

The Price Of Victory

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It was early in the fourth round; I measured it by the four swallows of whisky taken from the half empty pint of "Old Grandad" nestling against the palm of my left hand. The whisky produced a warm sensation that loosened my tongue, causing me to yell as did the rest of the wild beasts around me. Urged on by the mastery of alcohol, all the savageness of primitive man overshadowed the culture of civilization; and I felt the supremacy of the conqueror ruthlessly beating his victim. Each of his blows became my own; each smack of his fist slamming into soft flesh created a thrill. "Kill him," I yelled. "Kill him!"

Hysterically I lifted the bottle to my lips and with a quick jerk tilted my head backwards. For a second the arena lights glared into my eyes. The whisky seemed to draw my mouth. It slid across the top of my tongue and burned the tenderness of my throat before adding more fuel to the increasing fire in my belly. I screwed the cap tight and for a moment stared through the glass at the quivering liquid inside. Within its dark depths I saw the Roman Coliseum, the betrayal of Jesus and the swastika of Germany. Somewhat shaken I once more became aware of the people around me. I noticed the expressions, the sheer delight that reflected in their faces at the brutality occurring before them. I saw eyes that smoldered dangerously, mouths

that twitched at the sight of blood and expressions of sweet happiness as pain was felt.

A young woman in front of me leaped to her feet. "Look! Look!" she screamed. "His teeth, they're loose!" The manner in which she placed both hands to the side of her face and stared reminded me of a buddy I once knew. It was just after a hot piece of shrapnel had disemboweled him. The body twitched and jerked, but not the face; it remained the same. With a curse the woman's companion pulled her back down into the seat. "Naw, that's the mouth piece," he muttered. At the same time he glanced around and smiled. I nodded.

Leaning forward I placed my hands against the hard chair back. It shifted as my weight was applied. A smacking noise drew my attention once again towards the ring. Momentarily the beaten fighter rocked on his feet from the force of the punch, then slid to one knee. Stubbornly he clung to the conscious world before falling sideways to the canvas. His mouth piece, which was protruding from the corner of his mouth, rolled across the floor and stopped at the feet of his conqueror. A red blotch on the right cheek bone of the prone fighter turned a soft blue color as the winner's hand was raised into the smoke filled air. Somehow the sweetness of the life-saver I had placed in my mouth turned bitter.