

Raging Bull: 25 to Life (Act 2)

Written by Robert Ecksel

Tuesday, 11 October 2005 19:00

Fast forward two years. It's February 5, 1943 and we're in Detroit. There's a fight, and it's the rematch between LaMotta and Robinson. We're in the middle of the ring and Jake is clobbering Sugar Ray. Don Dunphy picks up the action.

"Now LaMotta's hurt Robinson. A right to the jaw. A left to the body of Robinson. It's anybody's fight at this point. LaMotta hits Robinson again. A left to the jaw. A right to the body. Robinson comes back with a right on the nose. LaMotta lands a left and a right to the head, a hard left hand to the body, and Robinson is driven out of the ring for the first knockdown of his career."

Jake LaMotta beats Sugar Ray Robinson, handing the great one his first loss.

In the next scene we're in the bedroom with Jake and Vickie. He's wearing white boxers. She's in a sheer white negligee. "Come here," Jake says. Vickie plays coy. "You sure we should be doin' this?" "Come here," repeats Jake. "You said never to touch you before a fight. You've been good for two weeks." "Take off my pants," Jake says. Vickie hesitates. "You know how to take off my pants?" "You made me promise not to get you excited." "Take off your panties." Vickie does as she is told. Vickie moves to the bed. She gingerly kisses the hair on Jake's chest. She slowly works her way below her husband's belt. Vickie tells Jake she likes "the gym smell." "What?" Vickie repeats, "The smell of the gym."

Jake fights Robinson a third time, again in Detroit, at the Olympia Stadium. Don Dunphy is ringside: *"LaMotta and Robinson meet for the third time. These men are unique, becoming classic rivals. These two men – fierce, powerful fighters – dangerous – so much so that no other fighter will go near them. And so, they fight each other, three weeks apart. They've each won one. And they'll probably fight again, the way it looks now. They go to close quarters at the bell."*

It's the last round *"with Sugar Ray well ahead on points. LaMotta may need a knockout. The left hook to the jaw – and Robinson is down for the second time in his career. He was down in the last fight, too. LaMotta watches Sugar Ray take the count from the referee. Robinson gets to his feet and the ref wipes off his glove. Despite being knocked down, Robinson is well ahead on points."*

Jake catches Robinson and knocks him down again. The bell sounds to end the fight.

The judges tally their scorecards. Robinson wins by decision.

In the dressing room after the fight, Joey's trashing the dump, while Jake shakes his head in disbelief. "I knocked him down," Jake says. "I don't know what else I gotta do?"

In a series of short masterful strokes Scorsese parachutes us through time and space. He gives us a simulation, with faded and scratched color film, of Super-8 home movies, based on the Jake's actual home movies, where we see the LaMottas at love and play, growing,

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marrying, being fruitful and multiplying, between a series of black and white stills of Jake in action: LaMotta vs. Kochan (New York/September 17, 1945), La Motta vs. Edgar (Detroit/June 12, 1946), La Motta vs. Satterfield (Chicago/September 12, 1946), and La Motta vs. Bell (New York/March 14, 1947).

We visit Jake and Vickie's new home on Pelham Parkway in the Bronx and we're back to black and white. The camera moves through the house and one hears, in the voice of a foreigner, these words coming from the TV: "Yeah, child. I am coming back and bash you on your head one more time."

Jake and Joey, surrounded by their wives and kids, are arguing. Jake says, "Don't ever do that Janiro bullsh** again. No more deals like that, you hear what I'm sayin'?" "What are ya talkin' about?" "What am I talkin' about?" Jake grabs a roll of flab from around his waist. "What am I talkin' about? Look at that – 168 pounds!" "Stop eatin'," Joey says. "I told ya I didn't wanna do it in the first place, didn't I?" "You're the one who told me you could get down to 155 pounds," says Joey. "I don't know if I'm gonna make it down to 155. I'm lucky I made it to 160 ... You're supposed to be my manager! You're supposed to know what you're doin'!"

Joey asks, "Do you wanna a title shot?"

Jake says, "What am I a circus over here?"

Joey explains: "You've been killing yourself for three years now, right? There's nobody left for you to fight. Everybody's afraid to fight you. Okay. Along comes the kid Janiro. He don't know any better. He's a young kid, up and comin', he'll fight anybody. Good, you fight him. Bust his hole. Tear him apart. What are you worried about?"

Jake says "I'm worried about my weight."

Joey is philosophical. "Now let's say you win, you beat Janiro. Which you definitely should beat him, right? If you win, you win. If you lose, you still win. There's no way you can lose, and you do it on your own."

"Joey's right," chimes in Vickie offhandedly. "This Janiro is an up-and-coming fighter, he's good-lookin', he's popular. You beat him now –"

"Excuse me," Jake interrupts. "What do you mean good-lookin'?"

"I'm not saying good-lookin'. I'm saying popular."

"Excuse me, excuse me, what do ya mean, 'good-lookin'? ... What are you an authority or what? Get out of here. *Get outta here*. Take the baby and get outta here."

With Vickie gone things should cool down, but that's not possible around Jake.

"Where she'd find out he's good-lookin' first of all?" Jake asks Joey. "When I'm away, you ever

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notice anything funny goin' on with her? I want you to keep an eye on her when I'm away, all right? You and I both know any woman, given the right time, the right place, the right circumstances, they'll do anything, right?"

Joey tries to explain to Jake that he misunderstood what Vickie meant. "She was talkin' on your behalf." "On my behalf? She was talkin' about a pretty kid, sayin' he's good-lookin'." "So you make him ugly," Joey says. "What's the difference?"

We're at the Copa with glamorous Jake and Vickie LaMotta. Jake is introduced to the crowd of politicians, celebrities, mob guys and their molls as the future middleweight champion of the world. He stands and gives a friendly wave. They applaud the boxing sensation. Jake looks around the room and sees Salvy and the boys. Jake makes a face. Salvy walks to Jake and Vickie's table and says "I'm over there with Tommy Como" (the film's proxy for Frankie Carbo). "Why don't you come over and have a drink." Jake smiles and waves at Tommy. Salvy returns to Tommy's table.

Vickie tells Jake she needs to go to the bathroom. Jake wants to know why. She looks at him like he's nuts. He looks at her like she's his property.

Returning from the ladies room, Vickie stops by Tommy's table to say hi to Salvy and the gang. Tommy asks her to sit down and have a drink. "I can't," Vickie says. "I have to get back to Jake. I just came by to say hello." She returns to Jake's table. Tommy says, "Not a bad kid that Vickie." Salvy says, "She's with that [bleepin'] gorilla."

Vickie persuades Jake to go and say hello to Tommy. Jake rises and makes his way to Tommy's table. He sits, smiles, and looks ill at ease. Tommy, with his eye on the betting action, asks Jake what's going to happen when he fights Janiro.

"I'm gonna open his hole like this," Jake says with a silly grin on his face. "Please excuse my French. I'm gonna make him suffer. I'm gonna make his mother wish she never had him, make him into dog meat ... He's a nice, a nice kid. He's a pretty kid, too. I mean, I don't know, I gotta problem if I should [bleep] him or fight him."

Everyone has a good laugh.

When Jake meets Janiro at the Garden on June 6, 1947, he's a man on a mission. After all, Janiro is the kid Vickie described as "good lookin'," so he's a surrogate for all the bums who are screwing her in Jake's paranoia-addled mind.

LaMotta does what he's been hired to do and rearranges Janiro's features. With blood, sweat, tears and phlegm flying in a million different directions, Janiro morphs into something even his mother wouldn't recognize. Jake unleashes his hellish demons on Janiro, who finally, gratefully, in slow-motion no less, goes down ... but not before it's too late.

As Tommy tells a friend at the end of the fight: "He ain't pretty no more."

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We're back at the Copa a second time. Joey sees Vickie with Salvy and is enraged at the thought that something is going on. Joey grabs Vickie and says, "You're makin' an [a-hole] out of my brother." When Salvy insists it's an innocent get-together, Joey says, "Mind your [bleepin'] business and shut up." "There's nothin' goin' on over here." Joey is not convinced and smashes a glass in Salvy's face. A brawl ensues, which eventually spills out onto the street. Outside the club, Joey hits Salvy over the head with a metal stanchion. Salvy tries to escape and makes his way halfway into a cab. Joey slams the door repeatedly into Salvy's body.

Tommy heard what happened at the Copa and doesn't like it one bit. He calls for a meeting between Joey and Salvy at the Debonair Social Club. At Tommy's insistence, the warring parties agree to a ceasefire and the former friends kiss and make-up. Salvy – looking a little worse for wear with his arm in a sling and a bandage above his eye – sheepishly exits, leaving Tommy and Joey alone.

Tommy says to Joey: "Listen to me. Now, Jake – the guy's become an embarrassment. He's embarrassin' me with certain people. And I'm lookin' very bad. I can't deliver a kid from my own goddamned neighborhood. What is it with him? Why does he have to make it so hard on himself, for Christ's sake? He comes to me – I'll make it easier for him. The man's got a head of rock."

Joey understands all too well. "You know, it's hard to explain, Tommy. Jake respects you. I mean, he don't even say hello to anybody. You know, you he talks to, he likes you. It's just that, uh, when he gets somethin' on his mind, you know, he's got a hard head, he likes to do things his own way. I mean, Jesus Christ he'd come off the cross sometimes and he don't give a [bleep]. He's gonna do what he wants to do. He wants to make it on his own, you know. Thinks he can make it on his own."

"Make it on his own," Tommy repeats in disbelief. "He thinks he's gonna walk in there and become champion on his own? ... You tell him, I don't care how colorful he is or great he is. He could beat all the Sugar Ray Robinsons and the Tony Janiros in the world, but he ain't gonna get a shot at that title – not without us he ain't."

Tommy and the boys made some good money off Jake when he fought Janiro, so it's time to make some good money off Jake again. Dangling the lure of a shot at the middleweight crown in front of LaMotta, he agrees, with Joey's encouragement ("The good news is – you're gonna get the shot at the title. And the bad news is – they want ya to do the old flip-flop for 'em"), to take a dive in his fight with Billy Fox. Jake meets Fox in Madison Square Garden on November 14, 1947 and his performance is pathetic. The ref calls a halt to the sham at 2:23 of the fourth round and awards a technical decision to Fox.

In his locker room after the fight, Jake is despondent and weeps. "What'd I do? What'd I do?" He is beyond consolation. "Why'd I do it? Why'd I do it?"

Back home the next morning, Jake is back to his old self and slams a newspaper on the kitchen table. The headline of the New York *Daily News* from November 22, 1947 reads "BOARD SUSPENDS LAMOTTA."

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“They got some balls,” Jake says to Joey. “Some balls. I take the dive. What more do they want? They want me to go down too? I ain’t goin’ down for nobody!”

Joey tells Jake that Tommy won't forget him.

“I look like a bum,” says Jake, “like a *mammalucco*. Like a *mammalucco* of the year.”

(END OF ACT 2)