



ROPE BURNS: Stories from the Corner

F. X. Toole

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Seventy-year-old F.X. Toole has exploded onto the literary scene with this astonishing first collection of stories drawn from his own experiences in boxing. In these powerful and moving tales, he reveals a complex web of athletes, trainers, and promoters and their extended families, all players in an unforgiving business where victory, like defeat, comes at a dark and painful price.

F. X. Toole breathes life into vivid, compelling characters who radiate the fierce intensity of the worlds they inhabit. In "The Monkey Look," an aging cut man with an incorrigible sweet tooth works the corner for Hoolie, a featherweight "bleeder" with attitude. "Black Jew" brings Reggie Valentine Love and his camp to a brutal elimination bout in Atlantic City, where they are treated like second-class citizens by a promoter. In "Million \$\$\$ Baby," seasoned trainer Frankie Dunn faces the most daunting challenge of his life when he agrees to aid the fearless Maggie Fitzgerald in her quest to become a champion boxer. "Fightin' in Philly" and "Frozen Water" are stories in which youthful dreams of glory and celebrity are threatened by the harsh realities that suffuse both of these narratives. The novella "Rope Burns" is the crowning achievement of the collection, offering a gritty, heartrending account of the indestructible bond that develops between a devoted fighter and his trainer.

In *Rope Burns* F.X. Toole exhibits the skill of a miniaturist: in precise and exquisite detail, he populates a world rich in unforgettable characters, like Señora Cabrera, the owner of the Acapulco café, who makes low-fat refried beans to keep a local fighter in top form, and an anonymous museum guard with a soft spot for Michelangelo. Toole's faithful dialogue crackles and bites, and the flawed characters he creates cannot help but remind us of our own too fragile humanity. He brings a new understanding to the violence and purity of the sweet science and the world it engenders, opening a window into the fighter's soul that can never be closed.

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