

Two Old-Timers, F. Scott Fitzgerald

Phil Macedon, once the Star of Stars, and Pat Hobby, script writer, had collided out on Sunset near the Beverly Hills Hotel. It was five in the morning and there was liquor in the air as they argued and Sergeant Gaspar took them around to the station house. Pat Hobby, a man of forty-nine, showed fight, apparently because Phil Macedon failed to acknowledge that they were old acquaintances.

He accidentally bumped Sergeant Gaspar, who was so provoked that he put him in a little barred room while they waited for the captain to arrive.

Chronologically Phil Macedon belonged between Eugene O'Brien and Robert Taylor. He was still a handsome man in his early fifties and he had saved enough from his great days for a hacienda in the San Fernando Valley; there he rested as full of honours, as rollicksome and with the same purposes in life as Man o'War.

With Pat Hobby life had dealt otherwise. After twenty-one years in the industry, script and publicity, the accident found him driving a 1935 car which had lately become the property of the Acme Loan Co. And once, back in 1928, he had reached the point of having a private swimming pool.

He glowered from his confinement, still resenting Macedon's failure to acknowledge that they had ever met before.

"I suppose you don't remember Colman," he said sarcastically. "Or Connie Talmadge or Bill Corker or Allan Dwan."

Macedon lit a cigarette with the sort of timing in which the silent screen has never been surpassed, and offered one to Sergeant Gaspar.

"Couldn't I come in tomorrow?" he asked. "I have a horse to exercise—"

"I'm sorry, Mr Macedon," said the cop—sincerely, for the actor was an old favourite of his. "The captain is due here any minute. After that we won't be holding you."

"It's just a formality," said Pat, from his cell.

"Yeah, it's just a —" Sergeant Gaspar glared at Pat. "It may not be any formality for you. Did you ever hear of the sobriety test?"

Macedon flicked his cigarette out the door and lit another.

"Suppose I come back in a couple of hours," he suggested.

"No," regretted Sergeant Gaspar. "And since I have to detain you, Mr Macedon, I want to take the opportunity to tell you what you meant to me once. It was that picture you made, The Final Push, it meant a lot to every man who was in the war."

"Oh, yes," said Macedon, smiling.

"I used to try to tell my wife about the war—how it was, with the shells and the machine-guns—I was there seven months with the 26th New England—but she never understood. She'd point her finger at me and say „Boom! you're dead," and so I'd laugh and stop trying to make her understand."

"Hey, can I get out of here?" demanded Pat.

"You shut up!" said Gaspar fiercely. "You probably wasn't in the war."

"I was in the Motion Picture Home Guard," said Pat. "I had bad eyes."

"Listen to him," said Gaspar disgustedly. "That's what all them slackers say. Well, the war was something. And after my wife saw that picture of yours I never had to explain to her. She knew. She always spoke different about it after that—never just pointed her finger at me and said „Boom!“ I'll never forget the part where you was in that shell-hole. That was so real it made my hands sweat."

"Thanks," said Macedon graciously. He lit another cigarette. "You see, I was in the war myself and I knew how it was. I knew how it felt."

"Yes, sir," said Gaspar appreciatively. "Well, I'm glad of the opportunity to tell you what you did for me. You—explained the war to my wife."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Pat Hobby suddenly. "That war picture Bill Corker did in 1925?"

"There he goes again," said Gaspar. "Sure—The Birth of a Nation. Now you pipe down till the captain comes."

"Phil Macedon knew me then all right," said Pat resentfully. "I even watched him work on it one day."

"I just don't happen to remember you, old man," said Macedon politely. "I can't help that."

"You remember the day Bill Corker shot that shell-hole sequence, don't you? Your first day on the picture?"

There was a moment's silence.

"When will the captain be here?" Macedon asked.

"Any minute now, Mr Macedon."

"Well, I remember," said Pat, "because I was there when he had that shell-hole dug. He was out there on the back lot at nine o'clock in the morning with a gang of hunkies to dig the hole and four cameras. He called you up from a field telephone and told you to go to the costumer and get into a soldier suit. Now you remember?"

"I don't load my mind with details, old man."

"You called up that they didn't have one to fit you and Corker told you to shut up and get into one anyhow. When you got out to the back lot you were sore as hell because your suit didn't fit."

Macedon smiled charmingly.

"You have a most remarkable memory. Are you sure you have the right picture—and the right actor?" he asked.

"Am I!" said Pat grimly. "I can see you right now. Only you didn't have much time to complain about the uniform because that wasn't Corker's

plan. He always thought you were the toughest ham in Hollywood to get anything natural out of—and he had a scheme. He was going to get the heart of the picture shot by noon—before you even knew you were acting. He turned you around and shoved you down into that shell-hole on your fanny, and yelled „Camera“.”

“That’s a lie,” said Phil Macedon. “I got down.”

“Then why did you start yelling?” demanded Pat. “I can still hear you: „Hey, what’s the idea! Is this some goddamn gag? You get me out of here or I’ll walk out on you!””

“And all the time you were trying to claw your way up the side of that pit, so damn mad you couldn’t see. You’d almost get up and then you’d slide back and lie there with your face working—till finally you began to bawl and all this time Bill had four cameras on you. After about twenty minutes you gave up and just lay there, heaving. Bill took a hundred feet of that and then he had a couple of prop men pull you out.”

The police captain had arrived in the squad car. He stood in the doorway against the first grey of dawn.

“What you got here, Sergeant? A drunk?”

Sergeant Gaspar walked over to the cell, unlocked it and beckoned Pat to come out. Pat blinked a moment—then his eyes fell on Phil Macedon and he shook his finger at him.

“So you see I do know you,” he said. “Bill Corker cut that piece of film and tided it so you were supposed to be a doughboy whose pal had just been killed. You wanted to climb out and get at the Germans in revenge, but the shells bursting all around and the concussions kept knocking you back in.”

“What’s it about?” demanded the captain.

“I want to prove I know this guy,” said Pat. “Bill said the best moment in the picture was when Phil was yelling, „I’ve already broken my first finger-nail!” Bill titled it, „Ten Huns will go to hell to shine your shoes!””

“You’ve got here „collision with alcohol”,” said the captain, looking at the blotter, “Let’s take these guys down to the hospital and give them the test.”

“Look here now,” said the actor, with his flashing smile, “my name’s Phil Macedon.”

The captain was a political appointee and very young. He remembered the name and the face, but he was not especially impressed because Hollywood was full of has-beens.

They all got into the squad car at the door.

After the test Macedon was held at the station house until friends could arrange bail. Pat Hobby was discharged, but his car would not run, so Sergeant Gaspar offered to drive him home.

“Where do you live?” he asked as they started home.

"I don't live anywhere tonight," said Pat. "That's why I was driving around. When a friend of mine wakes up I'll touch him for a couple of bucks and go to a hotel."

"Well now," said Sergeant Gaspar, "I got a couple of bucks that ain't working."

The great mansions of Beverly Hills slid by and Pat waved his hand at them in salute.

"In the good old days," he said, "I used to be able to drop into some of those houses day or night. And Sunday mornings—"

"Is that all true you said in the station," Gaspar asked, "—about how they put him in the hole?"

"Sure, it is," said Pat. "That guy needn't have been so upstage. He's just an old-timer like me."