

SUPER

A black and white photograph of a man, Scott Dixon, in a boxing stance. He is wearing a dark, shiny jacket and boxing gloves. He is leaning forward, with his hands resting on the ropes of a boxing ring. The background is dark and out of focus.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
SCOTT DIXON

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Round 1

Ambushed

18 May 2004

I was in high spirits, feeling prosperous. I'd just fought an Irish fella, Matthew Macklin, who was known as The Tipperary Tornado. All boxers enjoyed pumped-up, flashy and nonsensical names like that. I was no exception. It was just a bit of a noise to capture the attention of supporters and newspapers. I had fought him six days earlier at the Rivermead Leisure Centre in Reading but could still feel it throughout my body. I'd taken a bit of a hammering, but so had he. A lot of my straight lefts, peachy rights and uppercuts had got through his defences. Not enough to get the better of him, drop him or finish him, but the fight had a good turnout. Whatever the result, with 2,000 people in attendance, it wasn't a bad payday.

New kid on the block and much-fancied, Macklin was trained by Billy Graham, who also had Ricky Hatton in his stable. Macklin was a British-born Irishman. He was on a

roll and heading for the dazzling, bright lights of success. He hadn't been flattened, so far as I knew. I was beaten but it was a good enough performance. 'Not enough time to prepare' was beginning to sound like the story of my life. I was in reasonable shape and my mind was focused sharp like a camera with a zoom lens, but it wasn't enough.

In boxing, a lot of opportunities come late in the day. You grab them if the price is right, or you leave them. I never turned down work. You never knew if there was going to be more work, and I grew up in a place where work was scarce. Also, I'm a bit of a chancer. If opportunity knocked on my door, I usually answered. Somebody drops out, somebody steps in. No promoter ever wanted to cancel a fight. It's bad for business and reputations. There was always someone else up for it, whether it was a fall guy or someone trying to get their career off the mat. Guys who try to make a comeback rarely do. That's sad to say, but it's also true. Just look at the evidence. I usually answered the door.

So, I got a crack at Macklin and held my head up. I didn't get floored. Floored meant you held your head down and wondered after a loss, 'What next? Should I just pack it all in?' I just stashed the experience away in my boxing memory bank for the next time. There *would* be a next time. I hadn't been floored.

Today was a familiar clockwork routine. I untangled myself from a bird I'd met the night before at a nearby club called The Ritz. It was hardly a flashy spot like The Ritz in London, but a very different Hamilton, Scotland variety

of ritzy. I asked her, whatever her name was, to let herself out. After she left, I hauled myself out of bed and went to Alex Morrison's gym on Swanston Street for a quick shave, wash and a shower. I used his gym regularly when I was in Glasgow. It wasn't too far from Hamilton, where I grew up. The gym was a massive, vibrant place with four rings, top-notch gear, a changing room and showers.

Frequented by up-and-coming boxers and worn-out punch-drunks with nothing else to do, the gym was always packed to the rafters, reeking of sweat and fear. Today, two top Rangers boys who I followed, Barry Ferguson and Gordon Smith, were working out. They were my football heroes. Another character known as 'Nicker' Harris, who couldn't hurt a fly and was as skinny as Olive Oyl, was hanging around, too. The Invisible Man we called him, which suited his trade.

Like clockwork, first of December, he'd turn up with a scrap of paper and a Biro to take down festive orders: whisky, gin, brandy, Drambuie, Baileys for the birds, ale and fags. We're talking cases of it. Then 'poof', Nicker would vanish and go bust a warehouse. He made enough money in a month to keep him afloat all year, a truly seasonal businessman: 11 months off, one month on. After filling his orders, he would head to Spain and put his feet up. It was odd to see him here in May. Someone once asked him how he got all his stuff. He ran his finger down his nose, closed his eyes and whispered, 'Magic.'

Up-and-coming celebrities worked out here, too. All up, the gym had a hotchpotch gathering of all sorts and was very

much the place to be and be seen. There were pros, promoters, trainers, talent scouts, sparring partners, amateurs, teenagers, hopefuls, the hopeless, has-beens, hangers-on and, of course, plenty of tarts and bad apples.

Boxing and crime are like Siamese twins. You don't get one without the other one whispering in your ear. Everybody knew everybody and we all got on or gave each other space. It was a mingling of respectful mistrust, but not everyone followed the fundamental rules of loyalty and silence.

After training, I strolled over to the café next door. It was a regular hustle-bustle hangout. You could get a slice of toast, a cuppa, a cooked breakfast, and a head full of rabbit about who or what was going down. Redhead Janice Tool ran the café with a rod of iron and a rolling pin. She'd take no lip. If anyone said 'boo' to her, they'd have us lot coming down on them. Janice was untouchable.

After breakfast, I left the gym in my new silver Lexus, juiced the car down the road and drove the three miles to see my hairdresser friend, Leanne, at her flat. On the way, I heard on the radio that more rain had fallen in Scotland this past May than in recorded history. Today, we would have a brief respite with sunny spells, then thunderstorms and rain were coming our way. It was a bleak prospect. Already, I felt something wasn't hanging quite right today and I couldn't figure it out.

Maybe it was just the weather: dead depressing. Dark clouds were amassing like upturned mushrooms – fungi gathering in a dank forest and painting over little patches of

suspiciously promising blue skies. A strong wind from the east was shilly-shallying and kicking empty beer cans, supermarket plastic bags, fag packets, and discarded rubbish across the road. Everything was already sleeked and greased from the last downpour. Trying to shake all the muck and shit that I saw through my windscreen, my mind drifted to Leanne.

‘You’re Real Madrid, babe, the one to play for,’ I first said to her when we met, fancying the pants straight off her. She was in a league of her own, though. She told me straight what she thought of me.

‘You’re one big cocky shit,’ she replied slyly. I was the moth, and she was the flame. Or, maybe it was the other way around. Lately, I had been thinking about maybe giving it a go with her, but I’m not in the best shape. When I go to the flat, she asks me to sit down on a chair in front of a large mirror, just like a proper hairdresser. I liked that a lot. I could talk to her reflection. I didn’t have much hair to cut, so a blow dry was a waste of electricity.

‘Whoever’s been doing your hair has made a right proper mess of it,’ she said with a huff. ‘Honestly. It’s ginger. If you want blonde, see me,’ she added, drying my head with a towel. Getting her to do my hair regular was nothing more than an excuse to see her in private, with ivory-coloured curtains closed around us. She always looked as well turned out as her pad, spotlessly clean and well decorated. She also had a massive telly.

She had framed photos of her family and fast cars – supercharged rally beasts covered in sponsor decals – all neatly

displayed on one shelf. She likes to go as fast as she can, I thought. There was even a framed snap of her in racing gear with a crash helmet on behind the wheel of a car. It was all honky-tonk, a picture built to do the business. Just like her.

Leanne was as bonny as they get and funny, all rolled up into one tasty package of fun and games. When she cracked a smile, so did you. Every guy fancied the pants off her, but she was selective. Not everyone can pull that trick off. She had lovely ice-blue eyes and proper blonde hair with no dark roots and none of that filthy ammonia-stinking bleach shit that gets up your nose. If she'd been four inches taller, she'd have been strutting Paris catwalks with Naomi Campbell. Leanne had all the equipment to cause a stir and a car crash.

One incident nailed her in a nutshell. On a very hot day, apparently, some old Glasgow cock was cruising down the road in his 'Roller', while Leanne walked the pavement wearing nearly nothing and stilettos. He must have clocked her a second too long, mounted the kerb and hit a lamp post. Since then, people have called Leanne 'Car Crash'.

But, really, she was turbocharged with clean lines. Leanne hated anything not all buttoned up and neat and tidy. Her toenails were as well maintained and manicured as her hands, which tells you a lot about her attention to personal detail, even in places not every fella was lucky enough to see.

Bit of a variety act was Leanne, but she wasn't the only pebble on my beach. I'd never been able to stick with anyone long. Leanne's dad, Alan Arneil, who I'd never met, was a famous rally driver with a shelf stuffed full of trophies to

prove it. He'd heard I knew Leanne but word on the street was he wasn't much happy about it.

'There ... all done,' she said, blowing the hair off my shirt and trousers on to her skin-tight blue jeans, white pumps and the white sheet she'd laid on the carpet underneath the pine chair I was sitting on. I got up and she moved the chair into the corner of the room. She folded the sheet into a neat parcel, opened the window wide, flapped the sheet into the breeze – getting rid of every last hair from my head – folded the sheet back up and placed it neatly on a table. She was ready for her next customer.

'Anything else, sir?' she asked, running her tongue lightly across her top lip in slow motion.

'Can I give you a tip?' I smiled.

About an hour later, I'd just lit a cigarette when my mobile rang. I gave a smoky hello and coughed. It was Garry McMillan. I had known Garry since boxing shorts were so big that you had to tie them up with a belt or a piece of rope. I hadn't seen him for some time, but my nose told me what this might be about. I smelt trouble in the wind. Nothing was ever straightforward with him. 'Scott, need to speak,' he said. 'Tell me when you're finished. I'll come and meet you.' Finished what? I thought.

'Okay bro, I'll get back to you when I'm home.' I had no intention of calling him back today, if ever.

I pulled in and parked my car in the garage, which was behind my apartment building, when my phone rang in my kit bag on the back seat. Someone once told me that I had

360 degrees of awareness, which on the streets, in this neck of the woods, was more important than in the ring, where at least there was a referee. But on the streets and in the ring, anyone can turn a blind eye, to an extent, if they had a wad of notes stuffed in their pocket. The motto around here was 'watch your back' or get a minder to do that for you. Where I was from, safety in numbers didn't just apply to teenage gals.

With heightened awareness, I opened the car door, got out and reached into the back for my kit bag, then I heard a car drive up and stop. With the engine still ticking over, I heard a car door open, then another. I didn't hear them close. Then I heard footsteps. I turned just as a baseball bat came down on me. There was no time to dodge or catch it. Whack!

I spun like a top, and the pain rocketed straight through me. I managed to stay on my feet for a second or two, then I hit the deck. I was barely conscious. Instinctively, I threw my hands up to protect myself from further punishment, but I was being pole-axed.

I began to slip away and could feel blood trickling down the side of my face. I smelled it in the ether, too. That rusty aroma of blood can be the onset of death. If this was only round one, it felt like I'd need the attention of an undertaker pretty soon. Two other men joined the attack. I was being punched, manhandled and bundled into the back of a blood-red Honda. I was pinned by muscle, bad intentions and steel.

An arm was locked as tight as a wound-up vice around my neck, and I could feel a knife-tip stuck into my side. If I fought back or moved an inch, the knife was going in. Once

I made out their faces, I was consumed with disbelief and shock. These guys weren't strangers. I knew them all, for fuck's sake. What's going on? Over the years, they'd worked with me and for me along the way. We'd been lads for a long time.

Sitting in the back of the car, the only defence I had up my sleeve were words – maybe rationalising a bit – so I went for it in spite of the odds. Was this about a woman? Come on! It can't be. Or, maybe it's about ...?

'You cunts ... what is this?!'

'Shurrap.'

'About what? A fucking tart?!'

One of them stabbed me in the leg. The five-inch, lock-back blade cut clean into my leg, just above the knee. It should've hurt like hell, but I felt nothing. My mind raced. None of this stacked up. I regarded these guys. We grew up together and I boxed with them. My grandfather was friends with their fathers.

Mother of God, was there no honour? This was Judas Iscariot in triplicate, and they were here to give me a Glasgow-style kiss. I wasn't thinking about dying yet but death had me lined up in its sights. GBH was starting to turn into RIP. I stopped thinking and started operating from a different place – pure survival instincts.

We were driving fast into deserted countryside, three or four minutes from where I lived on Hamilton's outskirts. I was nailed down in the back of the car. I knew I was going to get hammered one way or another. They were in too deep

now to stop. Everyone was yelling and screaming. It was chaos inside that car.

McMillan and the two boys I can't name seemed pumped full of steroids and dope. They were deranged. I tried to say something, and the cunt in the passenger seat turned around and punched me smack on the nose. He was a boxer, so he could hit. I felt my nose crack like a stick. Now I was bleeding in three places. I wished I had a friend or two here to even the odds and settle this. I knew these fuckers would happily cut me into pieces, leaving me dead, buried and forgotten.

We got to Mutton Hall Road, where I did my roadwork every day. They pulled up to a halt in a side lane. It was too quiet, not even the birds were singing, and there was nobody around. Not a house in sight. People had been found dead in these parts.

Words weren't going to help me now. I was in a last-chance saloon. I knew I had to make a move because these guys were going to kill me here. I still didn't know why. But I couldn't die without taking a shot at living. One of them eyeballed me. An index finger beckoned me to get out. I couldn't make a move yet. The knife was still pinned hard into my side. Another of my assailants opened the car boot. I could hear tools clattering on to the ground. I was praying they didn't have a chainsaw. When he came back into view, he was clutching a baseball bat in one hand and a claw hammer in the other. And he was smiling. This wasn't going to be a beating; it was an execution.

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If so, these fuckers were going about it in a very slow way. One well-directed 9mm bullet would've worked. I started being appreciative about ways it seemed I wouldn't die. At least they hadn't poured petrol all over me and slung in a Zippo.

Fuck them. Push had come to shove. If I was going to die, I was taking one of them with me. I noticed the central locking was off. I leapt out of the car, fast as a rat, slammed the door on the knife coming after me, trapping a hand in the process, which gave me a split-second before a baseball bat slammed across the front of my shins.

I grabbed the biggest of the three, stuck my fingers square into his eye and tried to gouge it out. He screamed with pain. I hoped I'd blinded the bastard. The driver pulled a ball-bearing gas gun. I heard two shots blow in quick succession. *Bam bam*. I went down like a falling tree in a hurricane. I must've gone out like a light, but now back, but only just. Then I heard a voice from deep inside me. *Play dead*. The last thing I can remember was a hammer smashing on to my ankle.

Barely conscious, I laid like a big lump of granite rock, going nowhere, and held my breath. With my eyes shut tight but ears wide open, I could hear the clunking sounds of the car doors closing: one, two, three. The engine fired up and I heard the car rumble away, but then it stopped.

Jesus, are they coming back? I asked myself from the half-distance of being neither there nor anywhere. My clock was definitely ticking. Out of the corner of one slit of an eye, I

could see the car reversing slowly towards me. It stopped, then silence. I kept watching with my ears. They were probably checking to see if I was still breathing. I stayed completely still and held my breath. If they'd had even one brain cell between them, they would've run me over.

'He's dead. Let's get the fuck out of here.' The car sped away, with the sound of the engine evaporating into a distant night. As I sucked in a lungful of cool-night air, a dimmer switch turned off my lights.

Someone or something switched me back on like an alarm clock, and my eyes opened, buzzing like light bulbs. I had no idea how long I'd been here, where *here* was, or why. I didn't know anything. I was freezing cold and shivering, even though sweat was clogging my eyebrows and dripping into my eyes. I listened to the sounds of the night and heard the distant barking of a dog. Otherwise, there was nothing but graveyard silence until I heard a church bell tolling the time. I counted the chimes – 11. Jesus, I'm still alive. Or am I?

Then the pain hit me like electricity. The agony was indescribable. It was not here nor there. The pain wasn't in any one particular place, but in waves throughout me. I felt like I was on fire. Then I heard a voice, with an echo wrapped around it, from deep inside me. I'd heard the voice before but was never able to place it. *Get up.*

For a split second, the voice overwhelmed the pain. I tried to move but everything in my being felt broken. The hammer and the other weapons they'd used must've broken my arm, hand, leg and foot. I was immobile like a car with a dead

battery. With a deep breath, I managed to raise my head a fraction then let it fall back on to the cold ground. At the very least, I knew I had been able to move. I wasn't dead.

Get up, the voice said again. I had to get out of there. They could come back. I was amazed they hadn't yet. The voice spoke to me again. *Sing – sing*. Sing? I couldn't remember any songs to save my life. I tried to roll over, so I could crawl or drag myself along. Then, suddenly, from nowhere, I remembered the words we sang at Sunday school when I was a kid.

'One more step along the world we go ...'

I couldn't remember the rest of the song. I kept repeating those words, over and over. Deep in my soul, the words gave me a shot of energy. Jesus was working with me. I felt it. He was in my corner. I focused on that idea and a faded childhood memory. On the wall of my Sunday school, a picture of Jesus hung in a simple wooden frame. While we sat and learned about Christ and miracles, occasional rays of mid-afternoon sunshine would shine on that picture and brighten the room.

The memory was the push-start for my dead battery. I started crawling on my hands, using my elbows to drag myself along, scraping the skin off my knees and elbows. I was throbbing like a road drill. I didn't know which part of me was in more pain. I tried to transcend it, rise above it and deal with it. But something told me the pain was keeping me awake and alive, so I began using it like a friend. I started welcoming the pain.

Super

Extra-sensory skills, which I didn't know I had, guided me inch by inch to a pitch-black country road. I couldn't see a blind thing, but I knew the road. This was where I did my roadwork, so I knew I had a choice of sorts. Either I could crawl into a ditch and stay there until daylight, if daylight ever came, or crawl along the middle of the road.

If I used the road, I risked getting hit by a car because the driver wouldn't see me. There was a flash of lightning. I counted the seconds – one, two ... then heard a roll of thunder. A quarter-moon severed the clouds, like a knife, and for a split second I could see. Left or right? Fuck it, I'm going to take a chance. I went left, crawled into the middle of the road and looked ahead. There was a pinprick of light in the distance – maybe 300 yards away, hard to say. A streetlight, a house, a stationary motorbike with its headlight on, my imagination? It didn't matter. I just needed a target to aim for – a lighthouse to navigate the ship.

It took an hour on the road from hell to get to the light, but it felt like a lifetime. I wasn't even sure that I was still really alive. Maybe my nerves were just waiting to give up the ghost. Feeling the cat's eyes with my hands kept me in the middle of the road. I kept singing and not a single vehicle drove by, not even a hearse. My imagination was spinning, too. I expected to get run over by an ice cream van, with its windows blown out by a shotgun, or pissed on by a passing dog cocking its leg. If I hadn't been match-fit, I'd have been a goner.

But something else was keeping me going. I'd connected with something, tucked away in my core that must've been

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waiting for this day to reveal itself. I wasn't alone. Every now and then, when I had to, I would stop and lay my head down against the damp road for a couple of minutes, gathering up a shot of resolve and energy to carry on. I could've talked myself out of this and just lay there, closed my eyes and died like an injured animal after it drags itself into the undergrowth. Instead, I sang at the top of my voice, though I'd never been able to sing. 'One more step along the world ...'