

Kilkenny Kats with Steele Claws
By Peg Daniels

Author's note: Related Remington Steele Episode: Steele Knuckles and Glass Jaws

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"The Kilkenny Kats." That's what Barney called him and Ryan, Barney's prized fighters. Most likely because they were Irish and contentious and Barney liked the sound of it. He wouldn't credit the man with knowing the old cat story. At any rate, it applied: his training bouts with Ryan always ended up looking like cat fights lately. Vicious cats. He didn't know what it was about the man - Ryan just set him off.

Well, he did know. It was Ryan's fault, really. Ryan was already under Barney's tutelage when Barney came across *him* in a street fight in Brazil. Ryan was polished and looked every inch the fighter; he, on the other hand, was just a brawler. But Barney trained him, talking big, telling him they could con the locals out of practically their entire life savings: one look at him - tall, thin, scarcely a visible muscle - and the suckers would be killing themselves to bet against him. And then they'd be in for a surprise: he could box! He didn't rely on strength. He looked for weaknesses, unprotected areas, a chance to score, and then he backed off: this was the mantra he had received from Barney. And it worked! They'd haul in the cash and then, before the locals could register the fact that he was skilled, that it wasn't just a fluke, they'd leave for some other South American town, going far enough afield that his reputation hadn't preceded him.

Ryan was jealous, naturally. Not that he blamed Ryan, entirely: after putting in all this work, training for this since the age of ten, Ryan now had to watch *him*, the skinny upstart, steal all the glory. Ryan was good - no doubt about it - and had the undeniable physical edge. But *he* was smarter: he knew how to best take advantage of weaknesses, especially Ryan's. As a result, as a training bout went on, Ryan grew angrier and angrier and made even *more* mistakes.

He was happy to exploit them.

Recently, Ryan had started breaking the rules - holding him with one hand while hitting him with the other, kicking or butting or elbowing him, backhanding him, jabbing him in the eye, pushing him into the ropes, pulling rabbit punches, hitting him after the bell sounded - when Barney's attention was elsewhere, on some other trainee.

He hadn't just stood there and taken it, of course. And that's when their bouts degenerated into brawls. At first, Barney assumed *he* was the troublemaker - he tended to get a little wild when his blood was up - and threatened to drop him. He hadn't thought Barney would really do it, though: the take was too good. And Barney soon caught on that it was Ryan who was the problem. Barney warned Ryan that, good as he was, Barney wouldn't put up with his nonsense.

Now they could barely look at each other without one of them hauling off and punching the other when Barney wasn't around.

It all came to a head that afternoon.

He executed a particularly effective high left feint: his follow-up slam-to-the-midsection knocked Ryan on his arse. Ryan got up and came at him like a madman, cursing and punching, all rules abandoned. Ryan executed a particularly effective knee-to-the-groin that dropped him like a rock, and then continued to beat him as he lay there incapacitated.

Barney, furious, ran over and pulled Ryan off him, telling Ryan to get out and not come back again. Ryan stomped off, but *he* just stayed down there awhile, curled up on the mat, contemplating the little black dots that swirled in his vision. Finally, Barney dragged him to his feet, and the two of them watched as Ryan stalked off, his gear bag slung over his shoulder.

"Well, looks like it's just you and me, kid, just you and me." Barney said to him. "No more 'Kilkenny Kats', kid. Just a Kilkenny kid. Hey . . . I like that! 'Kilkenny Kid'! . . . We'll call you 'The Kilkenny Kid, Pride of the Pampas'. Whaddya think, kid, whaddya think? Like it?"

He had to admit: it had a nice ring.

Postscripts: 1) Synonyms for "Kilkenny cats" include the following: scrapping [slang]; quarrelsomeness; contentiousness. Roget's International Thesaurus.

2) The story of the Kilkenny Cats goes back to the eighteenth century (Kilkenny is both a town and a county in Ireland). Oddly enough, I didn't know of the poem until after I wrote the story (thanks Debra!): it almost seemed like I intuited it! Here is a version of the traditional Irish poem about them (there are several such versions on the web). I don't know when it was written:

Kilkenny Cats

There wanst was two cats in Kilkenny,
Aitch thought there was one cat too many;
So they quarrelled and fit,
They scratched and they bit,
Till, excepting their nails,

And the tips of their tails,
Instead of two cats, there warn't any.

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