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A bell rings. The old bastard scampers as best he can with the limp. He high heels it out of the ring, and I come prowling out like a tiger doing a couple of nasty clawing motions in the air with my hands. The rooster ran to my left, picking up speed as he went, then quite impresses me by taking the wall, climbing to about twelve feet as he passed partly with speed and partly with his ankle hook powers which I hear go thunk, thunk, thunk in the wall boards. I make a mental note, and kind of cog that into the grinding gears of my plan. I spin on my heel and see him running fast, then dropping and rolling off some hay bales, and then come spinning toward me like a runaway saw blade. At the last moment, I do my own gymnastic spin and clutch away from the rooster and I hear his spurs go chop into the boards where I was standing.

I do a couple of flips and land, hardly panting, some twenty feet away from the rooster. My muscles are just starting to warm up and swell a little with work. The rooster looks at me and crows, I take it, in frustration, though it is difficult to cog what he means by the screeching and it being something that I am growing tired of anyway. But on he comes again, spinning and flipping like so much of a red blur with the silver of his rooster hooks flashing in there. I do a run at him then spin and flip off to the right, missing the evil rooster by a hair's width. I come close enough so he can smell my Sunset over Santa Rosa cologne, and I hear the tiniest of frustrated monkey grunts from him.

By this time, I can see that he is not so straight and true when he

stops his high stepping flip kind of technique, and I headwork that he has grown tired over the last two passes and is kind of used to finishing his work by now, after pinning some poor bastard to the floorboards with his hooks. Still, I will wait a minute before administering to him, because he is something to watch. And since he will not be continuing his career after this evening, I will perhaps inherit some of the more exciting bits being always a showman first and looking for the new thing to throw into the act—although, I find the rooster man-type individual to be a little too glitzy even for me. He would look more at home on the runway at a fashion show for the homicidal, but I gave him top marks in presentation and would speak well of that over his grave if his family invited me to the funeral.

So, he's coming in for another pass, and I'm thinking to pull a close call by just standing there until the last second—to drag a big gulp out of the crowd—then dodging quick from the way; when I suddenly hear my name in a voice I recognize. I have excellent hearing and conjure a face. Somewhat unwisely, I peek up at the loft and sure enough I see Veronica Ramsey staring down and waving. That is just enough of an advantage for the rooster to press, and I feel this nasty biting kind of deep pain in my thigh where his spur has sunk in.

I snarl, but immediately tense the muscle around the spur to hold it in place. I see the rooster is cocking his right leg to stab at my throat so I do two things. First, I grip the ankle carrying the spur in my leg. Second I lift up with everything I've got. And the rooster goes skyward, his leg kick having missed my head and throat by mere fractions. He is off balance and lands strange, but flips and turns again like a good gymnast until he's facing me. I look quick at the loft and see a blonde head disappearing. *FUCK!* Then I glance at my leg, see the muscle tight and purple around an ugly red hole. Blood has spurted out and sprayed the floor at my feet, but it is fast slowing to a trickle.

The rooster crows again and comes spinning, but I am only anger now, and cannot keep my mind upon the battle. I can only think of Veronica Ramsey's face looking down through the chicken wire. The rooster is airborne coming at me. I take two steps, limbo under him, and come up behind, catching him around the waist as he takes off for another tumble run. I hold tight, and try to get a leg around him. We come down hard, off balance, and the rooster's right ankle crumbles. *Snap!* He crows now, but without the old excitement. He tries to straighten up, but I have him in a clinch. My old instincts move fast though, and I do my infighting real speedy, snatching his left wrist and pulling it up behind his back until I hear a *crack*, and another crow, of

course. Then I push him down.

I jump back and watch him climb to his feet. His right ankle wobbles a bit, and I expect a scream from him, but he must be on major painkillers as well, because he simply shrugs his broken arm and it dangles at his side, and then he puts weight on the ankle that should be sending him into convulsions. I am still thinking about Veronica as I run up to the rooster, and let him have it fast and easy. First of all, because Veronica has awakened up the tight and weepy feeling in my chest, and secondly, because he has drawn Nuke's blood and that is a crime bearing capital punishment.

I fly in with a series of tight roundhouses that leave his head rattling. Then I put two into his breadbasket deep, like sinking wells, and he goes over coughing blood. I snatch both his ears and pound his face into my knee until I feel his nose breaks and his lips explode. He takes a wild swing at me as I stand him up, but there is not much in it, and I let it strike off my pecks like a girl hit me or something. I smile and start punching his face until his head is a red blur, my knuckles making tough *thwocking* sounds on his forehead and temples, and jaws. I begin to cog that maybe the death and destruction is too intense for the rooster since he was good at the violence and unique, but I remember he has drawn the blood of yours truly, and no one must do that and live.

So I pound and kick him until he is this great wobbling wonder, and I am sure now he has been huffing neural stimulants and painkillers. I step back then give him a powerful roundhouse kick across the legs. He drops like a collapsing building, broken at the knees. He crumples onto his face. I walk around him, somewhat pissed off by his lack of emotion about the whole proceedings. I see money changing hands in the crowd, and I raise my bloody fists and roar. I look down at my foe. He is muttering in Spanish or Incan or something, and I headwork that I am going to be frustrated if he does not suffer at all.

So I grab his twisted legs by the ankles and lift him skyward upside down. I shake him a moment, and blood drools from his mouth. Then I drop him clunk on his head, still holding him by the spurs, and then on a whim of genius, turn his ankles in and drive the sharp points of the hooks into his groin until he is screaming, and his crotch is a tangle of torn flesh and material. Blood soaks down his chest. His eyes glaze. I lift him over my head, blood draining down my arms, and smash him onto the floor with all my strength. He bounces like a bag of meat and lies still. His skull is cracked and flattening out like its made of clay or something.

The crowd goes wild as I parade around the ring, arms raised in victory. I shake them at the spectators and occasionally walk over for a

stomp on the body. The little old fuck in the bull fighting costume comes over and holds up my hand and begins to shriek in Spanish. I shake off his hand, and then stalk over to the door by which I entered. Morris is there, looking frightened with me so close and terrible in blood and smelling of vomit and sweat.

“Excellent fight, Mein Herr!” he says eyes afraid of mine.

“It sucked, manager and agent-type individual.” I looked out into the ring. “He drew the blood of Nuke, though in defense I could say that I was somewhat distracted by the reappearance of foiled luncheon date, that I have mentioned to you, I believe—though my memory is awash with anger and violence. I must set these things to rights now. Many more must die for this.” I look at him and see him tremble. I am not going to run around the warehouse looking for Veronica Ramsey, since I am fairly certain I saw her disappearing in a way that introduced a period of not appearing for a while. I would wait, and talk to the young lady at some other time, when we could chat over a cup of some liquid or somesuch or cyanide. I noticed Morris watching me with much hesitation.

“What is it, noble Nazi squire, that has your Adam’s apple tremulous and uncertain?”

He almost squeaks, not too sure as he is, about yours truly’s mood. “I’ve got the purse, Mr. Nuke. Five thousand dollars.” He held it out like a kindergarten child with his first picture.

“Good work, Morris,” I say this, having now begun to towel off the oil and blood from my body. “I will have you drive me home where I can wash and spritz and dress, at which point we will go out and blow said wad of money.” I smile, but make a mental note to try to phone Veronica Ramsey using the number that I know is on my answering machine. Then, I discard the headwork as being the action of a weak man, not of Nuke.