



DECLAN RYAN

*SLOW GUITAR, SOFT TRUMPET AND A BELL*

*MINERVA III*

THE YOUNG GOD OF THE CATSKILLS  
BLIND CASSIUS AND THE BEAR  
CALIGULA IN JAPAN  
THE 39<sup>th</sup> EXCEPTION

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## THE YOUNG GOD OF THE CATSKILLS

Mike Tyson is twenty years, four months, and twenty-two days old  
and in the dressing room of the Hilton Hotel.

He's breaking his gloves down;  
pushing the leather to the back,  
so his knuckle can pierce through.

He's afraid of everything.

During training he's been afraid of the world champion,  
Trevor Berbick.

He's dreamed of Berbick beating him.

'The closer I get to the ring  
the more confident I get', he will later explain.

'Once I'm in the ring I'm a god.'

'I try to catch them right on the tip of the nose,  
because I try to punch the bone into the brain.

People don't have the slightest idea  
of just how hard it is to break somebody's jaw or eye socket.

They think it's just the power.

But it's the accuracy of the power.

Every punch is thrown with bad intention and the speed of the devil.'

It will take Tyson five minutes and thirty five seconds  
to dispose of Berbick.

The final punch Tyson will land,  
a left to Berbick's temple,  
will knock the champion down three times.

Berbick's brain won't accept he's finished,  
but his legs, covered in knee-high black stockings, will.

The first time he'll fall flat on his back  
in the centre of the ring;  
the second, he'll collapse sideways into the ropes.  
The third time he will fall  
forwards, failing to extend his hands  
in time to stop his face hitting the canvas.

Tyson will celebrate with a shrug,  
and a kiss on the lips for his manager.  
'My record will last for immortality.  
It will never be broken.  
It's ludicrous these mortals even attempt to enter my realm.'

Twenty years on, believing God to be a regular visitor  
to his apartment and himself the world champion,  
Berbick will be attacked by a twenty year old  
with a length of pipe and left to die in a churchyard.  
Fifty two at the time of his death, according to boxing records,  
some reports will have him as fifty six, others as forty nine.  
'Legally, I'm a spirit', he will say between this night, and that,  
'I have no age.'

## BLIND CASSIUS AND THE BEAR

Clay's been saying 'cut the gloves'  
but Angelo Dundee continues to kneel,  
to wash his eyes with a sponge.  
Clay was blinking in round four,  
and is complaining of a burning sensation.  
He finished the round with his eyes shut.

Clay's been calling Sonny Liston a 'big, ugly bear' for months.  
He's said 'I'm ready to go to war.'  
He's worked himself into a frenzy.  
At the weigh-in Clay's pulse  
was 120 beats per minute.  
The doctor who took it said 'he's scared to death.'

Clay's been linked to militant Black Muslims  
in the press before the fight,  
costing the promoter \$300,000.  
One commentator's written 'Liston used to be a hoodlum;  
now he is our cop;  
he is the big Negro we pay to keep sassy Negroes in line.'

Clay danced, and was impossible to find  
before astringent got in his eyes.  
Now he can't see  
but it's Liston who'll refuse to start round seven,  
conceding his title on the stool.  
Liston who can't raise his arms.

Clay's being pushed from his seat  
by Dundee, sent out to stand in front of Sonny,  
blind, but by the end of the fight he'll say  
'Almighty God was with me.  
I want everyone to bear witness; I'm the greatest thing that ever lived.  
I don't have a mark on my face, and I upset Sonny Liston,

and I just turned twenty-two years old.  
I must be the greatest. I showed the world.  
I talk to God everyday. I know the real God.  
I shook up the world,  
I'm the king of the world.  
You must listen to me.'

Tomorrow, Clay will be Cassius X  
and 'champ'.  
*The New York Times* will concede that  
'All those interminable refrains  
of "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee,"  
had been more than foolish songs.'

## CALIGULA IN JAPAN

It's just after 9 a.m local time in Tokyo.

Mike Tyson's cornerman has filled a condom with ice water  
and is pressing it against his fighter's eye.

There's no end-swell  
because no one thought to bring one.

James 'Buster' Douglas, a 42-to-1 outsider,  
isn't scared of the champion.

Douglas's mother died twenty three days ago  
but he refused to cancel this title shot.

Tyson's barely trained.

He'll later confess to spending weeks 'fucking those Japanese girls  
like it was eating grapes.

You thought I was Caesar,  
you thought I was Caligula out there in Japan.'

Because of the time,  
and the Japanese fans' politeness,  
the arena has been in near-silence through the opening rounds.  
It will stay quiet when Tyson drops Douglas in the eighth,  
and when Douglas gets to his feet.

When Douglas pivots in the tenth to land the blow  
which knocks Tyson down for the first time in his career  
the stadium will be 'so quiet you could have heard a rat pissing on cotton.'

Years from now, Douglas will say

'My main strategy was to survive.  
My corner said he was going to come like hell  
and I was ready for that challenge.  
I thought Tyson was getting up  
until I had seen him looking for that mouthpiece  
and then I knew he was really hurt.'

Tyson, when asked why this all happened, will say  
'I just stopped caring.  
He got up. Nobody else had.'



## THE 39<sup>th</sup> EXCEPTION

Joe Louis has outlived his era  
and is, according to Muhammad Ali,  
'making himself look real ignorant  
when he attacks these young, educated, Olympic boys.  
He's making himself an Uncle Tom for white people.  
Negroes don't follow and idolise that part of Joe Louis.'  
Louis is ill-equipped for Black Power;  
all that remains is his name  
which he's already used to endorse hair pomade,  
milk, cigarettes and liquor.

Fans are sending Louis dollars in the mail.  
The IRS have finally thrown in the towel.  
Louis is hearing gangsters' voices through the air-con,  
opening all the windows,  
refusing to eat anything which has come out of a can.  
He's got a job as a greeter, shaking hands  
at Caesar's Palace,  
but most nights are at the craps table,  
keeping what he wins on other people's chips.  
Drink has entered the picture, as has cocaine;  
accelerating an inherited condition.  
In wedding photos his wives all drank champagne  
and he ate apples;  
now he over-fills the tumbler.  
Some friends will later optimistically claim  
he 'ended his days not continually tormented.'

The public's last sighting of Louis  
will be ringside in a wheelchair, and cowboy hat,  
in colour.

He will be buried with full military honours  
in recognition of the four years of his prime  
spent being paid \$21 a week basic  
while amassing a \$100,000 tax debt  
on donations made to the army relief fund.

Louis will not qualify for burial at Arlington  
because he holds no medals for bravery,  
distinguished service or war wounds;  
did not die on active duty  
and was not disabled on active duty.

President Reagan will intervene  
to make Louis,

'the son of an Alabama sharecropper

I was privileged to have had as my friend'  
an exception -

the 39<sup>th</sup> since regulations were tightened.

