd heard of Kayo Terry a couple of years before. He'd been pretty good. I wondered what he'd done since.

"He's a disgrace to his name," Pop said angrily. "Tonight he's trying to make a comeback. All that means is he'll try to win. That's because nobody's paying him to lose!"

I asked if he could still fight if he wanted to. Pop nodded slowly. "He might have been heavyweight champion, if he'd listened to me." I must have looked surprised. "I used to manage him," Pop muttered.

The roar of the crowd shook the thin walls of the dressing room. "It's almost time to get into the ring," said J. D.



Pop threw an arm over my shoulders. "This boy you're fightin' is good. He can hit and he can box with skill. But he's out of shape. He won't last ten rounds. Hold him off for six rounds and he's through. But until then—watch it! He's tricky and he's dangerous when he fights dirty."

As I moved out at the clang of the bell, Terry charged me, fists flying. He was trying to take me by surprise. I stepped back and took his blows on my gloves and arms. I moved in a circle, letting him tire himself out. Then I caught him with a good jab in the chin.

When he moved back, Terry knew I could box. He must have been worried. He needed to win so badly.

Suddenly, a blinding flash of pain shot through my brain. He had thrust his thumb into my eye. I hunched against the ropes. I couldn't see. While he pounded the back of my head, I managed to get my arms around him. Then I saw stars, as he butted me hard in my forehead. The bell clanged, ending the round.

Pop yelled at the referee about the foul. But the referee only shrugged. He hadn't seen it.

The second round started slowly. Terry was trying to save his strength. And I was waiting for him to lose it. The fans grew restless. They began stamping their feet.

Just then Terry rushed me, throwing wild punches. I danced back, but he closed in. Suddenly he grabbed my arms at the elbows, leaned in, and snarled, "Fight!"

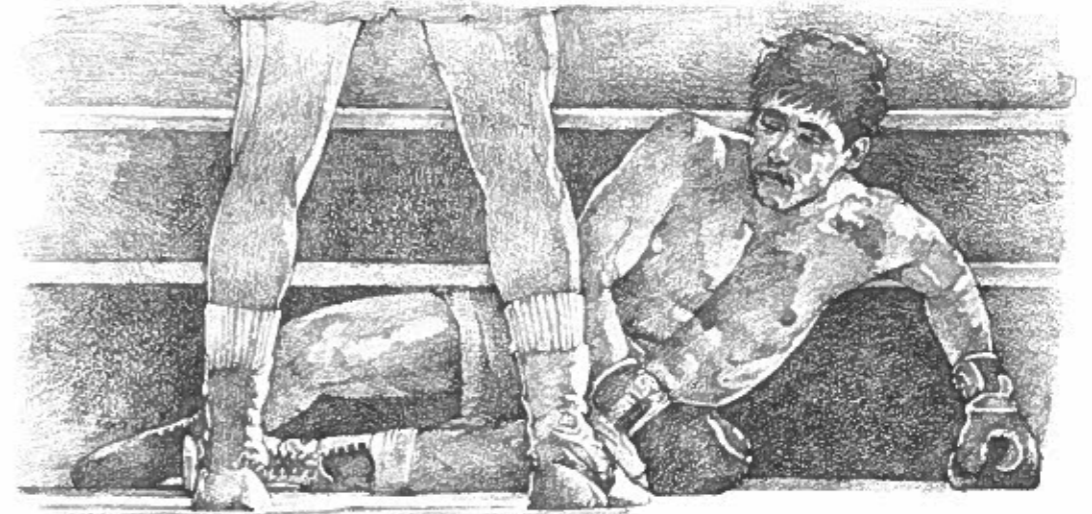
For a second I could only stare. I had never before felt hatred toward a man I was fighting. Fear, maybe. But never hatred.

I flung him away from me, clear across the ring. As he bounced back off the ropes, I charged in wildly.

The next thing I knew, a distant voice called, "Six!" I was flat on my back! I was so angry. I hadn't been careful.

"Seven!" called the referee. At "Eight!" I got up on one knee. And at "Nine!" I was on my feet, a bit wobbly.

Terry moved in quickly, trying to finish me. I held on and turned him into the corner. Then, as my head cleared, I made believe I was confused. I pretended to throw a punch, letting my glove go weakly past Terry's head.



Terry charged in confidently. As he did, I drove my left fist against his jaw. He dropped like a stone to the floor.

I was out of the ring by the time the referee finished counting to ten. Looking back, I was surprised to see Pop move suddenly into the ring. He lifted Terry in his arms, and dragged him back to the corner.

Pop and I went to a little restaurant afterward. He looked very tired as he handed me a roll of bills. I counted the \$300. Then I took \$75 and gave it to him.

"What's that for?" he asked. I told him it was his regular manager's share. He pushed the money toward me. "You don't owe me anything, son."

After a while, I said, "He really got me angry. You saw what he was doing in there."

Pop nodded. He wasn't looking at me.

"You planning to finish school?"

I said I guessed so. The question surprised me.

"You do it! Make something of yourself."

J. D. rushed up and said I'd have to hurry to make the bus back to Gainesville. Pop just sat there.

“Aren’t you coming to the station with us?” J. D. asked him.
 Pop shook his head. “I don’t think so. To tell you the truth,” he sighed, “I’m kind of worn out.”
 I grasped his hand. “So long, Pop,” I said. “And thanks a million.”
 At the bus station, J. D. shook my hand. “Pop will get you another fight soon,” he said. “You’ll make some more easy money.”
 I said that that night’s money hadn’t been easy. But it had been the fastest \$300 I’d ever made.
 J. D. looked puzzled. “What are you talking about?” he asked. “I saw the man at the arena give Pop \$100. That was your share.”
 Before I could say anything else, the bus started up and J. D. pushed me aboard.
 The next day, I wrote to Pop. I asked him about the \$200 of his own money that he had given me. Later, I wrote two times more. But all my letters came back marked “Not here.”
 Two months later, J. D. called and offered me a fight in Tampa. He met me at the bus station and hurried me into his car.
 “How’s Pop?” I asked.
 J. D.’s face fell. “Don’t you know? Pop’s dead.”
 I felt as though someone had kicked me in the stomach.
 I asked when it had happened. He said, “The next morning right after you went back to Gainesville. His landlady found him in bed.” J. D. tapped his chest. “Heart just gave out, I guess.”
 It was a moment or two before I could speak again. “Did Pop have any family?”
 “Just that one kid,” J. D. said.
 “What kid?”
 J. D. gave me a surprised look.
 “Didn’t you know? Billy Terry was Pop’s son.”

GETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY. Complete each of the following sentences by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. Each sentence helps you get the meaning of the story.

- Pop asked Jeff Turner to
 - a. lend him \$200.
 - b. fight Billy Terry.
 - c. leave school to become a boxer.
- According to Pop, Billy Terry
 - a. was once the heavyweight champion.
 - b. was a good fighter who was out of shape.
 - c. could not box very well.
- The fighter who Jeff knocked out was
 - a. one of Jeff’s friends.
 - b. J. D.’s brother.
 - c. Pop’s son.
- The day after Jeff won the fight, Pop
 - a. went back to Gainesville.
 - b. offered Jeff a fight in Tampa.
 - c. died in his bed.

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

REVIEWING STORY ELEMENTS. Each of the following questions reviews your understanding of story elements. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer to each question.

- What happened first in the *plot* of the story?
 - a. Billy Terry poked Jeff in the eye.
 - b. Pop gave Jeff \$300.
 - c. Jeff met Pop in an all-night diner.
- Which sentence best *characterizes* Pop?
 - a. He always seemed happy and filled with life.
 - b. He was rich because he managed so many famous fighters.
 - c. He was an elderly fight manager who was disappointed in his son.
- The main action of this story is *set* in a
 - a. car.
 - b. boxing ring.
 - c. restaurant.
- Which word best describes the *mood* of the story?
 - a. serious
 - b. humorous
 - c. mysterious

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS. Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. If you wish, look back at the words before you answer the questions.

- What is the meaning of the word *amateur*?
 - a. a person who has little power or strength
 - b. a person who is the star of a movie or play
 - c. a person who does something for pleasure, not for money
- Pop and Jeff headed to the arena where the fight was going to be held. What is an *arena*?
 - a. a very old house
 - b. a building in which different kinds of contests take place
 - c. a railroad station
- When Terry butted Jeff in the forehead, Pop complained about the foul. As used in this sentence, the word *foul* means
 - a. a ball hit in baseball.
 - b. a funny smell.
 - c. something unfair or against the rules.
- Jeff was out of the ring by the time the referee finished counting to ten. A *referee* is a person who
 - a. acts as a judge in certain events.
 - b. trains and manages fighters.
 - c. buys and sells tickets.

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

ADDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE. Complete the following paragraph by filling in each blank with one of the words listed in the box below. Each of the words appears in the story. Since there are five words and four blanks, one word in the group will not be used.

Almost everyone agrees that boxers must have courage and _____.

Although it is true that ability is needed to box well, _____ people do not

consider boxing a sport. They _____ that boxing should be

banned, or not allowed. They say that boxing is _____ and cruel. Do

you have an opinion about this?

started	some
skill	
think	dangerous

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

THINKING ABOUT THE STORY. Each of the following questions will help you to think critically about the selection. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer.

- Which statement is true?
 - a. Billy Terry was a very fair fighter.
 - b. Jeff made believe he was confused in order to make Terry careless.
 - c. Pop had been managing fighters for just a few years.
- Pop said that Terry would try to win because nobody was paying him to lose. This suggests that in the past, Terry
 - a. purposely lost some fights for money.
 - b. won every fight he had.
 - c. always trained very hard for all his fights.
- Which one of the following shows that Pop still cared about Billy?
 - a. Pop said that Billy was a disgrace to his name.
 - b. Pop told Jeff that Billy wouldn't last ten rounds.
 - c. After Billy was knocked out, Pop lifted him in his arms and helped him back to the corner.
- How did Jeff probably feel when he discovered that Billy Terry was Pop's son?
 - a. pleased
 - b. surprised
 - c. proud

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

Thinking More about the Story. Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- In this story, the fight manager is called "Pop." Why do you think the author is careful not to tell you Pop's *real* name?
- Who do you think Pop hoped would win the fight? Who do you think he expected to win? Explain your answers.
- Pop died of a broken heart. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give reasons to support your answer.

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises.

GETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY

+
 REWIEWING STORY ELEMENTS

+
 EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS

+
 ADDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE

+
 THINKING ABOUT THE STORY

▼
 Score Total: Story 10